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## Critical Analysis of Complete IELTS Textbook: Cultural Factors in Focus

Somayeh Nourazar<sup>1</sup>   
 Mahdi Naseri<sup>2\*</sup>   
 Elham Mohammadi<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>MA in Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching, Department of English Language, Faculty of Humanities, University of Zanjan, Zanjan, Iran

<sup>2\*</sup>Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language, Faculty of Humanities, University of Zanjan, Zanjan, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language, Faculty of Humanities, University of Zanjan, Zanjan, Iran

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### CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

E-mail: [mahdinasiri@znu.ac.ir](mailto:mahdinasiri@znu.ac.ir)

### ABSTRACT

The inseparable connection between language and culture has been at the forefront of many studies. Similarly, the role of teaching materials in fostering intercultural competence of language learners is consistently highlighted in the literature. In keeping with these observations, the current study aims at investigating the representation of culture in Complete IELTS textbook published by Cambridge University Press, 2012. Through adopting Kachru's concentric circles of English speakers around the world, the cultural content related to Center and Periphery Countries was explored. In order to quantify and categorize cultural themes, the Byram's cultural checklist (1993) was used. Next, the content of four sections of the textbook, namely reading, listening, speaking, and writing, was analyzed to record any cultural representation. The overall sample included 16 reading passages, 10 listening scripts, 10 speaking and 10 writing sections. The results indicated that Complete IELTS textbook contains cultural presentations of different countries with more weight given to Periphery Countries. The culture of these regions occupies 67.97% of the content in the textbook, whereas Center Countries take up 32%. Moreover, in terms of the eight areas of Byram, the majority of the cultural presentation (55.61%) falls under the category of geography. It can be concluded that the textbook is free of any cultural bias and ideological/political motives.

**KEYWORDS:** Textbook evaluation; Culture; Cultural content; Center and periphery countries

## 1. Introduction

Learning a language goes beyond linguistic knowledge and structure. In the process of learning a language, students are exposed to culture as it is embedded in the communication. Kramsch (1993) stated that language and culture are inseparable. He believes that EFL learners acquire both target language and culture. Cultural knowledge is part of the communicative competence which includes cultural understanding, conversational routines, and the target society's norms and values. Many other scholars believe in the strong relationship between language and culture and emphasize on the crucial role of culture in language learning and

teaching (Baker, 2012a; Baker, 2012b; Gao, 2006; Jamalvandi, 2013; Kramersch, 1993; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013; Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Han and Bae (2005) stated that teaching a foreign language without its cultural content is impossible. Gao also (2006) emphasizes the close tie between language and culture stating that language learning is cultural learning and accordingly language teaching is cultural teaching.

Textbooks as an important educational tool in a language classroom serve an important role in teaching culture. They are sources of linguistic knowledge and cultural aspects as well and help learners gain sufficient cultural knowledge and awareness (Al-Sofi, 2018; McKay, 2002; Kramersch, 1993; Taki, 2008). Gray (2002) states that textbooks are designed to teach language, but they also carry cultural implications. Therefore, all textbooks are inclusive of cultural content and approaches in different ways.

The culture presented in textbooks should be fair. It is emphasized that English teaching and learning materials should encompass intercultural perspectives and present cultures from around the world rather than merely the culture of English-speaking countries (Baker, 2012; Bennett et al., 2003; Byram, 1997; McKay, 2002). As McKay (2002) puts, three cultures -the source, the target and international culture- should be included in English textbooks to fulfill the needs of different English learners.

Several studies have demonstrated that textbooks often contain cultural and linguistic biases, and social stereotypes (e.g. Amerian & Tajabadi, 2020; Ansary & Babaii, 2003; Dar & Masroor, 2019; Melliti, 2013; Shah & Pathan, 2016). A large body of research has also attested to the frequent use of target language culture elements in internationally published textbooks, and this, in turn, deprives learners of acquiring adequate knowledge for effective intercultural communication (e.g. Amerian and Tajabadi, 2020; Canagarajah, 2003; Chao, 2011; Gray, 2002; Melliti, 2013; Shah & Pathan, 2016). As an example, Amerian and Tajabadi (2020) have criticized the biased cultural representation and dominance of British culture in Oxford's New Headway (4th ed.) series.

Following the spread of English language in the world, Anglophone countries' industry, and specifically, Britain has widely benefited from the exportation of English textbooks (Gray, 2002; Melliti, 2013). Cambridge University Press (CUP) as the oldest university press in the world (Hill, 2016) publishes over 50,000 titles by authors from over 100 countries. In 2011, CUP formed a partnership with Cambridge Assessment to publish official preparation materials for Cambridge English and IELTS examinations.

The appropriacy of global textbooks is determined by their global use (Canagarajah, 1999; Gray, 2002). Therefore, internationally published textbooks (e.g. IELTS preparation textbooks) are worthy of in-depth investigation in terms of their users' perspectives and cultural content as well. Michael (1993 as cited in Melliti, 2013) refers to cultural content as one of the essential elements in analyzing the content of textbooks in addition to linguistic content.

The present study is an attempt to probe the cultural content of Complete IELTS textbook published by CUP (2012). The underlying theoretical framework adopted to this end is Kachru's famous concentric circles of English speakers around the world. According to his model, two major groups of countries are identifiable, i.e. Centre countries and Periphery countries. The former attributes to *inner* circle (English is used as a first language, e.g. UK, USA) and the latter includes both *outer* (English is used as a second language) circle and *expanding* (English is learned as a second language) circle.

In contrast to similar studies on internationally published textbooks, as mentioned earlier, claiming the significant representation of Center Countries' culture (Phillipson, 1992), the presentation of culture in the Complete IELTS textbook seems to be in favor of Periphery Countries, in particular UAE. The textbook seems to have instances representing local culture of UAE. The present study was conducted in Iran to address the numerous students and teachers' complaints of cultural bias. Upon further investigation, no previous study has been undertaken to assess cultural bias in the IELTS preparation textbooks, in particular Complete IELTS. Following Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), CUP maintains fairness of its English language textbooks to all cultural groups. Therefore, with little evidence in the literature to support students and teachers' claiming cultural bias, a further investigation into the matter is needed to fill the wide gap in the literature. *Complete IELTS* textbook was investigated for the quantity and manner of presentation of Center and Periphery Countries' culture. This study aims at ensuring the neutrality of the textbook in terms of fair presentation of the world cultures. Moreover, this study provides feedback from a local context and makes textbook writers aware of some of the issues.

## 2. Literature Review

Since English is used as an international language, the cultural content of ELT materials should not be limited to native English-speaking cultures. According to Gray (2002) diversity of book users from around the world has to be embraced in designing a suitable global textbook.

Phillipson (1992, p. 17) classifies English language users around the world into two groups: Centre countries and Periphery countries. The term "Centre countries" covers Britain, the USA, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia. The majority of the population speaks English as their mother tongue. Countries outside this circle are called the Periphery countries. The

Centre countries are assumed to impose their culture to internationally published ELT textbooks. His argument revolves around the Centre countries' penchant for maintaining and extending their global influence through the English language teaching industry (Phillipson, 1992).

Some scholars in the field of ELT claim that the use of internationally published textbooks mostly produced by Western commercial organizations is not problem-free and may affect local curriculum; moreover, these textbooks are often considered as culturally inappropriate (Canagarajah, 2003; Gray, 2002). In a study on English language teachers' beliefs about internationally published materials in Indonesia, Zacharias (2005) mentions "teachers found some cultural aspects too remote to be understood or even the language too difficult" (p.33). It is not far from expectation that some learners may not have a clear understanding of some cultural aspects or they may find them inappropriate in their own culture.

This problem is not limited to global ELT textbooks. Some studies have proved the cultural bias in International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as well. In a study conducted in Bangladesh by Khan (2006), the subtle cultural biases toward Western culture and norms of behavior in the speaking test content have been revealed. Some of the topics on the test were identified as unusual, uncommon and unfamiliar. It was said that some vocabulary items and topics reflect Western concepts and patterns of interaction and are not culturally appropriate for local candidates. This makes the task difficult for them and affects their performance on the test. This issue needs test designers' attention.

In order to avoid such problems in ELT textbooks, publishers try to follow a "one-size-fits all" approach in designing global textbooks (Alkathery, 2011). They also prefer the use of neutral and not controversial topics. Gray (2002) stated that new global ELT textbooks are following similar guidelines to cultural content, which are based on two elements: appropriacy and inclusivity. Inclusivity means a fair and balanced representation of people from different races, religions, genders, ethnicities, and classes, while appropriacy refers to avoiding some topics that might be offensive to the book users. However, more recent research has proven that ELT global textbooks still suffer from bias and stereotype (e.g. Amerian and Tajabadi, 2020; Ansary and Babaii, 2003; Dar & Masroor, 2019; Melliti, 2013; Shah & Pathan, 2016). Reimann (2009) also declares that designing books which engage students with relevant and unbiased information on a cultural level is difficult and time consuming and requires a great deal of research and piloting.

## 2.1. Criteria for cultural content in textbook evaluation

Several scholars propose varied criteria for evaluating cultural content in a textbook. Hatoss (2004) focuses on the evaluation of three dimensions: text and visual input, methods used to teach the cultural content, and aims set by the author/s or publisher/s of a particular textbook for developing learners' cultural competence. Brooks (1986, as cited in Tüm and Sarkmaz, 2012) asserts that the cultural items form greeting, personal perceptions, attitudes on different issues, the use of phrases in different situations, commercial facts and domestic animals, etc.

Byram (1993) is considered to be one of the most prominent scholars, emphasizing the importance of introducing the intercultural element to foreign language learners (Sándorová, 2014). Byram (1993, as cited in Juan, 2010) proposes eight areas focusing on cultural content to be included in textbooks. The list consists of eight categories and each category is further divided into subcategories. These categories are:

1. Social identity and social group (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities)
2. Social interaction (differing levels of formality; as outsider and insider)
3. Belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs; daily routines)
4. Social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)
5. Socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passage)
6. National history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity)
7. National geography (geographical factors seen as being significant by members)
8. Stereotypes and national identity (what is "typical" symbol of national stereotypes).

Taking note of Byram's comprehensive and practical criteria, we decided to analyze the textbook in light of this checklist and cover almost every aspect of the culture.

## 2.2. Culture in the common European framework of reference (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2001) provides the design of teaching and learning materials, the assessment of foreign language proficiency, and a transparent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines. CEFR encourages language learning as a means of preserving linguistic and cultural identity of native culture (C1) and target culture (C2), improving communication and mutual understanding, and combating intolerance and racism. It is founded on the conviction that language learning outcomes are likely to benefit internationally if syllabuses and curricula, textbooks and examinations are shaped by a common understanding. Within this respect, world cultures gain importance as intercultural awareness. Besides, a new trend within this frame is to develop learners' critical thinking skills and intercultural competence at language classes implying other world cultures (C3) (Byram, 2000; Byram et al., 2001; Sercu and Bandura, 2005). The idea of C1, C2 and even multicultural aspects into language teaching and learning lies in the core of CEFR.

## 2.3. Review of studies on the cultural content of EFL textbooks

A number of models and approaches have been put forward for textbook evaluation. Various researchers have used content analysis, and more specifically, item frequency analysis in order to evaluate a textbook.

Regarding the intercultural communicative competence principles and components in an EFL textbook, in a recent study, Amerian and Tajabadi (2020) investigated Oxford's New Headway (4th ed.). To this end, they looked into the teachers' opinion on the cultural content of the textbook and their responses to an intercultural communicative competence checklist. It was concluded that there are biases and inadequacies in terms of the presentation and development of intercultural knowledge, attitude, and awareness. Amerian and Tajabadi (2020) mentioned that the textbook has presented the United Kingdom as the land of opportunities and emphasized that such a biased outlook towards cultural instruction do not equip learners with adequate and accurate knowledge required for successful intercultural communication.

Yet in another attempt to explore the cultural content, Putra et al. (2020) examined the manifestation of cultures and intercultural interactions in three English textbooks published in Indonesia. The cultural representation in the textbook was analyzed based on the approach suggested by Yuen (2011). The study clarified that the examined textbooks do not appropriately demonstrate cultural diversity. It was revealed that cultures of Indonesia and English-speaking countries are presented dominantly in the textbooks. Moreover, intercultural interactions are demonstrated in limited and superficial ways. As McKay (2002) states, while cultural content of teaching materials should not be limited to the culture of English-speaking countries, they should incorporate a variety of cultural elements to help learners develop an interest in language learning and to foster learner motivation.

Some other studies have criticized the biased cultural content in some internationally published ELT textbooks. Shah & Pathan (2016) confirmed the dominant presentation of western culture in two ELT textbooks published by Oxford University Press. The study employed Fairclough's (2003) Critical Discourse Analysis as an analytical framework to investigate the cultural presentation in the textbooks. It was found that the textbooks promote western value and culture and contain lessons on western lifestyles, customs and traditions to westernize the learners and train them to accept western culture as acceptable norm.

In another study, Chao (2011) examined the cultural content of an internationally published ELT textbook called New American Inside Out (elementary level/2008). The method of content analysis was applied and the content was codified. This study revealed that the textbook under study has presented culture with more focus on the introduction of western products, persons and perspectives. Chao (2011) stated that the bias in favor of Target Culture (English-speaking countries) is obvious throughout the textbook and less interest has been put on presentation of local and Asian culture.

Some other studies have revealed the unbalanced cultural presentation in textbooks in favor of target or international target cultures with less focus on source culture. Al-Sofi (2018) used Content Analysis and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) model to investigate the cultural content of an English textbook, *Well Read 1*, published by Oxford University Press regarding source culture, target culture, and international target culture. The findings revealed that the diverse cultural elements are represented with more focus on the target and international target cultures with less interest on the source culture.

Arslan (2016) conducted similar research in which he applied descriptive content analysis to investigate the cultural content and the usage frequency of elements related to native culture, target culture and international culture in EFL textbooks used for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in Turkey. The results of the study indicated textbooks were successful in presenting intercultural knowledge. However, native culture items are fewer than target and intercultural items in the textbooks.

Unbalanced culture presentation is not limited to ELT textbooks. It has also been revealed in the IELTS as an internationally recognized English language proficiency test. Very few studies have been done on the cultural bias of the IELTS exam. As an example, Freimuth (2014) conducted cultural content analysis on the reading component of twenty IELTS exams.

A total of sixty reading passages were examined for cultural capital. The study found that, on average, one reading test contained fourteen cultural references including cultural objects and historical settings. He found that the readings referred to 139 places or regions around the world with only five references pertaining to the Middle East and none to the United Arab Emirates where this study was conducted. In another study conducted in Bangladesh by Khan (2006) as an IELTS examiner, the speaking module of the IELTS test was investigated. The examiners were asked to fill out questionnaires and some examiners were interviewed. The study explored and analyzed the terminology, vocabulary, topics and question patterns of the speaking test for any cultural bias. Findings show that there are a number of culturally inappropriate and unfamiliar topics and also some vocabulary items and phrases that tend to confuse the candidates and affect their performance. The analysis of responses from the examiners reveals that candidates in Bangladesh have difficulty with certain questions and tasks in the IELTS speaking test as they tend toward Western culture and norms of behavior that need background knowledge to be understood.

## 2.4. Content analysis

Researchers define content analysis as a quantification process that classifies the content into numerical data and measures the frequency or the appearance of the analysis unit in each category (Bryman, 2012; Cohen, et al., 2007; Silverman, 2011). Historically, this technique is closely linked with quantitative studies and originally designed to deal with large amounts of raw material (Bryman, 2012). As put by Weber (1990), one of the fundamental features of content analysis is that a vast amount of written data is reduced to smaller groups of information or long texts with loads of words are represented by fewer words or expressions.

As mentioned earlier, in this technique, the focus is on establishing precise categories and counting instances, either for existence or frequency (Bryman, 2012). Instances are systematically identified, coded, and grouped before being analyzed quantitatively (Silverman, 2011). Bryman (2012) believes that it is the systematic nature of this tool that affords its objectivity. By clearly specifying the coding and other procedures, content analysis is replicable in the sense that other researchers could reproduce the study. Checklists are examples of pre-coded questions formed prior to the phase of coding and categorizing data. Checklists are of great importance as they help the objective and systematic transformation of each data into a score (Cohen, et al., 2007). Content analysis can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed (Holsti, 1969, p. 11). Rose et al. (2014) also stated that content analysis can be carried out quantitatively or qualitatively.

### 2.4.1. The process of content analysis

The procedures needed to be followed in carrying content analysis are as follows:

Step 1. Decide what kind of analysis is going to occur. The researcher must decide whether to code for a single word or set of words or phrases.

Step 2. Decide the number of concepts to code for. Concepts and categories need to be created and defined to limit the analysis.

Step 3. Decide whether to code for existence or frequency of a concept. When coding for existence an instance would only be counted once, no matter how many times it appeared. However, when coding for frequency the number of times an instance appears in a text matters. This would give a clue that a certain concept is more emphasized in a text

Step 4. Decide on how you will distinguish among concepts; whether concepts are to be coded exactly as they appear or if they can be recorded even when they appear in different forms.

Step 5. Decide what to do with "irrelevant" information. The researcher must decide whether irrelevant information should be ignored (as Weber, 1990, suggests), or used to reexamine.

Step 6. Code the texts.

Step 7. Analyze the results. (Colorado State University)

Many scholars (Dörnyei, 2007; Weber, 1990; and Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) emphasize the importance of creating and applying a coding scheme in conducting content analysis as it influences the outcomes of the whole study to the largest extent.

## 2.5. Quantitative and qualitative approaches

Qualitative content analysis is often referred to as "latent level analysis, because it concerns a second-level, interpretative analysis of the underlying deeper meaning of the data"; while the quantitative content analysis is usually described as "manifest level analysis", providing an objective and descriptive overview of the "surface meaning of the data" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 246). According to Holsti (1969) qualitative method of content analysis is insightful, whereas quantitative method is mechanical. In other words, qualitative content analysis is mainly inductive, as it draws inferences from the examination of topics and themes

and data; on the contrary, quantitative content analysis is considered to be deductive, aimed at testing hypotheses or finding answers to questions based upon theories or previous empirical research (Sándorová, 2014).

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) state that “qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text” (p. 308). Despite these differences, it has been highlighted by numerous scholars that, in research practice, the two approaches are often applied in combination (Dörnyei, 2007; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Actually, they mutually support each other’s advantages and strengthen the validity of the findings, thus both contribute to obtain a broader, holistic knowledge about the examined field of study (Dörnyei, 2007).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Textbook under evaluation

The main material used in this study was *Complete IELTS*, Bands 4-5 preparation textbook by Brook-Hart & Jakeman (2012) and published by University of Cambridge ESOL examinations. It is widely popular and commonly used as a core teaching material, both in public and private institutes, in Iran and abroad. This textbook is designed for students who wish to take the Academic Module of IELTS. The textbook teaches the skills, and language learners need to reach an intermediate level of English (CEF level B1). The Student Textbook contains ten units, each containing sections on each of the four skills in the IELTS exam.

#### 3.2. Instrument

Byram’s (1993) checklist for the cultural content of the textbook was selected to classify the cultural content of the textbook under certain categories.

#### 3.3. Procedure

##### 3.3.1. Data collection procedure

In order to investigate how culture is presented in the textbook, descriptive content analysis was used. The reason for employing this method is its capacity to turn the collected data of the text under study into manageable categories or codes (Byram & Feng, 2004). Two data collection techniques were chosen, namely, item frequency analysis and checklist. Checklist was used to analyze the cultural content of the textbook. Besides, in order to establish the frequency of culture-related items, item frequency analysis technique was utilized. At the first level, to come up with an overall picture of Center and Periphery Countries’ cultural preferences represented in the textbook, the researcher studied the book from the beginning to the end and listened to all excerpts provided in the form of a DVD accompanying the textbook for the listening sections of the textbook. Different sections of the textbook including listening, reading passages, speaking and writing sections were closely examined to find any potential topics including words representing Center or Periphery Countries. The researcher identified indicators that fit into each category mentioned in the Byram’s (1993) checklist. So, the cultural content of the textbook was classified under certain categories. In the following section content analysis procedure and creating coding scheme are explained.

##### 3.3.2. The procedure of content analysis and coding scheme

As part of the content analysis procedure, it is crucial to decide about a coding scheme. Many scholars (e.g. Dörnyei, 2007; Weber, 1990; and Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) assert that creating coding scheme is of great importance in conducting content analysis as it influences the outcomes of the whole study. One of the most fundamental and important decisions in developing a coding scheme is the definition of the basic unit of text to be classified. “Word, word sense, sentence, theme, paragraph, and whole text” are six commonly used options (Holsti, 1969, p. 116). In this study, analysis was for single or set of words (= 1 concept).

The following steps were undertaken according to the procedural instructions for the content analysis provided on the Writing@CSU Web Site at Colorado State University.

**Step 1.** Analysis was for single or set of words (=1 concept)

**Step 2.** Two different coding schemes were assigned to certain categories concerning the type of cultural referents. The first group of coding schemes was assigned to the type of cultural items following Byram’s (1993) Cultural Content Checklist including eight components as: social identity and social group, social interaction, belief and behavior, social and political institutions, socialization and the life cycle, national history, national geography, stereotypes and national identity (Byram, 1993, as cited in Juan, 2010).

The second group of coding schemes was assigned to the Center Countries' culture-related items (CC) and Periphery Countries' culture-related items (PC). The words or set of words (=1 concept) representing Center Countries' culture were coded as (CC) and the words representing Periphery Countries' culture were coded as (PC).

**Step 3.** The concepts were coded for frequency not existence. If a reference to a foreign culture was repeated more than once in the same passage, it was counted to the number of times it appeared in order to find out which culture is more emphasized.

**Step 4.** Eight components of Byram's (1993) Cultural Content Checklist were used. If there were any references (either with or without an explanation or detailed description) to the items mentioned in the checklist, they were recorded. Also, a single word and its different forms were recorded.

**Step 5.** "Irrelevant" information was ignored as Weber (1990) suggests.

**Step 6.** Cultural content of the textbook was classified and coded under the eight categories and their subcategories found in Byram's (1993) checklist. At this phase, the researcher identified indicators that fit into each category mentioned in the checklist. Then, any references to Center and Periphery countries were coded. Indirect references were also taken into account. If the name of a country was not specified, any other indirect identity, if provided, was taken as clues to determine the referenced country.

**Step 7.** Coded instances were added up and categorized for quantitative analysis. The number of culture-related referents was counted and the frequency and percentage of Center and Periphery countries' culture presentation were calculated. Finally, the researcher drew inferences from the collected data to investigate what is the dominant culture and also the manner of presentation of culture in the textbook.

#### 4. Results

Ten units of the textbook were examined and their references to Center and Periphery Countries were tabulated. Table 1 presents the general overview concerning the number of sections devoted to four basic skills in the textbook.

**Table 1.** Layout of the textbook

Section	Number
Reading	16
Listening	10
Speaking	10
Writing	10

Each unit is observed to have seven sections, four of which are devoted to four basic skills of Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening sections. Other sections including Vocabulary and Spelling, Pronunciation, and Key grammar are equally included in each unit.

Four sections of the textbook including Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening were examined thoroughly, and references related to Center and Periphery Countries were classified under the suitable categories included in Byram's (1993) checklist. Finally, the frequency and percentage of Center and Periphery Country's culture presentation were calculated.

The research question concerning the dominant culture presented in the textbook was answered based on the results of the quantification of the data. After that, the researcher drew inferences from the text and the collected data to investigate the manner of the presentation of the Centre and Periphery countries' culture. The study findings are summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Frequency of Center and Periphery Countries' Presentation

	CC	Percentage	PC	Percentage	Total
Reading	49	39%	76	60%	125
Listening	0	0%	21	100%	21
Speaking	2	7.69%	24	92.30%	26
Writing	6	100%	0	0%	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>67.97%</b>	<b>178</b>

Note. CC = center countries; PC = periphery countries.

As seen in table 2, 121 out of 178 coded items in the textbook were references to Periphery Countries, which constitutes 67.97% of the data, whereas only 57 items were references to Center Countries, which occupies only 32% of the study data.

As the data makes it clear, 76 out of 125 coded items in the reading passages were evaluated as representation of Periphery Countries, which constitute 60% of the data, this number is almost two times bigger than Center Countries' presentation in the reading passages (39%), and 49 items were direct references to Center Countries, which constitute 39% of the data in reading passages.

In the listening sections, 21 items were categorized in Byram's (1993) checklist as culture representing items. All the collected data in the listening sections were references to Periphery Countries with no item representing Center Countries. Topics presented in the listening sections were mostly general and culture-free. They contained cultural information that could not be restricted only to one nation or country. Actually, they were general enough to be used by people in any country or culture. These sentences had no indicator of their referents. It needs to be mentioned that throughout this study cultural items were coded based on eight categories found in Byram's (1993) checklist. So, when it is said that some items were culture-free it means that they were not suitable to be categorized according to Byram's (1993) categorization.

The percentage of the presentation of Periphery Countries in speaking sections was 92.30%. On the other hand, Center Countries' presentation constitutes only 7.69% of the collected data in this section. In fact, only two items, which constitute 8% of the coded data in speaking sections, were evaluated as references to Center Countries.

Writing sections were evaluated based on the topics presented for the writing tasks. As seen in table 2, 6 items were evaluated as direct references to Center Countries with no reference to Periphery Countries.

The most frequently used analysis categories in Byram's checklist are clear in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3.** Frequency of Center and Periphery Countries' Representation in Eight Categories Found in Byram's Checklist

	CC	Percentage	PC	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Social identity and social groups	0	0%	6	4.95%	6	3.37%
Social interaction	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Belief and behavior	2	3.50%	1	1%	3	1.68%
Social and political institutions	19	33.33%	3	2.47%	22	12.35%
Socialization and life cycle	0	0%	3	2.47%	3	1.68%
National history	3	5.26%	1	1%	4	2.24%
National geography	14	24.56%	85	70.24%	99	55.61%
Stereotypes and national identity	19	33.33%	22	18.18%	41	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>67.97%</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>-</b>

Note. CC = center countries; PC = periphery countries.

**Table 4.** Frequency of Culture Representation in the Textbook

	Frequency	Percentage
Social identity and social group	6	3.37%
Social interaction	0	0%
Belief and behavior	3	1.68%
Social and political institutions	22	12.35%
Socialization and life cycle	3	1.68%
National History	4	2.24%
National Geography	99	55.61%
Stereotype and national identity	41	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>-</b>

As presented in Table 3 and Table 4, the most frequently used analysis category was category of National Geography. As can be seen, 99 out of 178 coded data in the study were classified under category of National Geography, which constitutes 55.61% of the coded data. In fact, half of the culture presentations in the textbook were references to National Geography. Also, 85 out of 99 coded data under category of National Geography in the textbook were direct references to Periphery



Countries, whereas only 14 items were representation of Center Countries. It means that items classified under category of National Geography in the textbook were mostly representation of Periphery Countries.

Put it in another words, as seen in Table 3, 85 out of 121 coded data representing Periphery Countries in the textbook were direct references to National Geography (70.24%). It can be concluded that Periphery Countries are represented in the textbook mostly through National Geography. On the other hand, only 14 items out of 57 items representing Center Countries were references to National Geography (24.56%). Stereotypes and National Identity goes next with a percentage of 23 in representing culture in the textbook. Moreover, 41 items were classified under this category, out of which 22 items were representation of Periphery Countries and 19 items were references to Center Countries. The presentation of Periphery and Center Countries through Stereotype and National Identity is somehow balanced.

As the data makes it clear in Table 3, each of two categories of ‘Social and Political Institutions’ and ‘Stereotype and National Identity’ constitute 33.33% of the Center Countries’ presentation in the textbook. In other words, references to Center Countries were mostly presented through ‘Social and Political Institutions’ and ‘Stereotype and National Identity’. On the other hand, only 2.47% of the data represents Social and Political Institutions of Periphery Countries.

It needs to be mentioned that, from among twenty-nine subcategories in Byram’s checklist, no data were coded under twelve subcategories in the study. The unused subcategories are: social class, ethnic minority, greeting, moral and religious beliefs, health care, law and order, media, rites of passages, art, music, literature, and food.

## 5. Discussion

Bearing in mind that Complete IELTS textbook is commonly used as a preparation material all around the world, one would expect to witness three cultures -the source, the target and international culture- (McKay, 2002) as equally-represented and to a reasonable extent in the textbook. In the realm of cultural content evaluation of textbooks, many studies found that Center Countries’ culture is represented more prominently than the culture of Periphery countries. The outcome of the current study, to the contrary, suggested that the presentation of culture in the textbook is in favor of the Periphery Countries. These countries made up the largest portion of culture presentation of the textbook under study with 67.97%, while the percentage of presentation of Center Countries is only 32%.

Considering CEFR’s focus on interculturality, the results revealed that the textbook has not met the requirements suggested by CEFR, an important framework in terms of cultural identity and improving intercultural communication. As Complete IELTS textbook is claimed to be prepared according to CEFR, the textbook is expected to have a rich cultural content. It seems that the balance has not been established in terms of including intercultural elements.

As Arslan (2016) mentioned, intercultural communicative competence is regarded an important aim of EFL teaching. Consequently, the investigation of cultural content of textbooks as an important element in the course of teaching and learning has been the focus of many researchers. In this regard, Amerian and Tajabadi (2020) investigated Oxford’s New Headway (4th ed.). The findings proved biases and inadequacies in terms of the presentation and development of intercultural knowledge, attitude, and awareness. They criticized that such a biased outlook towards cultural instruction does not equip learners with adequate and accurate knowledge required for successful intercultural communication.

In a similar vein, Juan (2010) examined the cultural content of EFL textbooks used in higher education in China. She explored the kind of cultural information contained in the college EFL textbooks. It was found that the cultural content input in the textbook has not received attention in designing and organizing the textbooks. She suggested that the comparisons and contrasts between different cultures should be added, more passages should reflect the culture of other English-Speaking communities, and international cultures should be included.

These findings are in accordance with one of the shortcomings found in the analysis of the textbook under investigation in this study. The findings of the present study disclosed the fact that cultural variety has received scant attention in the compilation of *Complete IELTS* textbook. As mentioned earlier, twelve subcategories of the Byram’s checklist were passed over in the process of cultural analysis unused of the textbook. Also, 70.24% of cultural presentation of Periphery Countries in the textbook was references to National Geography and Geographical Items, while Socialization and Life Cycle, Music, Literature, and Social Interaction have received slight or no attention. This is also explicable in light of the link between language and culture. Given the results of the present study and the intricate connection between language and culture, more passages should reflect international cultures to keep learners interested in learning about cultures and developing their critical thinking by comparing and contrasting the cultural values.

The outcome of the present study is explicable in light of the challenges posed against the hegemony of native speakers' norms (Shin et al., 2011). English teaching and learning are encouraged not only to incorporate cultures of English-speaking countries but also involve intercultural perspectives (Baker, 2012a; Baker, 2012b).

It is also in line with the notion of global citizenship. In response to the needs of a global society, individuals should be empowered and placed at center of any educational endeavor. The shift toward student-centered learning is discernible in the recently published EFL textbooks. Meyer et al. (2010) found that measures of student centrism had a positive, robust effect on the level of human rights emphases. In other words, student centrism may contribute to the rise of global citizenship and assist them in getting familiar with the cultural diversity.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of the cultural content of the *Complete IELTS* textbook revealed that the textbook's cultural content is not properly inserted. Periphery Countries made up the largest portion of culture presentation in the textbook. In fact, the cultural presentation is more focused on Periphery Countries which constitute 67.97% of the collected data. Center Countries occupied only 32% of the cultural content of the textbook. Some criteria such as National Geography (55.61%), Stereotype and national identity (23%) are presented more significantly, while some other criteria such as socialization and life cycle (1.68%), belief and behavior (1.68%), and social identity and social group (3.37%) are addressed to a lesser degree in the textbook.

Moreover, no item in the book was coded under any of the following criteria in Byram's checklist: greeting, moral and religious beliefs, health care, law and order, media, rites of passages, art, music, literature, and food. The best-case scenario is when all criteria are addressed equally throughout the book by taking cross-cultural learning environments into account in order to familiarize learners with necessary aspects of different cultures and keep them motivated during their learning process. In the present study, however, the majority of the items coded under Periphery Countries were references to the Middle East in the textbook. To sum it up, material designers and textbook writers need to adopt a more critical position towards the cultural content of textbooks. Designing materials presenting cultural diversities and ideologies in different societies can enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence.

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