

## *The intricacies of the representation of the local and target cultures in language teaching*

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### **ABSTRACT**

It can be argued that the English Language Teaching (ELT) content produced locally in Pakistan is heavily influenced by religious and nationalistic concepts tending to overlook the target culture of the English language as well as the culture of the minorities dwelling in Pakistan. Recently, the polarization in the Pakistani society has intensified and religious intolerance is on the rise. Therefore, the objective of this study is to find out the extent to which the content of the textbooks produced in Pakistan plays a role – if any – in the prevalent polarization and intolerance in the Pakistani society. This study explores this phenomenon by analyzing the content of an ELT textbook published in Sindh, Pakistan. It relies on interpretive content analysis coupled with relevance sampling. The research design is composed of three linear steps that include identifying pertinent texts, interpretive content analysis, and finally, inferring the answers to the research question backed up by textual evidence. Relevance sampling helped choose the sample texts pertinent to this study based on the cultural, religious, and nationalistic notions that the texts touched upon. Data were gathered by meticulously reading the sample texts that were rich in vocabulary and historical discourse related to nationalism and religion. The findings reveal that the content of the ELT textbook does not present the learners with any target culture-focused content. It is also noticed that there is a strict focus on religious and nationalistic concepts while the cultures of certain religious minorities and sects do not find any place in the content. The two main identified overarching themes are religiosity and nationalism.

*Keywords:* course books, English Language Teaching, local culture, target culture, textbooks

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study aims to explore the representation of culture in a locally produced, Year 9 English Language Teaching (ELT) course book in Pakistan. The education system of Pakistan is a highly polarized one with mainly two sub-systems: the public sector and the private sector. According to Mahboob (2017), more than 70% of the private schools in Pakistan have English as their medium of instructions (MoI) while on the other hand, most public schools are primarily bilingual with Urdu and other regional languages dominating the conversation in classrooms. This linguistic and academic divide has also been reported by Garcia (2016). Mahboob (2009) also argues that the curriculum content in Pakistan focuses more on the dominant local cultures while minority and global cultures are neglected. Additionally, Coombe & Raza (2022) reported that English has become a major factor in employment in Pakistan. The students of the public sector then, as a result of this divided education system, have limited English proficiency and understanding of the culture of the English-speaking countries which limits their socio-economic progress as English writing skills – at the very least – are considered a must by employers (Coombe & Raza, 2022). This

can generate resentment in them as they feel disadvantaged. Therefore, the impact of this division can be seen on the general society as well in which the learners from both the education sub-systems co-exist and interact eventually. What remains to be unpacked further is the extent of the role of the content in this division, and if there are any remedial steps that can be taken.

Based on this observation, this study analyzes the content of the aforementioned textbook in order to evaluate the extent to which the local and target cultures are represented in the content of the chosen textbook along with the way in which those cultures are presented to the learners.

### **General representation of culture in ELT textbooks**

It is hard to argue that globally, learners learn English for a variety of reasons ranging from their jobs to their socio-economic status as well as general acceptance in various fraternities and communities. No matter what their reason is, however, the one thing that remains constant in their language-learning journey is the significance of the role of their English language course books. As Hurst (2014) argues, the tool that is used the most in any language teaching or learning process is a course book. Hurst (2014) further gives emphasis to the fact that language and culture are inseparable, and an English language course book is no exception as it presents explicit and implicit cultural content to the learners. According to Kramsch (2004), language not only expresses, but also creates collective thoughts of a social group; resultantly, this process engenders norms and ways specific to that group, and eventually constitute the culture(s) prevalent in any given society. In other words, culture is embedded in all aspects of language, and sidelining culture will limit the communicative competence of language learners. At this juncture then, with the intertwined nature of language and culture well-established, the two main issues that arise are (1) how should we define culture and (2) how the teaching of culture is integrated into the language teaching-learning processes? (Thanasoulas, 2001).

Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) proposed a model of communicative competence that advocates the importance of the socio-cultural competence of the learners. The definition of culture that Celce-Murcia (2007) proposes breaks it down into several individual components, such as literature and arts integral to the target culture, basic knowledge of history and geography, social structure (family, gender roles, marriage etc.), political and educational systems and religion and important customs. Bearing this definition in mind, it is quite easy to see how important this kind of cultural knowledge is for language learners across the globe. Hurst (2014:50), drawing on Bourdieu's work, defines 'cultural capital' as, amongst other things, 'ways of behaving or communicating effectively' and argues that enhanced cultural capital may change the learners' perspectives and prospects in life.

As for the teaching of culture, English Language Teaching (ELT) course books bring geographically distant cultures close to language learners, and while doing so, challenge the boundaries of the local cultures and identities of the language learners; however, they fail to create a new global alternative culture for the learners (Hurst, 2014). The other challenge is that the cultural content presented to the learners is produced in a completely unfamiliar context and the learners struggle to relate to it (Hurst, 2014). Mishan (2021) also underscores the fact that a vast majority of ELT course books portray British English as the dominant

variety of English – as ‘real’ English – along with the British cultural elements making the content somewhat irrelevant to the language learners across the globe. This culture-focused approach is evident in some of the locally produced ELT textbooks in Pakistan too. The main difference is that rather than the British culture, the ELT content in the public sector aims to inculcate ‘Islamic values’ and ‘awareness regarding certain ideological concepts’ (Mahboob, 2009:175). This has been unpacked in more detail in the next subsection.

Disputing this approach, Hurst (2008) argues that ELT course books should act as a bridge between the learners’ world and the world of English, but they are hardly ever neutral in terms of the cultural content that they present. A similar study conducted by Dahmardeh & Kim (2020) in the Iranian context also found that there was a clear imbalance in the representation of culture in some of the locally produced English language course books when according to Hatoss (2004), course books are supposed to promote biculturalism and intercultural sensitivity.

Bringing this sub-section to a close, some of the key points or problematic issues that we can extract from the discourse above could be ‘changing the learners’ prospects and perspectives based on their cultural capital’, the ‘representation of the British cultural elements in the global curriculum’ and the general need for ‘neutrality, biculturalism, and inter-cultural sensitivity’ in ELT curriculum. In the next sub-section, I will explore these elements in the context of Pakistan language education.

### **English and its culture in the context of Pakistan**

Generally speaking, the native English-speaking countries are considered the inner circle, the countries where English is spoken as a second or official language (ESL), are considered the outer circle, and the countries where English is considered a foreign language (EFL), are considered the expanding circle (Kachru, 1998). Since English is considered a second or an official language in Pakistan, keeping the notion of ‘World Englishes’ (WE) in mind, Pakistan can be placed in the outer circle (Kachru, 1998). According to Fang and Haidar (2019), various countries in the outer circle consider English a threat not only to the local languages but also to certain ideological and political beliefs. Pakistan is no exception (Coombe & Raza, 2022).

However, before exploring ELT in Pakistan in depth, it is important to get a brief overview of the fuzzy language-education scenario of Pakistan. Officially, Pakistan seems to advocate linguistic uniformity by declaring one language – Urdu – the national language of Pakistan when it is spoken by only 8% of the population while there are almost 60 other languages that are spoken across the country (Fang and Haidar, 2019). A highly multilingual country does not embrace multilingualism fully, and that is highly problematic. Also, although curriculum development and textbook approval are the responsibilities of the federal government, textbook development and assessment have traditionally been done by the provincial governments; recently, a third-tier authority – the District Education Department – has also been added to the mix (Shamim, 2008). Needless to say, this unnecessary distribution of authorities and various authoritative bodies leads to a great deal of confusion

in all aspects of language education including teaching English and its curriculum development.

Speaking solely of ELT, after gaining independence from the British in 1947, Pakistan adopted the colonial language ideology which rendered English the dominant status that it has in Pakistan today (Fang and Haidar, 2019). According to the official language policy, Urdu was supposed to replace English as the official language of Pakistan (Rahman, 1998). However, that did not happen. This led to a division in the Pakistani society. The elite class accepted English, Western values, and its culture as their own while the other lower social classes continued to see it as a threat to not only the vernacular languages but also to their values and culture (Rahman, 2005). This was the result of the two streams of education systems that the British had started in the pre-partition sub-continent: the English-medium system and the vernacular-medium system (Shamim, 2008). From a political viewpoint, this division served the British well at that time (Ramanathan, 2005).

This dichotomy is still evident in the Pakistani language education context. Loosely stating, in modern Pakistan, we can see two dominant education systems: the locally produced curriculum-based public sector and the globally produced curriculum-based private sector. The private sector not only reaps the benefits of the advanced, research-based globally produced ELT content, but it also has more efficient teachers who are not only better trained pedagogically, but also have a much better understanding of the local as well as the target cultures. In the public sector though, the learners rely on the locally produced ELT curriculum, and their teachers are also not very proficient in English or its target culture. Their understanding of the local culture, however, is quite strong as they are mostly themselves from the local townships and villages.

This dichotomy does not end here. It continues to impact the products of these two highly polarized education sub-systems – the learners – even after they finish their education and progress into their practical lives. As discussed earlier, the learners from the private sector end up in large conglomerates and multinational firms due to their superior linguistic and intercultural skills as most of these companies have natives from English-speaking countries working at high positions. Similarly, when learners from Pakistan move to English-speaking countries, the learners from the private sector seamlessly integrate into English-speaking societies as opposed to those learners who are from the public sector. This effortless integration can also be attributed – at least in part – to the private sector students' superior knowledge and understanding of the culture of the English-speaking societies. As Mahboob (2009) highlights this distinction between the curriculums/curricula of both sectors, the local textbooks in the public sector only include religious topics on the Holy Prophet and Islamic traditions such as Hajj. The 'Islamization' of English is also evident in the fact that certain Arabic phrases and words are integrated into reading passages consistently (Mahboob, 2009: 182).

Based on the discussion above on the dichotomous education system and the general importance and the intertwined nature of culture and language-teaching coupled with its impact on the language-learners of Pakistan and eventually the society as a whole, it becomes essential to explore the role of culture in the locally produced ELT curriculum of Pakistan.

As hinted at in the introduction, the question that can be raised at this juncture is:

- *How are the local and target cultures represented in the locally produced ELT curriculum in Pakistan?*
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## **The Textbook**

### **Why this particular textbook?**

The textbook that I have chosen to analyze is the *Secondary Stage English, Book One* for Year 9. It has been published by the Sindh Textbook Board. I have appended the hyperlink to the e-book to this study under Appendix A.

In the Pakistani public-sector education system, the significance of Year 9 is quite high as this is the year in which the learners take their Sindh board exams for the very first time. This is the year in which the public-sector students of the entire province study the same textbook and prepare for the exact same exam which is held approximately at the same time across the province. Before that, from Year 1 to Year 8, all the schools in the province have the liberty to choose from various approved textbooks to teach their students. The schools are also responsible for examinations and assessments. However, as aforementioned, Year 9 changes all that as the provincial board takes control of the textbooks and assessments.

Generally, the age range of the learners for this book is 14 to 16. It is quite hard to predict their accurate English proficiency level as this book is taught in the urban as well as the rural parts of Sindh. The English proficiency level of the students of the urban parts of the province is generally higher than those dwelling in the rural parts of the province. Tentatively, since the book does not specify the targeted proficiency level, based on observation and experience, the English proficiency level of the learners, presumably, is between true starters and lower-intermediate, depending on their location. This textbook can be considered the first book of a short, two-book series of *Secondary Stage English*. The second book of the series, *Secondary Stage English, Book Two* is taught in Year 10.

The rationale behind choosing this book is its importance for the learners. First, it is an important milestone because this textbook prepares them for their first ever board examination. Second, it is the start of their journey towards professional education as their grades in years 9 and 10 determine the intermediate college that they go to which is critical to their progress towards universities for further professional education.

### **The structure of the lessons**

There are eight units in the textbook altogether. Each unit comprises six sub-units/components: reading comprehension, listening & speaking, language practice, writing, study skills, and fun.

The reading comprehension section presents new language to the learners in the form of a reading passage followed by multiple-choice questions and true-false type exercises. In the listening & speaking sections, students are once more presented with new language items and are then asked to either practice the given dialogue/statements or prepare their own short

presentations on various topics. The language practice section is dedicated to explicit grammar teaching. The writing sections are mostly about teaching essay, letter and email writing, or paraphrasing and summarizing the given poems or prose. The study-skills sections focus on learning additional skills such as editing, making presentations et cetera. Lastly, the fun sections simply give the learners an opportunity to have fun with the language and be a little creative with it by doing various activities. There is no assessment whatsoever for the study skills and fun sections.

There are no separate teacher manuals with the textbook. The instructions for the teachers are mentioned at the bottom of those pages where all the activities are given.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The ensuing paragraphs elucidate the sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures that form the research design of this study. Since the study aims to investigate the representation of the local and target cultures in the ELT curriculum of the public-sector of Pakistan, content analysis was performed followed by relevance sampling. The collected data was then analyzed using Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework.

### **Sampling & Data Collection**

This study relies on content analysis. According to Cohen *et al.* (2018), content analysis is a reliable and objective method in educational research. Following the chosen research design, the text was first *unitized* by drawing systematic distinctions in order to omit irrelevant texts and keep those units of the text that were required for the analysis. This was achieved by adopting 'relevance sampling'. According to Krippendorff (2019), relevance sampling is appropriate for content analysis as it allows the researcher to choose the relevant texts that assist in answering the research question(s). Therefore, those chapters/topics in the book whose titles or text contain words that connote a discussion on sociocultural, socio-religious, or nationalistic topics such as rights, ethics, character-building, self-respect, and respect for others, civic sense, equity, national pride et cetera, have been chosen for analysis while the rest were excluded. This exclusion criterion has been applied to every piece of text that was analyzed for this study. These data were gathered via multiple careful readings of the texts.

### **Sample Size**

After applying the above-mentioned sampling techniques, seven chapters out of the eight presented in the chosen textbook were selected for data collection and analysis based on the content, topics, vocabulary, texts, and pictures that they had.



## **Data Analysis**

The content of the textbook has been divided into four categories that I will now elaborate on one by one in the ensuing sub-sections: reading passages, instructions for various activities, local culture-focused vocabulary, and visuals/pictures/illustrations.

### **Topical and thematic analysis of the reading passages**

The reading passages have been analyzed according to the themes and topics that they touch upon. The number of passages that discuss cultural elements – local or target – are counted and analyzed in the light of the content that they present to the learners.

### **Instructions for various activities**

It was noted that the learners' creative control over their answers to certain questions was circumscribed to particular cultural contexts through specific instructions. Such instances were also counted and analyzed in light of the apparent implied cultural restrictions.

### **Local culture-focused vocabulary**

Culture-specific vocabulary used in various exercises has been focused on and analyzed. The lexicon/diction that the learners are made to practice has been presented to them in certain particular cultural contexts. It would have been impractical to count each and every word. Therefore, all thematically significant instances that stand out have been analyzed.

### **Visuals/pictures/illustrations**

Last, the visuals – although there are not too many – in the textbook have also been taken into account. The pictures have been counted and the pictorial content for some has been analyzed on the basis of the cultural elements that they depict.

## **The Data Analysis Framework**

The framework that Cortazzi and Jin (1999) presented has been selectively implemented in this study. I say selectively because Cortazzi and Jin (1999) proposed a detailed checklist or various critical lenses to evaluate textbooks such as social identity, social interaction, belief and behavior, sociopolitical institutions, national history, geography, stereotypes, and national identity. The main foci for this study, however, have been the lenses of social and national identity, national history, stereotypes beliefs and behavior.

Culture has been divided into two categories: local/native culture and the target culture. For this study, the culture(s) practiced in Pakistan is considered the local culture whereas the culture of the inner circle countries (Kachru, 1998) or the native English-speaking countries is considered the target culture.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

### Topical and thematic analysis of the reading passages

The very first unit of the book, Unit 1, titled *Character Building*, starts with a reading passage on the last sermon of the Holy Prophet. The last sermon holds a great deal of significance in Islam as according to most scholars, the message and the teachings of Islam culminated in this sermon. The reading passage sets the tone for the reading comprehension exercises too as they are also in line with the cultural and religious themes presented in the passage. It is noteworthy that ‘character building’ is presented to the learners in a local religious and cultural context.

A similar theme continues in the following unit, Unit 2, which is titled *Role Model*. Right at the outset, following the standard structure of the lessons as explained earlier, there is a reading passage. This reading passage is on a very famous local mystic/spiritual poet, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai. Special emphasis is put on the fact that his literary and intellectual work was all about religion and the culture of Sindh; it is also highlighted that his devotion to religion garnered him a great deal of respect and a very high number of followers and devotees. The notion of a ‘role model’ is once more presented to the learners in the contexts of religion and local culture.

Unit 3 of the book titled *Education and Careers* starts off with a reading passage full of some local village imagery. It brings to attention some common local cultural practices and gender roles such as women working in the kitchen and serving food to men or young men being preferred over young women when it comes to higher/professional education. There is a religious reference as well when one of the characters in the story alludes to one of the Holy Prophet’s sayings that specifically instructs to give equal rights to men and women.

The reading comprehension passage for Unit 4, *Pakistan and National Pride*, is titled *The Great Visionaries*. There are lots of historical references in this passage as the discussion primarily revolves around the two main Muslim leaders who led the independence movement for Pakistan before 1947: Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Dr Muhammad Iqbal. Although there are references to Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s speeches in which he advocated and encouraged tolerance and equality for the people of all faiths and belief sets, his greatness and leadership qualities are once more situated in a cultural/religious and political context by highlighting the fact that he got an independent nation for the people of a specific faith.

The title of Unit 6 is *Gender Equity*. The reading passage in this unit discusses the role of women in the creation and progress of Pakistan. There are once more historical and political references in this passage as it discusses the lives, struggles and contributions of some of the women that played an important role in the independence movement for Pakistan. The

passage also discusses a couple of local women from the modern era who made a name for themselves in the fields of education and social and welfare work.

The reading passage in Unit 8, *People and Places*, as the title suggests, is all about how people live and move around the country in Pakistan. The reading passage does not refer



to any political, religious, or historical events, but strongly portrays the local culture in terms of the differences between the lives of those who live in villages and the city-dwellers. It also highlights and compares some of the common behaviors that can be witnessed in villages and in those who live in the metropolitan cities of Pakistan.

### Local culture-focused instructions for various activities

Exercise 8 in Unit 1.1 could be an example of subtly implying the veracity of a particular culture/religion. The task for the students is to orally discuss a few topics and prepare a chart. Some of the topics from the book are:

- *The principles that the Holy Prophet followed after migration to Madina so that Muslims and non-Muslims could live in peace and harmony.*
- *At least five teachings, as described in the last sermon of the Holy Prophet that we should practice in our daily life in order to strengthen our society.*
- *Some of the bad practices that we have adopted, which are against the teachings of the last sermon of the Holy Prophet, and how these are affecting our society.*

Pakistan is not a country with a hundred percent Muslim population. Students of other faiths also study at the same schools where Muslim children go to study. The topics mentioned above may not always align with the faith, culture or beliefs of non-Muslim students.

A similar example could be Exercise 8 in Unit 4.1. It is a form-focused task in which the learners have to orally complete a few sentences by adding the appropriate conjunction before providing their reasons. An example from the book is:

- *Jinnah's achievement is unparalleled in recent history because unlike most other leaders who only freed their countries from foreign rule, he not only got freedom but also managed to create a new state for the Muslims.*

Once more, it is the local culture/religion and a certain historical perspective that is presented to the learners in the form of such cognitively and creatively restrictive examples. If there are such students who hold a different view, then there is no choice left for them but to conform to the views of the majority.

Moving on to written tasks, Exercise 2 in Unit 1.4 asks the students to write a descriptive essay. Once more, the choices that have been provided to the students – most of them at least – limit the students to their local context. The topics given in the book are:

- *My village/town/city*
- *A historical place*
- *A scenic place*
- *School playground*

There is no option for the students to think outside the context of the local culture unless a teacher specifically chooses to change or alter the above-mentioned topics or gives them the option to come up with a topic of their choice.

Another example of a free-speaking activity could be Exercise 1 in Unit 7.2. The students are given ten options to choose from. None of them focus on the target culture. However, August 14, the independence day of Pakistan, happens to be one of the given topics.

### Local culture-focused vocabulary

There is a lot of religion and nationalism-focused vocabulary that has been presented to the learners in various exercises following the reading passages. For example, the word ‘piety’ has been used for those individuals who are good Muslims. The word ‘obligatory’ has been presented in the context of the mandatory prayers that Muslims have to perform five times every day. Similarly, words and expressions like ‘supplication’ and ‘omnipotence of God’ have also been presented to the learners in an Islamic context.

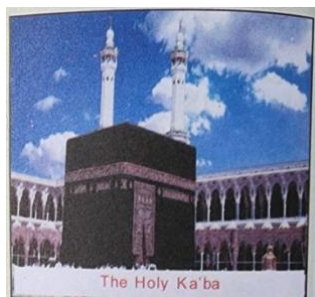
There are also words like ‘charpoy’, ‘*otaq*’ and ‘*bhit*’ representing certain objects and places specific to the local culture. ‘Charpoy’ is a special kind of bed found in the villages of Pakistan, ‘*otaq*’ is a place where the men of the villages gather in the evenings to discuss various things, and ‘*bhit*’ is a mound of sand.

Nationalistic slogans promoting patriotism are also found in the book. For example, ‘Pakistan *zindabad*’, the literal translation of which would be ‘long live Pakistan’. Lastly, all the names of the characters used in the reading passages as well as the exercises have been taken from the local society. Some examples could be ‘*Saira*’, ‘*Adnan*’, ‘*Tariq*’, et cetera – such names are commonly found in Pakistani society.

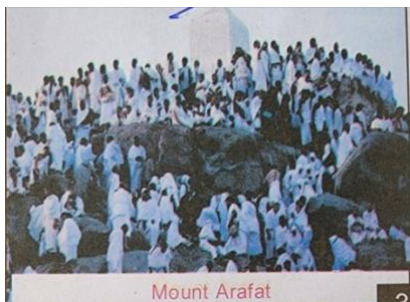
### Visuals/pictures/illustrations

Like vocabulary, the pictures in the book can also be loosely categorized into the same three classes: religion-focused, nationalism-focused and the pictures that depict the locations and objects found in Pakistan. It is interesting to note that the number of pictures in the book is a lot less than what one would normally expect in an ELT textbook.

For example, there are pictures of the Holy *Ka’aba* and Mount Arafat – as shown in **Figures 1 & 2** – which are two renowned religious locations for Muslims in Saudi Arabia. There is also a picture – **Figure 3** – showing a young girl whose head is covered and she is praying holding a ‘*tasbeeh*’ – a string of beads – in one of her hands.



**Figure 1.** Holy *Ka’aba*



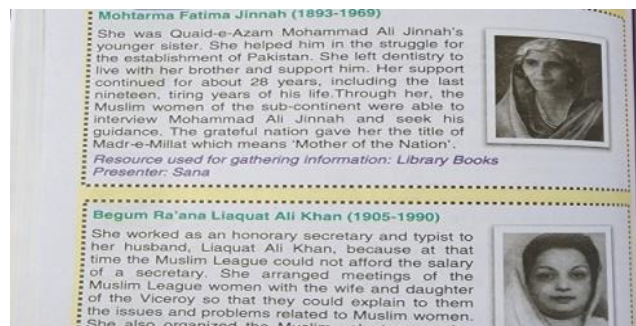
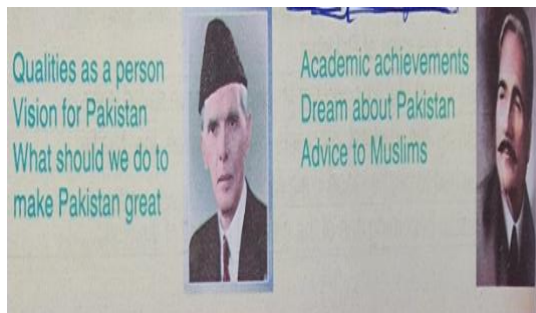
**Figure 2.** Mount Arafat



**Figure 3.** A girl praying with a scarf on

The only real people – men and women both – whose pictures are present in the book, are those who either took part in the independence movement for Pakistan or some famous women working in the fields of education and social work. All women are dressed in ‘*shalwar qamiz*’ – the most popular local outfit for women. This can be seen below in **Figures 4 & 5**.

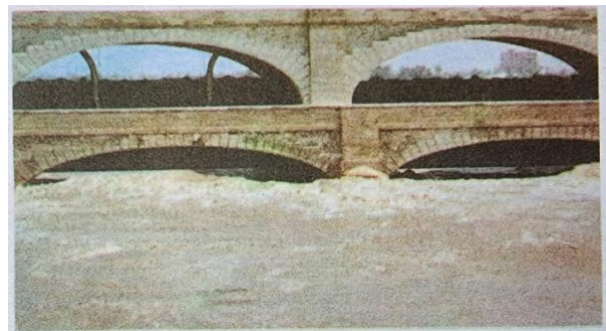
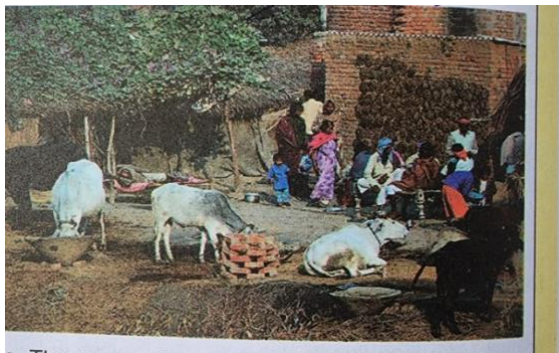
It is interesting to note that only their faces are shown. It is hard to predict if this is because of any designing or printing constraints or because of the local religious and cultural norms that discourage



**Figure 4. Muhammad Ali Jinnah & Dr Iqbal** **Figure 5. Fatima Jinnah & Begum Liaquat Ali Khan**

show the bodies of women. An educated guess would be that this is due to design constraints as the pictures of men also only show their faces and upper bodies.

The last set of pictures – **Figures 6 & 7** – is that which shows some local villages with a few villagers sitting in front of huts and shacks made up of red baked bricks, straw, and clay with some domestic animals tied to the trees around them. There is another one that shows a local dam rising above the river that it is built on.



**Figure 6. A local village**

**Figure 7. A local dam**

There are no pictures in the book that show any locations, traditions or objects from the target-culture countries.

### The target culture in the content of the book

There is very little content related to the target culture in the book – almost none. Perhaps, the closest that the content comes to referring to the target culture – and that too extremely vaguely – is in Exercise 2 in Unit 6.4 when the story of Helen Keller, an American woman who lost her ability to see and hear as a child, and yet, learned how to read and eventually graduated from Harvard, is presented to the learners. This too, is just an inspirational story from the target-culture society. There is no mention of any specific target cultural elements. **Table 1** below quantifies the number of instances where the local and target cultures are touched upon.

**Table 1: A tabular depiction of the number of instances where the content touches upon the local and target cultures**

	Category	Local culture (Number of instances/passages)	Target culture (Number of instances/passages)	Analysis of each instance/occurrence
1.	<i>Topical and thematic analysis of the reading passages</i>	6 reading passages	0 reading passages	Has been done textually in the findings and discussion sections.
2.	<i>Local culture-focused instructions for various activities</i>	4 exercises	0 exercises	-Ditto-
3.	<i>Local culture-focused vocabulary</i>	Various words, local concepts and names	0 words	-Ditto-
4.	<i>Visuals/pictures/illustrations</i>	9 pictures	0 pictures	-Ditto-

### DISCUSSION

Based on the results/findings of this study, the content of the textbook for Year 9 for the public-sector students of Sindh does not present the students with any target culture information or knowledge. On the other hand, the local cultural elements are found in abundance in the content of the book. However, it can also be seen that the cultures of the religious minorities and smaller sects of Islam in Pakistan do not have any representation in the content of the textbook either. Overall, we can divide the presented local cultural content into three categories: religion-focused content, nationalism-focused content, and the content that discusses the general indigenous culture-based elements such as the local traditions, places, and general ways of life.

In addition to that, there are instances where the textbook content touches upon the various roles that women play in Pakistani society and some of the challenges that they are faced with. I will now unpack these themes one-by-one in the following sub-sections.



## Religion-focused content

The religion-focused content seems to follow the Islamic theme which is the most widely practiced religion in Pakistan. The content does not directly preach the concepts of Islam. However, it subtly nudges the learners in a certain direction by suggesting that by following the teachings of Islam, they can build their character the best. The following excerpt from the textbook sheds light on this:

*The messages conveyed in this sermon are for all times. If Muslims follow these messages, the result will be a fair and equitable society, in which there will be honesty and justice, and meritocracy will be the guiding principle.*

This particular finding is in line with the study that Khokhar & Muhammad (2022) conducted, in which they also found out that the content of the textbooks in Pakistan had an ideological intent. Gulab & Khokhar (2018) also argued that textbooks in Pakistan give more space to the content that is related to Islam.

This particular aspect can be problematized in multiple ways: such religion-focused content can conflict with the views of those learners who have a different religious background. Willingly or unwillingly, they have to study the same material and complete the exercises or write their answers in a certain way that conforms to the religious notions presented in the content. Secondly, this could potentially leave little room for critical thinking as the students are expected to provide certain kinds of answers that are pre-determined by the course content and their teachers.

There are two ways this particular issue can be addressed: either by producing religion-neutral content or introducing some target culture-focused content in order to offset the heavily-tilted balance in favour of the local culture-focused content. Introducing religion-neutral content in the public sector – as efficient as it may sound – may not be a practical solution in Pakistan as it is an Islamic state with tentatively 96% of the population following the Muslim faith. However, at least making an attempt to bring some balance by exposing the learners to the target cultural elements as well can only improve their overall communicative competence. For starters, a practical approach could be to analyze the curriculum implemented in the private sector, and borrow those target cultural elements/concepts that do not conflict with the religious or cultural belief-sets of the local populace.

Setting the pedagogical and target-culture aspects aside, it is also critical to touch upon the lack of representation of the minority cultures in the content of the textbook as it certainly has its social implications. According to Khokhar & Muhammad (2022), little space is given to the content related to religious minorities in Pakistan. This discrimination, however, is not limited to other religions only as the followers of certain sects of Islam too – such as the Shia/Shiite Muslims – are also discriminated against (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2020). This lack of a fair and equal representation of all cultures can and has resulted in violent crimes such as the extra-judicial lynching of the people of other faiths in Pakistan. It will be harsh to blame the content of the textbooks solely for such heinous acts of crimes, but at the same time, it will be inappropriate to assume that there is no role of such content in shaping the extreme views of the young minds that are exposed to it on a daily basis. Tentatively, a couple of years ago, a Sri Lankan citizen was lynched to death in one of the cities of Pakistan

when the mob falsely accused him of blasphemy. The link to the news report to that incident is appended to this study under Appendix B.

### **Nationalism-focused content**

The nationalism-focused content of the book, needless to say, follows the themes of nation-building and the history of the Muslims of the sub-continent and their leaders who fought for freedom against the British and the Hindus of the pre-partition United India. There is a political aspect to such content. Pakistan and India have had a long-standing and blood-stained rivalry for decades. According to Khokhar & Muhammad (2022), the multiple wars that Pakistan and India have had, have a major impact on the content of textbooks in Pakistan. The fact that Pakistan has mainly been ruled either by the religious right-leaning political parties or the army itself also plays its part when it comes to having nationalism-focused content in textbooks (Khokhar & Muhammad, 2022). Religion once again comes to the forefront as the entire struggle of the All India Muslim League to get a separate homeland for sub-continental Muslims is situated in an Islamic context in the textbooks (Giunchi, 2007).

Promoting this particular facet of history adds fuel to the fire as the achievements of Muslims, and the negative role – according to the presented history in the textbooks – that the Hindus of that time played in the independence movement are accentuated. Here is an excerpt from Unit 4.1:

*Initially, the Quaid-e-Azam was a strong proponent of Hindu-Muslim unity and an active member of the Indian National Congress. But, as an outstanding political leader, he very soon sensed that the Indian National Congress was leading the Hindus of the sub-continent towards Hindu-Muslim polarization. This, he realized, would result in political and economic victimization of the Muslims in the region. Therefore, he decide to leave the Congress and join the Muslim League ... This was despite strong opposition from the two big power players in British India; the ruling British and the majority Hindus.*

Such content automatically subtly associates the national identity of Pakistanis with those who are of the Muslim faith, and disassociates all other religious identities from the national identity. There are around 4.4 million Hindus in Pakistan who study the same content. This not only is not aligned with the views that they hold, but again creates a massive divide on a societal level by subtly creating the image of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ in the minds of the young learners which has long-lasting and profound implications as discussed above.

Once more, a simple and effective solution potentially could be to introduce nationalism-neutral content. If that is not possible due to political reasons, then at least the contribution of the people of other faiths and cultures should also be highlighted in the textbook content. Also, according to Kalin & Siddiqui (2020), nationalism can also have a positive impact if a single national identity is promoted across the board rather than having isolated and ostracized factions in the society struggling to protect and maintain their discrete identities. We get to see this in various Western countries where a single dominant national identity is promoted by the state, but not at the cost of taking away the unique identities that various communities of the society cherish and like to maintain. For example, it is quite



common in the US for a person of an African descent to be known as an African-American. Another example could be the Pakistani community in New Zealand in which being called a 'Pakistani-Kiwi' is fast becoming a norm and the country in general not only accepts that identity, but also encourages people to have a strong bond with their cultural and religious roots while adopting their new national identity as well.

Purely from a curriculum perspective, according to Kalin & Siddiqui (2020), an effective way to promote tolerance and acceptance towards religious minorities and sects could be to draw attention to their contributions and achievements in textbook content which seem to be lacking in the content of the analyzed textbook.

### **General indigenous cultural elements**

The third category of the content of the book, the content that focuses on the general ways of the indigenous population through pictures, poetry and general prose, is quite important. This is the type of content which can actually provide a great point of departure to bring about a positive change in the curriculum. Since it is highly contextualized, it grabs the attention of the students as they can generally relate to it. Therefore, it must be retained. However, in a similar vein, parallels can be drawn between the native/local and the target cultures by discussing the general ways of the natives of the English-speaking countries too without touching upon any religious or political issues. That way, the presentation of the target cultural elements will nicely dovetail with the presentation of the local culture and the students will be able to notice, understand and perhaps, critique the similarities and differences between the two cultures. Such an approach can promote general cultural sensitivity, tolerance and critical thinking in the students too which can perhaps narrow the intellectual and educational gap between the public and the private sectors at some stage to a certain extent.

### **Role of women**

According to Ali, Asad, Gul, Johansson, Krantz & Mogren (2011), Pakistan has a patriarchal society. There are certain traditional roles that women are supposed to play such as performing home chores and taking care of their children and husbands (Ali, Asad, Gul, Johansson, Krantz & Mogren, 2011). This reductive image of women is depicted in the reading passage of Unit 3 as well in which women are shown to be serving the men of the family. Also, there is some initial reluctance shown by the head of the family to invest in his daughter's education as compared to his son as women are not expected to earn and provide for their families.

The content of this particular unit seems to highlight as well as challenge this stereotypical image of women in the Pakistani society. Religion again comes to forefront as an allusion to the Holy Prophet's teachings regarding equal opportunities for men and women is made. Moreover, it is also shown that once the daughter becomes a doctor, she starts working at a local hospital and not only helps her village, but the neighbouring ones too which stresses the importance of educating women.

Ali, Asad, Gul, Johansson, Krantz & Mogren (2011) also endorse this view that higher education can act as an agent of change for oppressed women as it gives them the opportunity to become independent. Attaining higher education can also help in altering the

traditional perception of the limited role(s) of women in the Pakistani society (Ali, Asad, Gul, Johansson, Krantz & Mogren, 2011). Besides, a country where 49.5% of the population are women ('Population, female', 2022), it is not feasible at all that obtaining higher or tertiary education is made difficult for them as providing them with opportunities to work can add substantially to the overall economy of a country that has been in dire need of foreign aid for the last few decades.

### **Closing the discussion**

Concluding the discussion, the key thing to be kept in mind is that textbooks are a powerful tool to legitimize the socio-cultural practices of any society (Khokhar & Muhammad, 2022). As Apple (2012) argues, they can also legitimize a hidden curriculum that is generally accepted by the learners willingly and uncritically without paying any attention to the explicit or implicit messages that the content conveys. Phillipson (1992) takes this idea further by highlighting that textbook content works on two levels: it forms pupils' identity and then groups them into various economic and social classes.

This study set out to explore the extent of the role of the content of an ELT textbook in shaping the identities of the learners and adding to the intolerance in society. Based on the results and discussion presented above, it is somewhat evident that in the context of Pakistan, the presence of a hidden curriculum, which is shaping the identity and views of the students of the public sector, can be sensed. This needs to be looked into and remedial steps need to be taken in order to check the fast-spreading polarization in the Pakistani society.

It is imperative to take steps to mitigate the impact of some of the discussed polarizing factors in the locally produced textbooks of Pakistan as they not only disadvantage the students of the public sector academically by adversely impacting their socio-economic progress but also create a societal divide amongst religious minorities and various smaller and lesser-known sects of Islam causing even more resentment and disintegration in the already highly imploded Pakistani society.

### **LIMITATIONS**

One of the limitations of the study is that only one book from the public sector has been analyzed. After Year 9, years 10, 11, and 12 also follow a similar board examination pattern. In a similar study, the textbook content for those years can also be analyzed under a cultural representation lens to get an even better understanding of this phenomenon.

The other limitation is that the analyzed textbook is taught only in the province of Sindh. There are other provincial educational boards in Pakistan along with the federal educational board. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized in any way.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, a separate longitudinal qualitative study can be conducted with the aim of exploring the perceptions of the teachers and the learners of the public sector in Sindh regarding the cultural representation in the locally produced ELT content. A secondary

component of the study could be a comparative analysis of the ELT content in the public and private sectors operating in Sindh. Depending on the findings regarding the perceptions of the teachers and the learners, suggestions can then be made to bring about improvements in the public-sector ELT curriculum.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the content of one of the locally produced ELT textbooks in Pakistan in order to explore the representation of the local and target cultures. Based on the content analysis, it can be deduced that there seems to be a ‘hidden curriculum’ that aligns with the ideological policies that the state has maintained historically, and the young learners are influenced heavily by the religious and nationalistic notions presented to them in the form of local culture. There is a parallel education system in the same society – the private sector – from which concepts can be borrowed to balance the content being taught in the public sector. Moreover, an equal representation of all indigenous cultures and sects – majority as well as minority – is needed to address the prevalent religious intolerance and polarization.

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## APPENDIX A

<https://ebooks.stbb.edu.pk/storage/uploads/books/174152276.pdf>

**APPENDIX B**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttAOMzxB7hg>