Foreign Content and National Integrity: An Evaluation of Curriculum in Private Sector Education at School Level in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study highlights some serious concerns regarding damage caused to national, social, cultural and religious identity by the so-called advanced curricula adopted and implemented in the private schools. The oxford English books of grade five, six and seven are taken as sample of study. The method of content analysis has been used to find out the themes, expressions and lexical items that are foreign to our culture, religion and national interests. The study exposes that the indigenous moral and ethical values of the country are in jeopardy by the content selected to teach English as a language and as a subject. The young minds are unable to differentiate our values from foreign values and are consequently adapting themselves to foreign norms and traditions. This study urges the dire need of designing unified curriculum at least at school levels. The curriculum must be developed on the basis of moral and religious values.

Keywords: Oxford English books, curriculum, private sector education, national integrity, school going children.

Introduction

"There is nonetheless a fundamental values position which all language teaching should promote: a position which acknowledges respect for human dignity and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction" (Byram 2001: 7).

Foreign language learning and teaching in modern age pay great attention to incorporate cultural and traditional concepts of the foreign culture. An overarching aim of modern foreign language curricula is to produce culturally literate individuals who understand and tolerate other people and their cultures (Corbett, 2003:3). It is a common practice to develop cultural understanding of the target language among foreign language learners. For this purpose, we can find a plethora of textbooks in the market to educate learners about prominent cultural concepts of target language community. In Pakistan, English language enjoys a unique status of being unofficially the only official language of the country and for most part language in education as well. To meet ever-growing demand of EFL/ESL learners at different levels, we see many textbooks highlighting British, American, Canadian, Australian and other foreign cultures. Some challenge the use of textbooks in age of 'digital natives' and suggest to abandon textbooks while benefitting from other sources available online.

By and large, textbooks remain the major preference by teachers and policymakers. Textbooks help teachers in planning, designing and teaching courses

under pressure while providing guiding materials for students to track lessons and prepare in advance at home. Many researchers have recently analyzed the discourses of different EFL/ESL textbooks from different perspectives like racism and immigration (van Dijk & Atienza, 2011), gender stereotypes (Taylor, 2003), ideologies of L1 textbooks (Liu, 2005), and culture in L2/foreign/heritage language textbooks. There is an ongoing interest in demystifying textbooks which clearly point to pivotal role of textbooks in educational system.

Kids spend most part of their early lives in schools (day time and perhaps they focus on the same even when they are back home) and what they study or read their can leave an ever-lasting impact on their ideologies and identities. It is easy to influence and control the minds of innocent young souls and we as teachers can provide different possible alternatives to our kids. Textbooks are also other important factor which can serve to legitimate some social, cultural and religious practices that are promoted through educational process (perhaps school ideas as well), as well as diffusing social practices and ideologies (Apple & Beyer, 1983). School curriculum can serve specific agendas and focus on legitimizing particular type of knowledge and ideas which are represented in selected textbooks. In Pakistani context, most textbooks of private sector schools present a dismal situation where learners fail to find objective truths and real historical facts. Textbooks are usually product of 'political, economic and cultural activities, battles and compromises' (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991:2). Textbooks are more than just selection of random pieces of texts or discourses; rather they represent philosophies and ideologies promoted by any nation for their youth. Ongoing discursive practice of crystallized textbooks portray ideological and philosophical complexities that can only be comprehended after understanding interplay of authors, reviewers, international publishers, editors, proof-readers, task designers, photographers and others. All these different players produce highly polyphonic texts that provide a specified version of graphic, verbal and visual texts for readers. Most of the textbooks, if not all, present a 'legitimized version' of social and international world around us.

Literature Review

Education is an activity that involves planning and conscious efforts to achieve ample goals and objectives to fulfill the needs of individuals as well as to serve community. This proposes that somewhat meaningful and valuable is being deliberately imparted to the receivers(Njeng'ere, 2014). Curriculum and national integrity are complimentary to each other as the designing and inclusion of contents in a curriculum always respect the sentiments of the target population other than meeting all technicalities (Singh & Mukherjee, 1993). Curriculum designing is s a matter of serious concern as the education makes able a nation to achieve its targets and uplift the society. The theorists have always made efforts in elaborating the ethical, social, political and economic objectives of education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011) . Especially, the schools significantly play an important part in the creation of our social world (Baker & Le Tendre, 2005).

Tyler (1949) argues that the intention of schooling should be directly attached to the vital issues of existing society. According to him, school as the agency for

helping young people to cope up successfully with the grave problems of modern-day life. Education in schools at different levels aims to develop multiple skills of the children making them efficient enough to control and run the mechanism of family, society and government. Curriculum is a source by which education is obtained (Dan, 2011).

Lappalainen (2011) is of the view that Textbooks play a crucial role especially in school world and they may be used to accomplish some hidden agendas as the textbooks are carrying some ideologies. Therefore, it becomes imperative to monitor and investigate the contents of the textbooks in particular of the language books like English text books as language in itself carries across a culture. Culture may be described as a set of rules, norms, values and social practices that direct the attitude and behavior of the group of people and language teaching always refers to teaching the culture through language (Lappalainen, 2011). The situation becomes alarming when target culture is not represented in the textbooks and young school going children are to get the awareness of some other cultures.

English textbooks in particular represents the English speakers' culture thus becomes a constant threat to national integrity and social development. They reflect the source culture rather than target culture (Aliakbari, 2004). Textbooks add to the transmission of meticulous demonstrations and stereotypes. In the earlier periods, there has been a growing concern in investigation the ways in which textbooks exhibit the elements of history, ethnic groups, minorities and gender differences, etc. Such elements raised the controversies and there has been prolonged debates on the roles of curriculum and national integrity (Canale, 2016). Textbooks are the books that most of the people come across in schools first ever in their lives. They thoroughly study and absorb the contents of the syllabus books as they have not experienced such materials anywhere containing knowledge of science, religion, politics, and cultural diversity (Lindaman & Ward, 2006).

In modern times, the concept of international culture has got prominence. The books of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) preach this theory in particular. The students are taught language by such contents that aim to develop cultural awareness in the students. The other term for this new well established practice is intercultural communication as it is a key factor in developing links and establishing strong relation in the global world (Siddiqie, 2011).

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. The sample for this research consists of Student books of English for level 5, 6 and 7 by Oxford University Press. The research technique of content analysis has been used for an in-depth analysis of the sample. Since this research is focused on the content of the textbooks, it was, therefore, imperative to use this technique. The researchers after deep analysis of the content included in these textbooks developed a few categories which further helped in the analysis of data. The peer discussion was also used as a tool for data analysis. The table of categories to be discussed in detail is as follows:

Table 1
General Categories of Data Analysis

Level	Themes	Social	Cultural	Lexical
5th	Horror; Evil; Man and Nature; Determination; Invincible spirit of Man	New and old; Olympics in Greece and China; Bangladesh in flood	Greek myths; Egyptian Mummies	
6th	Love for places; Havocs of Nuclear war; Wild life; Importance of forests; Morality	Jamaican society; African childhood	Ads about cereals	Lilliput Anansi Kling kling
7th	Fear of ghosts and aliens; Helplessness of Man; Uselessness of war; Animal rights; Equality; unity			

Data Analysis

The research has taken the English Student books for the level 5, 6 and 7 by Oxford University Press. The method of content analysis has been used to analyze the validity and relevance of the content used in these books to teach English language to the young learners. Language is not a mere collection of words, it carries culture of the speaker too. The research has showed that the increase in the percentage of the foreign content shows a gradual moving away from who we really are. The students are taught about lands they have not seen and the names they have not heard around them. All these results in not only vague understanding of young students but also the secretly growing desire to be a part of those far off exotic places which populate the pages of their books. For the sake of a clear understanding of the issue concerned, content analysis was conducted in different dimensions to find out the real impact of such curriculum. Following are the motifs repeatedly found in the books under consideration.
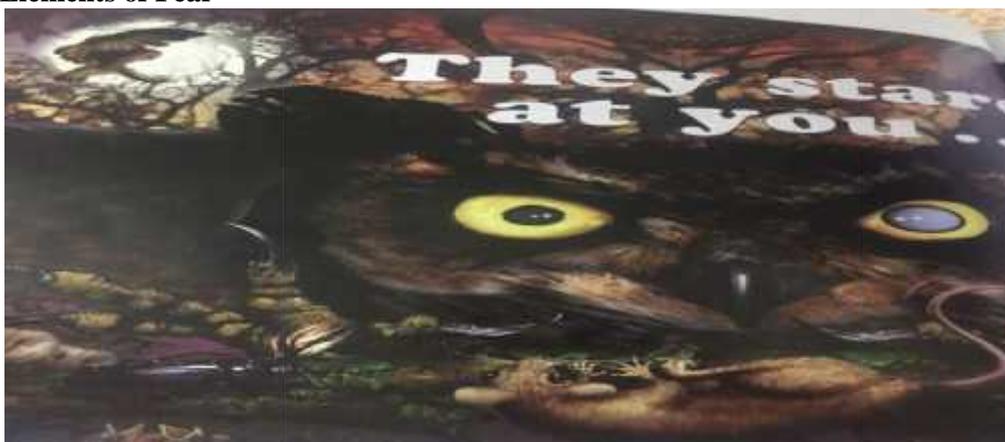
Elements of Fear

Figure 1: Chapter title with horrifying image

Quite detrimental to the young minds is the introduction of horror stories. The textbooks appear to be a never-ending series of fear, aliens, ghosts and dead-men. The table of contents of student book 5 displays "The Aliens have landed" at second number. It's a fictional story about the alien masters who control the human subject. The idea in itself is quite grotesque and does not give rise to any positivity in any way. It definitely creates a creepy feeling which can very successfully disturb the mind of the learner. The text book can become a source of nightmares. Furthermore, it is in total clash with Islamic ideology. Likewise, the third chapter is about writing a play and yet again the scene that has been chosen is the witches meeting scene on the heath in "Macbeth". The horrific content supported by the visual images like crooked nails and ugly long teeth is not suitable in any way for a textbook at this level.

The introduction of horror reaches its pinnacle in student book 7 where table of content is a long list of scary content. The very first chapter is "Johnny and the Dead" followed by the second chapter "Dracula" and the third chapter "this wild-looking boy". The second unit starts with a nightmare "last night I dreamt" followed by the Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka with the visual images of a dreadful huge insect lying on the bed. What on earth can be the reason for adding such stuff in the textbook at this level when a young mind is ready to imbibe all types of influences? The intended objective of including such extracts is to enhance the vocabulary and writing skills which can be taught through so many other types of writings, then why horror stories. The situation when analyzed calls for serious attention. It seems that through a proper academic planning the element of fear is being introduced. This fear makes the future of nation fearful and coward, starting at the slightest sound around and thus rejecting or nullifying the idea of fearless youth which the founders and the creators of this nation had.

Introduction of Evil

The forces of evil are introduced through certain characters as of witches and aliens but without developing any contrast with good around. The children at elementary level do not have ripe thought processes to accept or reject one emotion unless and until they are told in detail about it. The question that arises here is that don't we have any such content available in our own environment that can make the students understand the concept of evil and good. The Islamic history and the different situations are full of such incidents that teach the strength of good and fragile nature of evil. Why should we pick foreign content to teach morals to our kids in this specific part of the world? Does it mean that our own morality or moral stories are, in fact, so incapacitated that we have to borrow the moral concepts of west.

Figure 2: Chapter title with really horrifying image

Man and Nature

Man and Nature have been shown in close proximity with each other but in such symbolic way that it is totally incomprehensible for students. A man's desire to fly like birds is age old but there is no need to highlight it through a Greek legend quite alien to our culture. Nature however has been presented as an unfriendly and hostile force at work against human beings. The famous Earnest Hemingway's extract from Old Man and the Sea shows the invincible spirit of Man against the odds of Nature. Hostile Desert, likewise is another such piece of writing. Shipwrecked again is a story of the havoc caused by the might of water. The natural environment finds complete description along with significance in student book 6 chapter Rainforest-What's the Fuss about? Quite interestingly Pakistani students are being taught about forests in Brazil and Italy. Why couldn't the editor select pieces about any type of forest that is found here in Pakistan? The account of Nature too is foreign. Furthermore in student book 7, all the negative images of nature are presented trough wolves, owls, insects and bears. The soft images of nature are not found. There is only violent and torrential manifestation of Nature which is enough to upset the young learners.

Social Incompatibility

The societies which have been portrayed in the books under discussion are quite unfamiliar to our kids. After getting an exposure to the carefully culled pieces of content from the social context, the young learners consider their own very real society as sham, full of lies and backward. The instillation of this feeling is very systematic and can very easily be understood from the following examples.

Names of People and Places

The description of a foreign society inhabited by foreigners is a great setback to our own societal values and norms. The names of people are such that a child finds it hard to relate to it. Van Cheele, Gregor Samsa, Bazzer, Garreth, Tutankhamun and

Pliny are but just to name a few. Ironically, there is only one Muslim name Ali to be found in these three books and that too has been set in England. Names of places are quite unfamiliar like Sandra Street, Mount Etna, Serengeti and so many others. The names of positions like Count and alderman are also quite confusing.

Figure 3: Representation of completely foreign culture

Food and Social Traditions

There is a little mention of food but whatever it is, it does not relate to Pakistani context. The advertisement about the cereals as breakfast is still an unfamiliar idea. The traditions like bonfire have also not yet been a part of mainstream societal activities.

Cultural Identity and National Integrity

The content being taught at elementary level classes through books by Oxford University Press is quite harmful for national identity and integrity as it promotes other cultures and makes students oblivious of their own culture. The myths of foreign nations have been introduced like that of Greece. The Flight of Icarus is a Greek myth which our culture and social values do not support. Why couldn't a myth related to our own geographical location and culture as the myth of Saif ul Malook, be a part of syllabus? Another chapter is dedicated to the depiction of African childhood. The question still remains the same. Why do our children need to learn about African childhood? Do our children have sufficient knowledge about the childhood conditions in their own country, and are the Africans as well interested in Pakistani Childhood? The children are introduced to the American Dream of Martin Luther King instead of dreams of Iqbal and Quaid. The children have no idea about Two Nation Theory but are given full information about the future of America.

The havocs of nuclear disasters have also been discussed but without mentioning America who is responsible for the first ever use of Atomic bomb. Pakistan is itself a nuclear power and the young teenagers of this nuclear power might harbor the idea that being nuclear power is something to feel ashamed of. The uselessness of war has also been depicted through a football match that is played between England and Germany during a time of respite in World War 1. The sympathetic feelings arise in the young hearts but for whom? The British and German

soldiers of course, where is our very own Pak Army fighting at various fronts? There is a whole chapter dedicated to the disasters of flood in Bangladesh. Pakistan also faces such disasters almost every year but the problems of others are more important. There is nothing that makes the children aware of their own identity in the textbooks under consideration. Student Book 5 has only one chapter containing bits of information about Pakistan. Student Book 6 and 7 do not have even a single chapter pertaining to our national identity and integrity.

If the context is removed, no one can tell that these books are taught in Pakistani schools. These books carry not even a single chapter either on Islamic values and morals or Pakistani culture and social values. There is no mention of any great leader who represents Pakistan or Islam. Muslim identity is absolutely absent from the pages of aforementioned text books. This type of content is quite threatening to our national and social narrative which must be taken care of without any further delay.

Conclusion

Content analysis of three books demonstrates that we have failed to include relevant textbooks and current textbooks do not meet the needs of the learners. The books totally represent foreign culture, identity, philosophies and hidden agendas. The materials in books are not culturally and religious sensitive and this might be doing more harm than good to identity, ideologies and philosophies of the learners. Students might even find it difficult to learn target language because they cannot relate to different situations, scenarios, people and places presented in the books. All this content demands extra cognitive pressure as learners have to learn concepts and ideas in a language they are not expert and the situation further becomes complex when they fail to relate to people, places, ideas, myths and philosophies depicted in these books.

This is high-time that we should seriously start thinking about our curriculum practices. All stakeholders should actively take part in this process and curriculum should be designed according to the local needs. Textbooks and materials should be socially, culturally and religiously sensitive and they should not pose any feelings of insecurities or aloofness among learners. We need to develop materials which suits the needs of the learners and which also prepares our youth according to our moral values deeply rooted in Islamic thought and culture. Parents, teachers, and policymakers need to realize that we should learn English as a language rather focus should be on learning properties of English as an International language which does not hold burden of any specific culture or norms. English is international lingua franca and it is the property of its users. We should nativize and localize the language and contents to meets needs of our learners. In the process of teaching an important foreign language, we cannot (and should not) sacrifice our identity and ideology. We should include such materials and examples which are local and easily comprehendible for our learners. We believe this is the way forward and we should work in this direction to produce a young nation who is not dependent on any foreign culture and a nation that takes pride in exhibiting its own identity, culture, values and traditions.

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