

DESIGNING CULTURALLY FRIENDLY ELT SYLLABUS AND MATERIALS

In this paper the researcher will put forward theories from various scholars and theorists in the matter of syllabus design and materials development. They would be then applied and fitted to Turkmen ELT context. The findings proved that syllabus and ELT materials based on latest language teaching methods (CLIL) and cultural and moral values need to be developed soon. New type of Syllabus and culturally friendly ELT materials (textbooks) would be more successful, motivating much better, instruct more effectively, and gain the benefits to both teachers and learners of English.

The findings of this study are hoped to have implications for teaching and learning culture and moral values in English as a Foreign Language classrooms in Turkmenistan.

1. Introduction

If the Syllabus is a body, then teaching materials, textbooks will be the soul which makes the body be alive. The process will continue with designers' dressing. Syllabus designers will dress their Syllabuses with their knowledge, opinion and ideology using the latest styles of fashion.

1.1. Defining Culture

It is hard to concretely state and define what culture is. It is one of the most complex words in the English. According to Craig Storti, "Culture, a system of beliefs and values shared by a particular group of people" [8].

A document published in 2002 by UNESCO made the definition more apt by calling culture: "a distinctive set of spiritual, material, emotional and intellectual features of society or a social group and it encompasses in addition to arts and literatures, lifestyles ways of living together, traditions and beliefs" [42].

In the work titled "Communication between cultures" by L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter and L. A. Stefani there are some more good definitions for the term culture: "Culture, the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artefacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving" [35].

1.2. Defining Syllabus, Teaching Materials and Textbooks

English language teaching has many important components. Among all those components the most essential elements for most of the EFL/ESL classrooms and programs are the syllabuses, the textbooks and instructional materials that are often used by language teachers. Hutchinson and Waters define syllabus as follows: "At its simplest level a syllabus can be described as a statement of what is to be learnt. It reflects language and linguistic performance" [17, p. 80].

If define it specifically: "A language syllabus is a teaching guideline of when and what material is to be given to the learners and how language learning is to be put in effect. Syllabi embody the general and specific objectives of the language teaching course, the short-term ones being contained in the long-term goal" [19].

Syllabus is an important component in language teaching programme. It can provide a solution to many of the problems of school education. Language teaching syllabus will achieve its goals only with the support of accordingly developed textbooks and instructional materials. Tomlinson defines materials as “anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language” [38, p. 66]. Among all types of language teaching materials, textbooks are seen as the essential element of the syllabus in most of the English language teaching programmes. Textbooks also provide syllabus for a program, thus supporting novice teachers, training them in methodology and saving their time and effort for more worthwhile pursuits than material production [10]. Nunan [30] explains role of materials in his way: “...materials, in fact, are an essential element within the curriculum, and do more than simply lubricate the wheels of learning. At their best they provide concrete models of desirable classroom practice, they act as curriculum models and at their very best they fulfil a teacher development role” [cit. by: 44, p. 63].

Designing a Syllabus defined as the process of selecting, organizing, executing, and evaluating learning experiences on the basis of the needs, abilities and interests of the learners and the nature of the society or community. To design a syllabus is to decide what gets taught and in what order [31]. Syllabus design can be defined as selection and organization of instructional content including suggested strategy for presenting content and evaluation [3].

1.3. Turkmen Culture

Turkmenistan is a country that has one of the oldest civilizations which has made a significant contribution to the development of the world culture. Historical sources prove that in the III–II millennium BC big states were established on this territory. Turkmen are well-known for their lavish hospitality, respect for seniors, honesty and sincere generosity. They treat a guest as the messenger of Allah. Hence, there is a proverb: “The guest is higher than father”. Friendship, neighbourhood and love are among the most important values for the Turkmen. It is said that “If your neighbour is happy, you will be happy too” [40]. Being people of word and honour, Turkmen had always fulfilled the obligations under treaties. “Any Turkmen if he gave his word, would break it in no way, even should it threaten his life and freedom”, wrote a traveller in the remote past with amazement and without envy [11].

2. Culture and English Language Textbooks

2.1. Interlink between Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is that they are like the two sides of the same coin – one cannot be taught without the other. Seelye (1984) argues that “the study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture” for language is the means through which all elements of culture are represented and carried out [28; cit. by: 45]. According to some scholars in teaching a language, it is crucial to teach the culture of its people since “one cannot learn to use a language without knowing the culture of the people who speak that language” [21, p. 63]. This view is not a recent one, since it had already been expressed by Politzer (1959), according to whom whether or not teachers want to teach a culture is not an option but a necessity: “...as language teachers we must be

interested in the study of culture (in the social scientist's sense of the word) not because we necessarily want to teach the culture of the other country but because we have to teach it. If we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning; for unless he is warned, unless he receives cultural instructions, he will associate American concepts or objects with the foreign symbols" [cit. by: 45].

Kramsch in her book *Context and Culture in language Teaching* states that "Culture is not an independent aspect of language learning or teaching, it is a feature of language, it is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners' proficiency when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them" [20, p. 1].

If language and culture are inseparable then a global language should be attached to global culture. It should not be associated with any one particular nation and culture. The researcher thinks that it is not compulsory to have English culture in English language textbooks.

2.2. Whose Culture should be taught in ELT classes?

The ideal answer to the question above is "as varied as the numerous English speakers around the world" [2, p. 60]. It is easier said than done. Some scholars were opposed to the idea of teaching culture through ELT classes. Following Smith's notion of an international language, Gonzalez (1995) claims that the teaching of an international language should not include culture since an international language should be 'de-nationalized'. "English is deracinated or uprooted from its original cultural soil; only special registers of science and technology, business and geopolitics are used" [cit. by: 45, p. 58]. Richards stresses that ELT should still include culture but not the culture of English-speaking countries. He argues: "English is no longer viewed as the property of the English-speaking world but is an international commodity... The cultural values of Britain and the US are often seen as irrelevant to language teaching, except in situation where the learner has a pragmatic need for such information. The language teacher need no longer be an expert on British and American culture and a literature specialist as well" [33, p. 7].

There are some other scholars – Widdowson (1994), Gupta [12], Jenkins [18], McKay [26] – who have expressed similar views [45]. There are some scholars who believe that a global language has no boundary of usage. Smith (1976) was one of the first scholars to define the term 'international language', noting that an '*international* language is one which is used by people of different nations to communicate with each other' [cit. by: 26, p. 11]. Further he makes several important assertions regarding the relationship of an international language and culture which provide educational basis for learning a global language. These assumptions are:

- a) its learners do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language;
- b) the ownership of an international language becomes 'de-nationalized';

c) the educational goal of learning it is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and culture to others [cit. by: 26, p.12].

McKay in her Ben Warren International Book Award winner book called *Teaching English as an International Language: Rethinking Goals and Approaches* suggests a modification of Smith's second assumption [26]. She claims that with regard to the use of English in the outer circle countries, the ownership of English should be re-nationalized rather than de-nationalized. This means that the use of English should be embedded in local contexts of use. McKay (2002) needs to revise Smith's (1983) notions related to the relationship between a global language and culture as follows:

1) as an international language, English is used both in a global sense for international communication between countries and in a local sense as a language of wider communication within multilingual societies;

2) as it is an international language, the use of English is no longer connected to the culture of the Inner Circle countries;

3) as an international language in a local sense, English becomes embedded in the culture of the country in which it is used;

4) as English is an international language in a global sense, one of its primary functions is to enable speakers to share with others their ideas and culture [26, p. 12].

2.3. The Role of learners' Culture in ELT textbooks and Materials

The use of local materials will lead to more successful language learning, as they will incorporate the cultural values of the students. It will make learning a foreign/second language more meaningful as there will be better cognitive development and avoidance of cultural alienation for the learners. It will also lead to more positive attitudes and higher motivational intensity to learn English. A recent study which was conducted in Pakistan is a good example for this. The study was conducted to look at the usefulness of local materials in comparison to foreign materials in English for intermediate students. Results based on questionnaires, interviews and on the spot observation revealed that a text on Pakistani culture (*Aik thi Nam* by Shaheed Nadeem) to teach language through drama was found to be more interesting and motivating than an English play (*The Dear Departed* by Stanley Houghton) [24]. Another example is from the researcher's own experience. The researcher compared the same type of exercise in two contexts: India and Turkmenistan (e.g. *postcard writing*). Indian students were more familiar with the situation compared to Turkmen students in Turkmenistan. This is a good example of benefits of learners' familiarity or in other words relevance of learners' culture in ELT textbooks and its benefits.

2.4. Goals of Teaching Culture in ELT classes

Tomalin & Stempleski [37, p. 7–8] modifying Seelye's (1988) 'seven goals of cultural instruction' in some aspects might be an advocate for the teaching of target culture:

1) to help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours;

2) to help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave;

3) to help students to become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture;

4) to help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language;

5) to help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence;

6) to help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture;

7) to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

There are some other aims for the teaching of culture. Cook argues that multi-competent speaker is an individual who "can stand between two viewpoints and between two cultures, a multi-competent speaker who can do more than any monolingual" and so "the point should be to equip people to use two languages without losing their own identity, not to manufacture ersatz native speakers" [6, p. 179].

Byram's intercultural communicative competence involves "Comprehension not only of how we understand others but also of how others perceive us. Speakers need to be aware that what they communicate is understood as a function of how others identify them and what perceptions of them their interlocutors bring to the interaction. They need to be aware of their own culture, of what they take for granted; of the culture relativity of what they hitherto believed was natural and normal" [4, p. 27].

Many scholars have suggested that the function of teaching the culture of a world language should be to enable learners to share their ideas and cultures [18; 20; 26]. This is especially true because of the strong connection between language and identity, since "Every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of how they are and how they relate to the social world. They are in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation" [29, p. 410].

Therefore it is important for users of English to claim ownership of the language, so they might consider themselves legitimate speakers of English [cit. by: 29]. One way of doing that is by contextualizing English within the users' own cultural norms [18].

2.5. Categories of Textbooks depending on their focus on cultural content

Cortazzi and Jin divide EFL textbooks into three large categories depending on their focus on culture.

1. Textbooks based on the source culture: the textbooks that are produced at a national level for a particular country. (Learners are taught how to talk about their own culture to visitors to their country rather than be prepared to encounter other cultures. Although such textbooks help students to become aware of their own cultural identity, they do not develop students' intercultural awareness.)

2. Textbooks based on the target culture: these textbooks usually focus on one or two target cultures (e.g., the United Kingdom, United States). (Though widely used all over the world, they are often criticised for their commercial nature and seen as publishers' promotional materials.)

3. Textbooks aimed at the international target culture: books that include a wide variety of cultures set in English speaking countries or in countries where English is not a first or a second language, but is used as an international language [7, p. 204–210].

2.6. Globalization, Culture and School Education

The role played by culture and cultural values in school education, especially in the language classes, is usually discussed. The process of globalization made us citizens of a global village. And this globalization brought a global language with it, which is English.

Regardless of where it exists on the planet, cultural values are necessary to the survival of the citizens of this global village. There should be interests of global humanity towards longer-term social and cultural values. Instead of injecting English culture through English Language textbooks, those books may help to acquire common cultural values for whole humanity. The goal of such textbooks should be establishing dialogue among civilizations, cultures, and faiths. It is simply to form, live and promote “Common Values” among mankind, such as love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, justice, peace, brotherhood, and freedom. These values are accepted by all humankind. If such textbooks are used at school level and children acquire all these values in that stage, even in multicultural populations, then, the researcher hopes, there will be no or at least less conflict among the societies. All the cultures will have common points: instead of clash, there will be alliance of civilizations. So, the language textbooks might play an important role in this mission. For any student, education and character are the basic foundations. Values, attitudes and behaviours in children should be installed right from childhood. Cultural beliefs and values should be enriched through good education system. English Language education can be an alternative programme, and so the tool can easily be a culturally friendly textbook.

2.7. Culturally friendly ELT textbooks and teaching materials

It is generally accepted that textbooks are the central materials in language teaching classes. They may be the teacher, the trainer, the authority, the resource, and the ideology in the foreign language classroom [7]. Such textbooks are produced massively for EFL and ESL purposes all over the world, and aim to meet the needs of language learners, so that they can function linguistically and culturally well in English communicative acts. There are textbooks which mirror the students' local cultures rather than the English-speaking cultures. For instance, an EFL textbook for Venezuela, *El Libro de inglés* (Núñez, 1988), has texts describing the local geographic features. Places outside Venezuela are also mentioned, but priority is given to the source culture [cit. by: 39].

Another example is *English for Saudi Arabia*, by Al-Quarishi, Watson, Hafseth, and Hickman (1999), in which almost every setting is situated in the source culture. Hinkel conveys the following comments on this textbook: “When the textbook characters greet one another, talk about professions, make Arabian coffee, or talk about going on a pilgrimage to Mecca, they are predominantly Saudi Arabians performing culturally-familiar activities in their own country with their own citizens (in English)” [7, p. 205]. Hinkel (1999) states that learners are encouraged to talk about their culture through the use of such materials, because then they become aware of their own cultural identity and it can enhance a language course [cit. by: 39]. Such courses are called content-based as they integrate particular content with language teaching aims. Lee and Van Pattern stated: “Culture as people, customs, and artefacts – is content and can be treated the same as any content in any course; teachers can use culture as content in the various kinds of activities that can be developed for communicative language teaching” [22, p. 5].

Textbooks will directly or indirectly communicate sets of cultural values. This is called ‘hidden curriculum’ [10; 16]. Many scholars claim that hidden curriculum is more effective than the official curriculum. Risager states that “FLT textbooks no longer just develop concurrently with the development of foreign language pedagogy in a narrow sense, but they increasingly participate in the general cultural transmission with the educational system and in the rest of society” [cit. by: 10, p. 90].

2.8. Content Analysis of the Cultural Content in contemporary EFL Textbooks

Textbook analysis is the systematic analysis of the text materials including the structure, the focus, and special learning assists. This part aims to evaluate and analyze the Turkmen high school “English” textbooks’ content from the view of cultural content.

Textbook is the effective instrument for the educational practice and it can reflect values and senses for individuals and nations [15, p. 135]. Among all the thorough lists of criteria for textbook evaluation, Byram’s checklist focuses on cultural content [5, p. 10]. It is more comprehensive and practical. It covers many aspects of the culture from the spirit to the material infrastructure. So the researcher examined the cultural content in textbooks by adopting Byram’s checklist (from 1 to 8) and adding some more guidelines tried to collect, analyze and evaluate the data of the cultural content in the chosen textbooks [5].

3. Importance of the study

Teaching culture in EFL classrooms improves communication and makes teaching more authentic. The culturally friendly ELT Syllabus and teaching materials help in promoting a greater awareness, understanding and enriching their local and universally accepted cultural and moral knowledge and also it increases the motivation of the students to learn English effectively.

4. Purpose of the study

This paper aims at researching the role of culture, the use of culture in ELT materials especially in textbooks. The purpose of this study is mainly to integrate and promote cultural and moral values in ELT materials and textbooks, a contribution to the global peace.

5. Questions of the study

More specifically, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the attitude of Turkmen students towards the cultural and moral elements in EL textbooks?
2. What do the Turkmen students need as cultural and moral elements in their EL textbooks?
3. How can the suitable culturally friendly ELT materials be selected for Turkmen students?
4. How can social and universally accepted cultural and moral values be incorporated into the new ELT syllabus and materials?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural content?

6. Methods of the study

Mixed-method approach was selected as the methodology of this study. Mixed methods research may be defined as “the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research” [9, p. 212].

Mixed-method approach enables the researchers to draw on all possibilities [36] and provides a broader perspective to the study as the qualitative data helps describe aspects the quantitative data cannot address [cit. by: 32]. A mixed-methods approach to research is one that involves gathering both numeric information (e.g., on instruments) as well as text information (e.g., on interviews) so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information [cit. by: 23]. Using both forms of data allows researchers to simultaneously generalize results from a sample to a population and to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

In this study, the mixed methodology helped to explain the Turkmen EFL situation. A survey questionnaire was designed to understand the students’ and teachers’ point of view about cultural content. The third section of the questionnaire is on the implementation of cultural and moral values. The questionnaire was completed by 20 EFL teachers, 30 secondary school graduates and 100 high school students at different educational institutions in Turkmenistan. The questionnaire was administered to the students with the help of their teachers. Also, an interview conducted with 10 ELT experts.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the theoretical and research literatures related to culture learning in language education programs. Clearly, by discussing the relationship between language culture and its role in ELT textbooks, the researcher tried to

point out the need and benefits of learners' own culture in ELT textbooks. He also argued that identifying, comparing, understanding, and learning of one's own culture is both important and necessary. Students' native culture can be effectively integrated into the English language curriculum instead of channelling only Western (UK or US) culture. The use of Turkmen culture not only provides content that students are already familiar with, but also a means to develop language skills while communicating. The direct and indirect introduction of culture in English textbooks could certainly make cultural learning and teaching manageable for both teachers and students. Textbooks must be suitable to students and not be at loggerheads. Borrowing ideas from elsewhere may be good but the roots of learning should be based in the local environment. Culturally friendly textbooks and materials are needed for teaching of cultural values and language in a proper way. Therefore, a preferable way of introducing culture is integrating and presenting it through texts and language classes where the cultural values are highlighted. Teaching of culture should not be ignored or left to unconscious processes, so that the teacher plays a key role in culture teaching and learning in EFL classrooms. Course materials effectively used and carefully planned by teachers are important considerations towards the effective integration of culture into a content-based curriculum. The researcher strongly recommends starting projects on culturally assimilated ELT. There is a hope that Learners' Culturally Friendly ELT textbooks in Turkmenistan will overcome the task of learning and teaching of English language in an easy way.

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СЕМАНТИКО-ИЕРОГЛИФИЧЕСКИЕ МОДЕЛИ ИМЕН СУЩЕСТВИТЕЛЬНЫХ-ЗООНИМОВ В КИТАЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

В статье проводится анализ двух типов моделей языкового знака китайского языка, семантическая модель лексического значения, с одной стороны, и иероглифическая модель, с другой. Выявляется состав подсистемы семантических компонентов, определяется частотность составляющих разные модели конститuentов, устанавливаются общие и специфические характеристики анализируемых моделей на материале имен существительных-зоонимов китайского языка.

Лексическое значение слова, несмотря на многолетнюю историю исследований, до сих пор остается в центре внимания ученых [1; 2; 3]. В последнее время анализ составляющих элементов значения приобретает особую значимость. Обращение к семантическим компонентам значения лексических единиц в активно развивающейся когнитивной лингвистике позволяет с помощью языковых данных приблизиться к решению одной из фундаментальных задач науки – раскрыть природу механизмов нашей познавательной деятельности и определить роль языка в общем когнитивном устройстве человека. Если для языков с иероглифическим письмом лексическое значение представляет собой единственный источник выявления семантических