



## Representation of Culture and Intercultural Interactions in Iranian and Afghan Secondary English Textbooks

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### Abstract

Culture, intercultural interaction, and language have often been described as indivisible and the relation between them is quite intricate. This study was conducted to evaluate Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks. Two aspects, representation of culture and intercultural interaction, were focused on in the conversation parts of Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks. First, 172 conversations in Iranian textbooks and 160 conversations in Afghan textbooks were analyzed based on [Byram's \(1994\)](#) framework to investigate the frequency of representation of culture. Second, all the conversations were analyzed based on [Song's \(2013\)](#) model to investigate the frequency of intercultural interactions. Results revealed that *Social Interaction* was the most frequent category for the representation of culture and *Superficial Interaction* was the most frequent category for intercultural interactions. In the same vein, *National History* was largely ignored in the representation of culture within these 12 books while *Critical Reflection* was the category that was not paid due and sufficient attention to throughout the books regarding the intercultural interaction. The study implies that teachers, materials developers, and coursebook designers might be able to make more informed and proper decisions regarding the way and the extent cultural elements are to be incorporated in English textbooks.

*Keywords: Conversations; Culture; Cultural Representation; English Textbooks; Intercultural Interaction*

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## 1. Introduction

Language and culture are frequently referred to as being inseparable, and their relationship is extremely complicated. Language includes specific cultural norms, social institutions, and cognitive processes in addition to the overall number of words, grammatical rules, and sentence structures. Effective language learning requires an understanding of both the linguistic norms and these culturally distinctive circumstances. The culture of the specific population who speaks a language often influences how that language evolves (Ariawan, 2020; Kartika Putra et al., 2020; Yanhong Liu et al., 2021). Knowing the cultural circumstances that support the language we are learning can give us priceless insights into specific phrases that are frequently used by locals of a certain cultural group, which is essential if you're serious about mastering a second language. (Williams et al., 2009).

Learning how to interpret meaning in context through language requires sophisticated communication skills as well as intercultural communication competency. It deals with how cultural differences give participants in a communicative encounter complex meaning. The main goal of fostering intercultural competency is to make it easier for professionals and learners to effectively communicate in culturally unfamiliar settings (Yanhong Liu et al., 2021). Additionally, the accomplishment of useful goals through cross-cultural communication suggests social interaction issues. As a result, the difficulties in intercultural communication are brought on by a lack of cultural awareness when using language in an unfamiliar setting (Koester & Lustig, 2010). Intercultural communication research emphasizes the value of cultural sensitivity in English language instruction programs. (Ali et al., 2015). The need for and advantages of cross-cultural training programs emphasizing the improvement of intercultural communication effectiveness are highlighted in research studies by Schmidt (2000). Thus, all aspects of intercultural communication must be incorporated into English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula.

It is very important to show or represent the culture within textbooks. Nobody denies the significance of culture in language acquisition, but it is nice to discover how it is represented in the instructional materials. Since language is a symbolic form or a means of representation, representation is crucial since culture is always created through meaning (Kozlova & Ryabichenko, 2021). Language always serves as a conduit through which culture's meaning is conveyed among its participants (Damen, 1987). It enables individuals to freely explore their identities without being forced to fit any stereotypes presented in a certain film or television program. Minorities can learn that they are more than the stereotypes that surround them with the aid of representation (Spencer-Otay & Franklin, 2009).



Presently English teaching has become an international issue that occurs in different places all over the world, so intercultural aspects of English teaching are undeniable. English is a tool for communication among people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Soomro et al., 2015). Understandably, it is not possible to talk about teaching English as a foreign language while ignoring cultural aspects and intercultural interactions in English textbooks because they are at the center of education through their texts, exercises, their important role in the division of curricula and integrating educational area in modern polyculture contexts. It must be noted that if there is a sufficient intercultural relationship between students and books, a positive outcome of instruction is expected (Kozlova & Ryabichenko, 2021).

The frequency of multicultural societies is increasing fast and it will not be wrong to say the majority of societies include lots of cultures within themselves. In these societies, there is a superior culture that is in major, which dominates others in different aspects including pedagogic books (Kozlova & Ryabichenko, 2021). Different methods are used to teach students all over the world. Textbooks are the most known material that different instructors tend to use for the teaching process. That is why it is logical to claim that the representation of culture and intercultural interaction in textbooks can be a manifestation of the whole educational system (Kozlova & Ryabichenko, 2021). Therefore, the current research intended to delve into these two cultural elements and the extent to which they are represented in the secondary Iranian and Afghan English textbooks.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Representation of Culture in Language

Particularly in cultural studies and this sociology of culture, what has come to be known as the *cultural turn* in the social and human sciences has leaned toward the importance of meaning in explaining culture. It is said that culture is more of a way of life than it is a collection of things, such as books, paintings, television shows, or comic books. Culture primarily deals with the lecture and exchange of ideas—the giving and receiving of meaning—among the members of a society or council to demonstrate that two individuals share a common cultural background and can express themselves, as well as their opinions and perceptions of the world, in ways that will be understood by one another. Therefore, culture depends on its participants drawing significant inferences about what is happening around them and understanding the world in significantly linked ways. It is essential to give cultural processes top emphasis. Parties in a society are responsible for giving things, people, and situations significance. Things rarely, if ever, have a single isolated, fixed, and unchanging meaning. Even something that seems obvious, like a stone, can be a stone, a

border feature, or a piece of sculpture depending on what it signifies - that is, within a specific context of intent, within what the philosophers refer to as multiple *language games*. It has to do with how we use things and give them significance (Hall, 1997).

## 2.2 *Intercultural Interaction in Language*

Intercultural interaction can be defined as manners encompassing both verbal and nonverbal cues that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds perform when they are engaged in similar or simultaneous tasks and actions. This justification requires more elaborations like how we should differentiate between cultural committees and what groups of interactions are specified. (Spencer-Otay & Franklin, 2019). The subsequent question is when an interaction is called intercultural, rather than intracultural? To answer this question, it must be explained that interaction comes to be intercultural rather than intracultural when the cultural discrepancy between the individuals is considerable enough for one or more of them to glimpse its impact (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

To highlight cultural differences that aid students in becoming interculturally apprised of their own culture and the presence of otherness as well as to appreciate and consider them, the case of improving intercultural communicative competence (ICC) for learners of English has been acknowledged as one of the absolute purposes in the field of English language instruction (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1999; Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2001; Lázár et al., 2007). Greater emphasis should be placed on intercultural dialogue in English language instruction so that students may relate cultural differences and forge more harmonious, fruitful connections (Samovar et al., 2012).

However, it is not always evident how important culture and cross-cultural dialogue are to English language instruction. Different teachers downplay the significance of introducing culture as a component of language instruction (Gonen & Saglam, 2012). Merely boosting students' linguistic knowledge has been prioritized over equipping them with ICC to function appropriately and efficiently in intercultural settings. Teachers' disregard for international communication and culture in English language instruction can be attributed to their greater interest in empirical communication aspects (Onalan, 2005); Due to the busy curriculum, teachers believe they do not have enough time to explore cultural aspects in their teaching methods (Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Hong, 2008); Due to a lack of training on how to incorporate culture into educational practices, assess learners' intercultural communication, and change in beliefs as a result of culture teaching, instructors are unable to incorporate culture and intercultural



communication into their classes (Gonen & Saglam, 2012); additionally, few teachers are knowledgeable in cross-cultural interaction (Sercu et al., 2005).

It is noticed that a mixture of terms has been employed in intercultural communication such as ICC (e.g., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009), intercultural competence (IC) (e.g., Fantini, 2001; Kim, 2009; Rathje, 2007; Sercu et al., 2005), intercultural communication competence (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1999; Wiseman, 2002; Zaharna, 2009), multicultural competence (e.g., Pope & Reynolds, 1997), cross-cultural competence (e.g., Magala, 2005; Norhayati, 2000; Williams et al., 2009), and many of these terms have been interchangeably used. ICC is an umbrella word that encompasses many ingredients including linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and IC (Byram, 1997). He goes on to explain that the word "ICC" refers to the capacity that enables communication in a foreign language with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The capacity to carry out communication strategies that negotiate one another's cultural identities or identities in a context with a foreign culture is known as intercultural communication (or communicative) competence (Chen & Starosta, 1999). In addition to knowledge and abilities, Wiseman (2002) includes motivation as a third element in his definition of ICC. Lázár et al. (2007), an international team of specialists engaged in executing programs under the auspices of the European Centre for Modern Languages, define ICC as the capacity to connect appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts and to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations. Two key elements: Skills and attitudes, are strengthened by this definition. The latter aims to increase appreciation, empathy, and patience for ambiguity, attention to and openness toward people from other cultures, and a desire to delay judgment. The former involves progress in the areas of observation, interpreting and relating, mediation, and discovery (Lázár et al., 2007).

Although it has become a common academic cliché, hardly one seems to genuinely understand what intercultural competency entails. Few individuals are aware of the phrase's pedagogical significance, which may be the biggest obstacle to using intercultural situations in foreign language instruction (Simensen, 2003). Not between states, but between people, is communication possible. When learning a foreign language, novices must deal with cultural differences at the personal and local levels rather than the national level. They must develop an openness to cultural complexity and variety to achieve this (e.g., Guest, 2002; Dypedahl, 2004).

### *2.3 Relevant Empirical Studies*

Song (2013) examined how various cultures were represented in textbooks and whether or not cultural prejudices existed. English is viewed as a language of

global and international citizenship in the updated Korean national English curriculum, which has been implemented since 2009. The curriculum broadens cultural diversity and aims to accept linguistic and cultural differences. However, the examination of four textbooks revealed that they favor English and American culture. Additionally, although the textbooks showed many cross-cultural encounters, they were only briefly discussed, and the texts heavily emphasized non-Korean, white, largely American, and masculine identities. Favoring mainstream white American male images above others reflects social inequities regarding race, nationality, and gender. The inquiry was followed by a discussion on the reproduction of well-known knowledge, cultural biases, and imbalances embedded in the texts, and it was suggested that teachers should adopt a critical stance toward intercultural education to instill critical perspectives in their students.

Jian-Shiung Shie (2013) investigated Taiwanese unknowing students' answers to Western-derived allusive intertexts. 16 Taiwanese college students with a basic level of ability were given eight samples of intercultural intertexts to read from the essay titles of the British magazine. A semi-structured one-on-one interview was used to collect qualitative information regarding their responses to the intertexts. Then, a quick survey was given to them to find out why they wanted to learn multicultural texts. The results showed that most interviewees and questionnaire respondents were motivated to learn these intertexts, and that they primarily felt positive about them. The results showed that it is beneficial to look further into uninformed readers' responses to study international texts, both theoretically and practically.

Roohani and Molana (2013) attempted to provide a better understanding of the cultural representational and intercultural interactional structures found in the Interchange textbook series, an ELT textbook series used in Iran to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) to students. It assessed how culturally-diverse Interchanges 1, 2, and 3 were using content analysis of texts and images, with a focus on country, gender, and race, and whether there was any cultural prejudice or imbalance. The white male group was emphasized in all three textbooks, according to the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Additionally, inner, outer, and extending circle nations were represented in the textbooks using Kachru's (1985) terminology, with the expanding circle incorporating the primary nationality while the inner circle's American culture predominated. Although these textbooks sought to illustrate numerous intercultural relationships, the interactions were usually limited to superficial features of the target culture. The dominance of male and white symbols, as well as US culture, highlighted racial and gender inequality as well as the textbooks' cursory consideration of culture. The materials can be enhanced by EFL educators' constructive discussion of the cultures that interact, as shown by the





textbooks' modest emphasis on the hybrid environment and an additional level of intercultural features, i.e. critical reflections.

Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) explored how culture was portrayed in dialogue and reading passages in both international and locally adapted textbooks used in Iran, where macro-planning for language teaching has a localization bias. An analysis of the content of these textbooks was conducted to determine which 'cultures'—those associated with the first language, those associated with the target language (TL), or other cultures—and which aspects of each culture (sociological or aesthetic) were expressed. The analysis revealed that only a small percentage of the cultural features included in the localized textbooks were based on the TL and other cultures, and the majority were culturally neutral. Similar to how native language and local culture were completely absent from the targeted textbook corpus, sociological values were emphasized above aesthetic aspects of culture. In contrast, intercultural elements were the main focus of the international textbooks. Comparatively speaking, TL cultural elements were more overt in international textbooks, and very few portrayals were culturally neutral.

Ali et al. (2015) offered important insights into how to increase intercultural communication proficiency. The presumptions suggest the employment of communicative techniques that focus on improving students' proficiency in language communication through cultural context. However, in a few educational and linguistic contexts of Pakistan and Iran, the education of culture in communication has not received priority. The results of this study highlight issues with teaching English as a method of instruction in public colleges in interior Sindh, Pakistan, and with designated textbooks in Iranian schools. It was designed to identify problems with intermediate textbooks used in colleges and schools. As a result, the study recommended using cultural perception in language instruction to help people achieve proficiency in cross-cultural communication.

Ariawan (2020) conducted a content analysis of the official English high school textbook for Indonesia which was published in 2017 by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The data consisted of 83 visual elements, 11 talks, and 17 reading materials, which were all subjectively assessed using Byram's checklist. The results showed that life cycle and social contact came in at 15.9%, while stereotypes and national identity came in at 28.05% of the cultural dimensions. With 12.2%, the occurrence of national geography is high. Less than 10% is suggested for social identity and social group, belief and conduct, national history, and social and political institutions. There are specific goals for including various cultural perspectives. Since the textbook is required reading for senior high school students who are interested in defining their identities, the presence of national identity, for instance, is dramatic for students. This concept

is consistent with the curriculum's aim to support the development of students who have a positive sense of self, excellent character, and a strong national identity. It can be inferred that Indonesia's English textbook is great in terms of how it represents different cultural facets. However, the presence of various cultural aspects of the target culture and global target culture is still essential to aid students in developing cultural competency and a certain level of patience and admiration for others.

Kartika Putra et al. (2020) investigated how English textbooks depict cultures and intercultural interactions. It makes use of cultural content and intercultural interaction analysis to study three English textbooks for twelfth-grade students produced by three significant Indonesian publishers. The results showed that while Indonesian and English-speaking countries' cultures are dominant, the evaluated textbooks do not accurately depict cultural diversity in a global setting. Additionally, intercultural interactions are typically shown in textbooks in fragmented, constrained, and superficial ways.

Yanhong Liu et al. (2021) is one of the studies which is related to the current study. Numerous studies have examined how cultures are represented in English-language textbooks across a variety of contexts, particularly in Asia. However, these studies only used a small amount of data, and the conclusions were subject to severe limitations. To compensate for these flaws, the author self-constructed a corpus with 40 volumes/books and more than one million words to analyze the cultural constellations found in 10 collections of Chinese university English textbooks. The author aimed to make up for the lack of manual content analysis in big data mining by using a corpus of 864 texts, which is significantly larger than the numerous texts examined in other studies. This would also reduce subjectivity. The entire data set was thematically coded throughout the article using corpus tools. The findings indicated that: 1) the authority of American and British cultures is pervasive in these texts, with cultures from other Inner-circle countries in the boundary and cultures from the Outer-circle and broadening-circle countries largely disregarded; and 2) these textbooks demonstrated a tepid interest in local or Chinese cultures. One can conclude that in a multilingual and multicultural society, the authority of Anglo-American monocultural embodiment in English textbooks is problematic.

Some of the aforementioned studies focused only on the representation of culture while others merely concentrated on intercultural interactions. In the current study, these two elements were thoroughly explored. Furthermore, yet another gap was the focus of previously-done research on only one country while in this study secondary English textbooks of two countries with almost similar cultural background were analyzed to broaden the scope of research. Finally, the third problem of previous studies was their corpus size while this research examined 12 English textbooks. Going through the existing literature,





it can easily be discerned that no study has yet been conducted to evaluate both Afghan and Iranian textbooks in terms of intercultural interaction and representation of culture. Therefore, the researchers chose two series of books that are taught in two different countries with almost similar cultures. To this end, the researchers formulated the following research questions:

1. How culture is represented in Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks?
2. How intercultural interactions are represented in Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Design

The present study is corpus-based and descriptive research study that aimed to delve into the representation of cultural elements and intercultural interactions in the Iranian and Afghan English textbooks. In both countries, the study started from grade 7 up to grade 12. The focus was on the frequency of cultural representations or intercultural interactions.

#### 3.2 Instrumentation

The first instrument of the study was a checklist developed by [Byram et al. \(1994\)](#) which entails *social identity and social groups, social interaction, beliefs and behavior, socio-political institution, national history, national identity, national cultural heritage, and stereotypes* as basic subcomponents. The second instrument was a framework proposed by [Song \(2013\)](#). [Song \(2013\)](#) examined Korean textbooks that are formulated according to the nationwide curriculum. The intercultural interactions are further subclassified into three facets (*superficial interaction, hybridization, and critical reflection*).

*Superficial interaction* is the description of tangible cultural goods like food and travel. It highlights how different cultures each have unique exclusivities that should be respected. For instance, every country has its own style of cooking and eating, which should be valued as part of the cultural heritage. For example, when Afghan culture and English learning are combined, the word *chapan* is a brief encounter.

*Hybridization* refer to a fusion of more than two different cultural norms, values, traditions, and practices. As in the picture of a Korean man breakdancing while listening to Samulnori, a traditional Korean song. A common example of

a hybridization is the incorporation of the holy holiday Eid al-Fitr with a foreign tongue like English.

*Critical reflection* refers to the involvement in further discussion or consideration of the beliefs, history, values, or conflicts specific cultures.

For instance, when a father is religious while his son does not believe in his father's religion, a critical reflection situation occurs.

The final instrument was the secondary English Iranian and Afghan textbooks. Table 1 provides information about Iranian English textbooks and Table 2 provides information about Afghan English textbooks.

**Table 1**

*Name, Number of Pages, Units, and Conversations of Iranian English Textbooks*

Textbooks' Name	Grade	Number of Pages	Number of Units	Number of Conversations
Prospect1	7	76	8	49
Prospect2	8	88	7	48
Prospect3	9	133	6	34
Vision1	10	124	4	17
Vision2	11	11	3	12
Vision3	12	99	3	12

**Table 2**

*Name, Number of Pages, Units, and Conversations of Afghan English Textbooks*

Textbooks' Name	Grade	Number of Pages	Number of Units	Number of Conversations
EFA book	7	160	16	36
EFA book	8	167	16	37
EFA book	9	176	16	33
EFA book	10	152	12	17
EFA book	11	192	12	0
EFA book	12	166	12	12



*Note.* Grade 11 Textbook, English for Afghanistan, included no conversation part, so it was excluded from the study. EFA abbreviates for English for Afghanistan.

### *3.3 Data Collection Procedure*

The following steps were taken by the researchers to collect data and accomplish the stated objectives of the study:

1. All the 172 conversations in Iranian secondary English textbooks and 160 conversations in Afghan secondary English textbooks were thoroughly studied line by line to comprehend the information in the texts.

2. The conversations were respectively numbered from 1 to 172 in Iranian textbooks and from 1 to 160 in Afghan textbooks.

3. To facilitate the understanding and categorizing of the data, the coding system of [Byram et al. \(1994\)](#) was applied.

4. The clauses containing the aforementioned representation of culture or intercultural interactions were identified and classified based on the following instruments:

A) [Byram et al.'s \(1994\)](#) model of cultural elements

B) [Song's \(2013\)](#) model of intercultural interaction

5. To ensure the reliability of the data, the conversations were studied by another professional researcher, and the inter-rater reliability was calculated. The inter-rater reliability stood at .78.

### *3.4 Data Analysis*

Having determined the frequency of cultural interactions and representation of culture in the secondary textbook series, the researchers calculated the frequency of occurrence and the percentage for each one.

## **4. Results**

### *4.1. Analysis of Cultural Representation of Iranian and Afghan Secondary English Textbooks*

All the conversations in the textbooks including 172 conversations in Iran textbooks and 160 conversations in Afghan textbooks were examined to answer

the first research question. Byram's (1997) model was used. Results are presented in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4. At the end of the analysis, a table is presented to show the whole results in all books which were included in this study. Since Prospect and Vision series are separated, so Afghan books were divided into two groups including grade 7 up to 9 and grade 10 up to 12. Here is a sample to show how the model was implemented on the conversations in Prospect 1.

**Table 3***Descriptive Statistics for Representation of Culture in Prospects 1-3*

Byram's Checklist	Prospect 1 Freq	Prospect2 Freq	Prospect3 Freq	Total freq	Mean	Total freq percentage
social identity and social groups	23	13	14	50	16.66	25.90%
social interaction	27	29	14	70	23.33	36.26%
belief and behavior	0	0	0	0	0	0%
socio-political institutions	0	0	7	7	2.33	3.62%
socialization and the life-cycle	3	4	6	13	4.33	6.73%
national history	0	0	0	0	0	0
national geography	0	32	5	37	12.33	19.17%
national cultural heritage	0	3	9	12	4	6.21%
stereotypes and national identity	0	3	1	4	1.33	2.07%



Total	53	84	56	193	100%
Mean	5.88	9.33	6.22	21.44	

A sum of 193 representations of culture is used in these three books. As shown in Table 3, the most frequent representation of culture was *social interaction* with a frequency of 70 and a percentage of 36.26%. After that, *social identity and social group* with a frequency of 50 (25.90%) was the second most frequent aspect. The third frequent cultural aspect was *national geography* with a frequency of 37 (19.17%). It should be noted that *socialization and life-cycle* with a frequency of 13 (6.73%) was more frequent than *national cultural heritage* with the frequency of 12 (6.21%). Later it is *socio-political institutes* with the frequency of 7 (3.62%) and finally, *stereotypes and national identity* is the least frequent category with a frequency of 4 (2.07%). It is also noteworthy that no *belief and behavior and national history* was found in these books.

Byram's Checklist	Vision1 Freq	Vision2 Freq	Vision3 Freq	Total freq	Mean	Total freq percentage
social identity and social groups	2	0	15	17	5.66	13.82%
Social interaction	8	19	11	38	12.66	30.89%
belief and behavior	2	1	0	3	1	2.68%
socio-political institutions	0	1	0	1	0.33	0.81%
socialization and the life-cycle	0	8	5	13	4.33	10.56%
national history	0	0	6	6	2	4.87%
national geography	10	3	3	16	5.33	13.00%



national cultural heritage	8	0	1	9	3	7.31%
stereotypes and national identity	2	8	10	20	6.66	16.26%
Total	32	40	36	123		100%
Mean	3.55	4.44	4	13.66		

### Prospect 1, Lesson 1 (Sample)

**Teacher:** Hi (*Social interaction*), class! (*Social group*)

**Students:** Hello (*Social interaction*), Teacher. (*Social identity*)

**Teacher:** Thank you (*Social interaction*), sit down, please (*Social interaction*). I'm your English teacher (*Social identity*). My name is Ahmad Karimi. Now, you tell me your names. What's your name?

**Student 1:** My name is Ali Mohammadi.

**Teacher:** How are you, Ali?

**Student 1:** Fine, thank you (*Social interaction*).

**Teacher:** And what's your name?

**Student 2:** My name is....

### Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Representation of Culture in Visions 1-3*

Byram's Checklist	Vision1 Freq	Vision2 Freq	Vision3 Freq	Total freq	Mean	Total freq percentage
social identity and social groups	2	0	15	17	5.66	13.82%
Social interaction	8	19	11	38	12.66	30.89%



belief and behavior	2	1	0	3	1	2.68%
socio-political institutions	0	1	0	1	0.33	0.81%
socialization and the life-cycle	0	8	5	13	4.33	10.56%
national history	0	0	6	6	2	4.87%
national geography	10	3	3	16	5.33	13.00%
national cultural heritage	8	0	1	9	3	7.31%
stereotypes and national identity	2	8	10	20	6.66	16.26%
Total	32	40	36	123		100%
Mean	3.55	4.44	4	13.66		

A total number of 123 representations of culture was used in the Vision series. It is notable that again *social interaction* was the most frequent representation of culture with a frequency of 38 and a percentage of 30.89%. Then it is *stereotypes and national identity* with the frequency of 20 (16.26%). Later, *social identity and social group* with a frequency of 17 (13.82%) is the third most common constituent. *National geography* (13.00%), *socialization and life-cycle* (10.56%), *national cultural heritage* (7.31%), *national history* (4.87%) and *belief and behavior* (2.68%) were respectively other most commonly-used representations of culture. The least frequent category was *socio-political institutions* with a frequency of 1 (0.81%).

### Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics for Representation of Culture in English for Afghanistan Grade 7-9*

Byram's Checklist	EFA G7 Freq	EFA G8 Freq	EFA G9 Freq	Total freq	Mean	Total freq percentage
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social identity and social groups	30	18	21	69	23	14.71%
social interaction	66	39	47	152	50.66	32.40%
belief and behavior	14	11	35	60	20	12.79%
socio-political institutions	2	19	2	23	7.66	4.90%
socialization and the life-cycle	23	24	19	66	22	14.07%
national history	0	0	4	4	1.33	0.85%
national geography	9	56	13	78	26	16.63%
national cultural heritage	0	0	1	1	0.33	0.21%
stereotypes and national identity	0	6	10	16	5.33	3.41%
Total	144	173	152	469		100%
Mean	16	19.22	16.88	52.1		

A total number of 469 representations of culture was used in English for Afghanistan (EFA), Grade 7 up to 9. Again, the most frequent component was *social interaction* with a frequency of 152 and a percentage of 32.40%. Then, *national geography* came second with a frequency of 78 (16.63%) and followed by *social identity and social group* with a frequency of 69 (14.71%). Socialization and lifestyle categories were next with a frequency of 66 (14.07%). The least frequent constituents were *belief and behavior* with a frequency of 60 (12.79%), *socio-political institutions* 23 (4.90%), *stereotypes and national identity* 16 (3.41%) and *national history* with a frequency of 4 (0.85%). Finally, only 1 instance of *national cultural heritage* was found with a percentage of 0.21%.

**Table 6**

*Descriptive Statistics for Representation of Culture in English for Afghanistan Grade 10-12*

Byram's Checklist	EFA G10 Freq	EFA G11 Freq	EFA G12 Freq	Total freq	Mean	Total freq percentage
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social identity and social groups	25	0	11	36	12	14.06%
social interaction	49	0	2	51	17	19.92%
belief and behavior	79	0	9	88	29.33	34.37%
socio-political institutions	10	0	0	10	3.33	3.90%
socialization and the life-cycle	32	0	3	35	11.66	13.67%
national history	0	0	0	0	0	0%
national geography	16	0	8	24	8	9.37%
national cultural heritage	0	0	11	11	3.66	4.29%
stereotypes and national identity	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.39%
Total	212	0	44	256		100%
Mean	23.55	0	4.88	28.44		

A total number of 256 representations of culture was used in English for Afghanistan (EFA), Grade 10 up to 12. First of all, it is necessary to mention that EFA Grade 11 had no conversation part so it was already excluded from the investigation and there was zero representation of culture in “conversations”. In the other two books, grades 10 and 12, the most frequent category was *belief and behavior* with a frequency of 88 and a percentage of 34.37%. The second frequent element was *social interaction* (19.92%) and the third one was *social identity and social group* with a frequency of 36 (14.06%). *Socialization and life-cycle* with a frequency of 35 (13.67%) came next. The least frequent components were *national geography* (9.37%), *national cultural heritage* (4.29%), and *socio-political institutions* (3.90%), respectively. There was just 1 instance of *stereotypes and national identity* with a percentage of 0.39%. It must be mentioned that there was no representation of *national history* in these books.

**Table 7**

*Descriptive Statistics for Representation of Culture in Iran and Afghan Secondary English Textbooks*

Byram's Checklist	Iran English textbooks freq	Afghan English textbooks freq	Total freq	Mean	Total freq percentage
social identity and social groups	67	105	172	86	16.52%
social interaction	108	203	311	155.5	29.87%
belief and behavior	3	148	151	75.5	14.50%
socio-political institutions	8	33	41	20.5	3.93%
socialization and the life-cycle	26	101	127	63.5	12.19%
national history	6	4	10	5	0.96%
national geography	53	102	155	77.5	14.88%
national cultural heritage	21	12	33	16.5	3.17%
stereotypes and national identity	24	17	41	20.5	3.93%
Total	316	725	1041		100%
Mean	35.11	80.55	115.66		

As Table 7 shows, a sum of 1041 representations of culture were found in Iran and Afghan secondary English textbooks. The most frequent constituent in all books was *social interaction* with a frequency of 311 and a percentage of 29.87%. The second frequent component was *social identity and social groups* with a frequency of 172 and a percentage of 16.52%. The third frequent one was *national geography* with a frequency of 155 and a percentage of 14.88%. *Belief and behavior* with a frequency of 151 and a percentage of 14.50% came next.





The least frequent elements were *socialization and life-cycle* (12.19%), *socio-political institutions and stereotypes and national identity* both 3.93%, *national cultural heritage* (3.17%), respectively. Finally, *national history* with a frequency of 10 and a percentage of 0.96% was the least common representation of culture in the Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Intercultural Interaction in Iran and Afghan Secondary English Textbooks

The second question intended to delve into the intercultural interactions in Iran and Afghan secondary English textbooks. To investigate this question, a model by Song (2013) was adopted as reference point on all 173 conversation parts of the Prospect and Vision series of books in Iran and on the 160 conversations sections of the English for Afghanistan series including grades 7 up to 12. Results are presented in Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9. At the end of the analysis, a table is presented to show the whole results in all the included books. Since Prospect and Vision series are separated, so Afghan books were divided into two groups including grade 7 up to 9 and grade 10 up to 12. A sample is introduced to show how Song's (2013) model was used to analyze the conversations.

##### English for Afghanistan, Grade 9, Unit 10 (Sample)

**John:** I could hardly recognize you Omar. Are these your national clothes?

**Omar:** Yes, it's chapan (*Superficial interaction*) which we wear on formal occasions.

It's called long coat.

**John:** What's that on your head?

**Omar:** It is a Qaraqul hat (*Superficial interaction*) which is made of kip.

**John:** So, is today a special occasion?

**Omar:** Yes, it's Eid-Al-Fitr (*superficial interaction*).

**John:** What is Eid-Al-Fitr (*Hybridization*)?

**Omar:** It's the day when Muslims celebrate the end of Fasting (Ramadan month) (*Hybridization*).

##### Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Interaction in Prospect 1-3*

Song's Model	Prospect 1 Freq	Prospect2 Freq	Prospect3 Freq	Total	Mean	Total freq percentage
Superficial interaction	1	15	6	22	7.33	51.16%
Hybridization	3	14	4	21	7	48.84%
Critical reflection	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	4	29	10	43		100%
Mean	1.33	9.66	3.33	14.33		

A sum of 43 *intercultural interactions* was used in this series of books. The most frequent subcategory was *superficial interaction* with a frequency of 22 and a percentage of 51.16%, but there was a slight difference between this element and *hybridization* with a frequency of 21 and a percentage of 48.83%. Notably, no *critical reflection* was found in these books.

**Table 9**

*Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Interaction in Vision1-3*

Song's Model	Vision1 Freq	Vision2 Freq	Vision3 Freq	Total	Mean	Total freq percentage
Superficial interaction	27	25	15	67	22.33	77.90%
Hybridization	2	12	5	19	6.33	22.1%
Critical reflection	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	29	37	20	86		100%
Mean	9.66	12.33	6.66	28.6		



In the Vision series, a total number of 86 intercultural interactions was used. The most frequent constituent was *superficial interaction* with a frequency of 67 and a percentage of 77.90%. The second frequent component was *hybridization* with a frequency of 19 and a percentage of 22.1%. Interestingly, there was no *critical reflection* component in the Vision series too.

**Table 10**

*Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Interaction in English for Afghanistan Grade 7-9*

Song's Model	EFA G7 Freq	EFA G8 Freq	EFA G9 Freq	Total	Mean	Total freq percentage
Superficial interaction	19	24	22	65	21.66	73.04%
Hybridization	6	2	16	24	8	26.96%
Critical reflection	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	25	26	38	89		100%
Mean	8.33	8.66	12.66	29.66		

Examining English for Afghanistan (EFA) grade 7 up to 9 revealed that a total number of 89 intercultural interactions was used in these three books. Similar to Iran's secondary English textbooks, *superficial interaction* was the most frequent element with a frequency of 65 and a percentage of 73.04%. The next one was *hybridization* (26.96%) and there were no instances of *critical reflection* in these three Afghan books too.

**Table 11**

*Descriptive Statistics for Intercultural Interaction in English for Afghanistan Grade 10-12*

Song's Model	EFA G10 Freq	EFA G11 Freq	EFA G12 Freq	Total	Mean	Total freq percentage
Superficial interaction	35	0	11	46	15.33	63.88%

Hybridization	10	0	2	12	4	16.66%
Critical reflection	14	0	0	14	4.66	19.44%
Total	59	0	13	72		100%
Mean	19.66	0	4.33	24		

A total number of 72 intercultural interactions was found in the EFA Grade 10 up to 12. First of all, it must be mentioned that English for Afghanistan Grade 11 had no conversation part so it was excluded from this research. The most frequent category was *superficial interaction* with a frequency of 46 and a percentage of 63.88%. *Critical reflection* came second with a frequency of 14 and a percentage of 19.44%. Of course, the difference between the second and third one was marginal and *hybridization* with a frequency of 12 and a percentage of 16.66% was the third one. English for Afghanistan was the only book that included a *critical reflection* instance.

**Table 12**

*Descriptive Statistics of Intercultural Interaction in Iranian and Afghan Secondary English Textbooks*

Song's Model	Iran English textbooks freq	Afghan English textbooks freq	Total	Mean	Total freq percentage
Superficial interaction	89	111	200	100	68.97%
Hybridization	40	36	76	38	26.20%
Critical reflection	0	14	14	7	4.82%
Total	129	161	290		100%
Mean	43	53.66	96.66		

As displayed in Table 12 the most frequent component of intercultural interaction was *superficial interaction* with a frequency of 200 and a percentage



of 68.97%. The second one was *hybridization* with a frequency of 76 and a percentage of 26.20%. The least frequent aspect was *critical reflection* with a frequency of 14 and a percentage of 4.82%. It was notable that there was no critical reflection in Iran's secondary English textbooks.

## 5. Discussion

Results of the current study are consistent with a number of previously-done research in the existing literature (e.g., [Ali et al., 2015](#); [Ariawan, 2020](#); [Bagheri et al., 2020](#); [Kartika Putra et al., 2020](#); [Roohani & Molana, 2013](#); [Song, 2013](#); [Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014](#); [Yanhong Liu et al., 2021](#)). Except for [Kartika Putra et al. \(2020\)](#)'s study, other studies primarily focused only on the representation of culture or only on intercultural interactions, but this study concurrently concentrates on both.

The first explanation for the first question of the study is that each book has different parts including reading, listening, vocabulary, grammar, and conversation. In this study, the focus was only on "conversation" parts. For example, EFA Grade 8, Unite 5, includes lots of national history representations but they are not in the "conversation" parts. There are similar examples in Iranian textbooks; for example, Vision 3, Lesson 1 includes information about Ferdousi and Hafez and their life but none of this information is in the "conversation" part. Meanwhile, this cannot be accepted as a justification because the conversation is a part in which two or more individuals are talking and this will be more attractive than a text to read so it could be better to place some more information in these parts. This issue is not in line with previous study conducted by [Ariawan \(2020\)](#) which is very similar to this study because of the use of the same model for the representation of culture where national history is not the most underrated aspect in that study and even stereotypes and national identity is the most frequent aspect in Indonesia English textbooks, so it is reasonable to expect more national history representations in conversation parts of these twelve books. Later he says it is not possible to separate social life and political institutions ([Ariawan, 2020](#)), so maybe it was better to use more representations of this aspect to produce more contextual conversations.

Another interesting point is that in both countries the same situation exists and none of the educational systems paid attention to this issue. This is in line with [Ariawan \(2020\)](#)'s attitude where he stated that there are specific goals for including various cultural perspectives. Since the textbook is required reading for senior high school students who are interested in defining their identities, the presence of national identity, for instance, is dramatic for students. This concept is consistent with the curriculum's aim to support the development of students who have a positive sense of self, excellent character, and a strong national identity. Iran and Afghanistan are Muslim countries and in the Muslim countries



*belief and behavior* are very critical cultural elements. According to Fathi (1995), 97% of the population in Iran is Muslim and as mentioned by Ghori (2020) 95% of people in Iran and Afghanistan are Muslim and it is worth to mention that in both countries, Farsi is the predominantly-spoken language and there are lots of common cultural points among their people. A cursory look at these statistics reveals that the expectation of a high frequency for this category was reasonably justified. This result is congruent with Ariawan's (2020) and in both studies *belief and behavior* category enjoyed a high frequency.

The second explanation for the results is the political conditions of these two countries. Both countries are governed under an Islamic Republic system. According to Mansurian (2016), one of the aims of an educational system in a country is to institutionalize Political and social values in students and textbooks are one the most useful tools for this goal and the most important part of socialization and formation of the social identity of people takes place in adolescence and textbooks play a central role in it. It is interesting to know that according to Roohani and Molana (2013) critical reflection is the widest part of Song's (2013) model because it can include Dating, Night clubs, Bi-educational schools, mixed-sex gyms, Facebook, Twitter, Online dating, YouTube, and Dressing, Mixed-sex party, Fashions and models, Friendship, Pet keeping, Lifestyles -It may be a hybridization- Dressing, Dance and Events (e.g. September 11th) while two other parts of this model are more limited. Knowing this fact, it was expected to have a high frequency of critical reflection in these twelve books but it seems the ministry of education in these two countries preferred to avoid talking about these concepts.

Hybridization includes values, traditions and customs. Again it can be argued that political attitudes in both countries are favorable and the governments are called the Islamic Republic, so according to Mansurian (2016), it is reasonable to hypothesize that political and cultural aspects were the factors that influence the content of the textbooks. This influence provides this result in which hybridization is more frequent than critical reflection. The findings are incongruent with Roohani and Molana (2013)'s study. If other books like the corpus of Roohani and Molana (2013) had been investigated, there might have been a softer atmosphere to provide critical reflections.

The fourth explanation is regarding the most frequent category, *superficial interaction*. This category includes physical things like food, gestures, places, media, festivals, people, and currency. Song (2013)'s interculturality is the main focus in this model. for example, when the name of a poet comes in a conversation but there is no *intercultural* feature for it, then it is considered as a representation of culture in stereotype and national identity category. The second explanation for this result is based on Ghori (2020). He asserts that in the Iran and Afghan cultures, things are important. People use physical things



and appoint to them so much in common daily conversations and even in their history, there are important rules for things. Even we see that Kebab is registered as an Iranian food or there was a Buddha idol which was an indicative historical thing in Afghanistan. This result is closely in line with studies like Song (2013) and Roohani and Molana (2013), where it was seen that in those studies superficial interaction was the most frequent category as well. One of the other justifications that lie behind the inadequate attention being paid to the cultural aspects and intercultural interactions can be attributed to the serious focus on the target language elements. Kovacs (2017) states this means writers of the textbooks want to teach the students grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, writing, reading, and speaking consequently they forget to include cultural aspects of the local or global region.

The other reason for the lack of intercultural interaction in the Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks can be ascribed to the existing conflict and hostility among governments and people of these two countries with America or England because of their tyrannical behavior toward these nations and colonization in the history. The competing forces of nativism, immigration, and globalization, as well as traditional patriarchal standards, can be seen in Indian ELT textbooks, according to Bose and Gao (2022). Additionally, it must be acknowledged that American culture predominates in nations without a history of British colonization, with American cultural representations being the most common, as evidenced by the research of Hermawan and Lia (2012) and Song (2013). Binaries is a different theory that is present. This idea argues that colonization forces frequently emphasized the differences between them and colonized people, which had a number of unfavorable effects, such as preventing marrying out of fear of miscegenation and a lack of cultural blending (Burney, 2012).

## 6. Conclusion

The present study was aimed to find the frequency of cultural representation and intercultural interaction in the Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks. Two models were used to achieve these goals: Byram et al.'s (1994) was used to answer the question about the frequency of representation of culture and Song (2013) was used to investigate the frequency of intercultural interaction. The results revealed that the most frequent representation of culture was social interaction while national history was almost the absent category. As far as the second question was concerned, results were indicative of the fact that *superficial interaction* was the dominant aspect while *critical reflection* was the least frequent category of the model. The results indicated that there was not a balanced representation of culture in the secondary English textbooks of the education system of Iran and Afghanistan. This study and similar studies indicate that there are problems with cultural dimensions and how such cultural

elements are represented, so materials developers can use the results to develop a more culturally-inclusive textbook. Teachers know that there are problems with cultural aspects in the textbooks so they can improve or coordinate their methods in teaching in ways to include much more authentic and cultural situations for students. They can suggest points to material developers because they are experimenting with various methods in real-life situations. Finally, this study can help learners to be aware of what they are learning and find out the deficiencies of the textbooks and through this understanding, they might be able to use other resources or at least ask their teachers to provide them with more culturally-rich situations for in pedagogic settings.

It is worth mentioning that the government of Afghanistan changed and Taliban took the control of the country. The ideology behind the Taliban is different from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. So, predictably, they will publish new books based on their beliefs. At the time of conducting the present study, the Taliban had not published a new English series. That is why the researcher had to use books that were released by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. First, it must be mentioned that these two countries were chosen because of their common language, Persian, and a very close relationship in culture. Meanwhile, there is another country, Tajikistan, where Farsi is used so if a study can include their English textbooks, then there might be a more reliable outcome. Secondly, the present study limited itself to conversation parts while a book starts from the cover and even table of content and then continues with paragraphs, readings, practices, pictures, listening, and speaking. If a study including all these parts is conducted, there will be a better and more holistic look at the whole contents of the books. The textbooks that were used in the Iranian and Afghan educational systems were analyzed while there are a lot of other books, even global English textbooks, that are being taught in different countries. In those books there are fewer limitations for including different contents; for example, the issue that occurred concerning *critical reflection* in examining intercultural interaction in this study.

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