Hidden curriculum: An analysis of cultural content of the ELT textbooks in inner, outer, and expanding circle countries

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Abstract: Despite the great body of work examining the cultural content of the international and local ELT textbooks, the cultural content and elements of the ELT textbooks in the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries have seldom been reported. That said, the purpose of this study was twofold: first, it was aimed to investigate the cultural content of the ELT textbooks of the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries; and, second, to examine the cultural elements of these ELT textbooks. To that end, three ELT textbook series from inner, outer, and expanding circle countries were selected and analyzed. The results of this study showed that there were differences among the ELT textbooks of different concentric circles. While the ELT textbooks of the inner circle contained more L1 and L2 cultural content, the ELT textbooks of the expanding circle contained more L1 and international cultural content. Moreover, the ELT textbooks of the outer circle showed tendency to contain L1, L2, and international cultural content. With respect to the cultural elements, the inner and outer circle contained more L2 esthetic cultural elements, whereas the expanding circle ELT textbooks tended to represent their cultural elements through L1 esthetic and sociolinguistic cultural senses.

Subjects: Arts; Humanities; Language & Literature

Keywords: ELT textbooks; cultural content; inner circle; cultural elements

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Culture is an important aspect of second or foreign language learning which is called as the fifth skill of L2 learning. One of the main mediums of teaching L2 culture is through including it in L2 textbooks. In this study, we sought the occurrence of international, national, and target language cultures among the English language textbooks (ELT) of three countries representing as inner, outer, and expanding countries. That said, we came to the conclusion that there were discrepancies among the ELT textbooks of the three countries with regard to the inclusion of international, national, and target cultures. Based on the information we obtained, we reach to model of culture occurrence in ELT textbooks.
1. Introduction

Culture, doubtlessly, as an indispensable part of second/foreign language teaching/learning (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004) has remained as a hotly debated issue in language education (Kramsch, 2013). It seems that the large number of research focusing on the nature of culture in language education (e.g. Gu, 2005; Premier & Miller, 2010) does not weaken the cultural discussion debates in language teaching/learning. Besides, the number of cultural studies addressing culture in applied linguistics (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Pennycook, 2007) demonstrates that it has found the foreground of academic discussions in language education (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). That much of important role that culture plays in language education is, probably, due to the final objective of language teaching/learning which is to empower L2 learners to communicate cultural meanings appropriately (Rodríguez & Espinar, 2015; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014).

Teaching culture in a close association with L2 teaching turns to an axiomatic fact (Harumi, 2002). However, the everlasting and ongoing concern, with regard to teaching cultural material, is whose culture should be regarded as the forepart; the target language culture, the source culture of the language learners, or the international culture as the accumulation of different cultural sources? It is stated that being competent in each of these cultural types is not sufficient and global cultural consciousness and intercultural citizenship should be the chief objective of L2 cultural learning (Byram, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). According to Weninger and Kiss (2013, p. 696) “language education, including EFL education, must have a transformative goal that can be achieved only through cultural reflection and understanding within a critically oriented pedagogy.” It is in this sense that the pivotal role of ELT textbooks comes into view as a facilitator type of ELT material bearing the responsibility to “promote the development of a reflexive, open, and globally aware language learner” (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 696).

Due to the prominent roles of ELT textbooks in language education, they have been subject to investigation for their content, especially at discourse level (e.g. McConachy & Hata, 2013; Meihami & Khanlarzadeh, 2015; Nguyen, 2011; Rashidi & Ghaedsharafi, 2015). To use Ndura’s words (Ndura, 2004, p. 143) “the content of instructional materials [among them are textbooks] significantly affects students’ attitudes and dispositions toward themselves, other people and society.” ELT textbooks need to address different voices and cultural perspectives to enable L2 learners to figure out various cultural values and perspectives (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011). However, ELT textbooks do not pay equal attention to represent different cultural values in respect of various cultures (Tseng, 2002; Yuen, 2011).

ELT textbooks are considered as “the visible heart of any ELT program” (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237); nevertheless, they are not the mere mirror of the content they include. This is what Giroux (1988) calls hidden curriculum which “... refers to those unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of a given class” (p. 51). It is due to the hegemonic ideas whose ideology do not allow the outlier cultural beliefs, ideas, and values to be included in the ELT textbooks and try to shape them by their own “highly structured cultural forms” (Berchini, 2014, p. 162). Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) believe that ELT materials contain hidden curriculum, addressing different messages about different cultures. The term curriculum, as Chapelle (2009) mentions, means that ELT textbooks possess the features of a complete curriculum, suggesting that they are not only teaching language but also conveying different hidden agenda.

The hidden curriculum, emphasizing the values and voices of a specific culture, leads L2 learners to a set of specific cultural values. English language, because of its ubiquitous function as a lingua franca (ELF), establishes a hidden hegemony of its native-speakers’ cultural norms and values in ELT materials; manifesting in ELT textbooks. However, owing to the increase in the number of non-native speakers of English, this status confronts challenges (Modiano, 2001; Shin et al., 2011). By reason of this, world Englishes is now the concern of many language scholars (e.g. Bolton, 2004; Canagarajah, 2007; Jenkins, 2006) who believe that it is not possible to provide a clear definition for Standard English.
World Englishes taps upon the spread of English model proposed by Kachru (1985, 1988, 1992) to capture the way English diffuses around the world. Kachru proposed three concentric circles: inner, outer, and expanding (Figure 1).

The smallest circle depicts the inner circle countries in which native speakers of English are constituting the majority of the population. The most tangible examples of this circle are the UK and the USA. The second circle shows the outer circle countries such as India and Singapore. English has been spread in these countries through imperial expansion of English native speaker countries. It is not the mother tongue of this circle, yet it benefits them as a sort of lingua franca to communicate with language groups. This circle, the outer circle, is the concern of language educators (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2007; Trudgill & Hannah, 1994) since a variety of English is spoken there, producing varieties of grammar, lexicon, and phonology. This circle is analogous to the narrow view of world Englishes (Bolton, 2004; Jenkins, 2006). Finally, the outermost circle is called expanding circle including countries that English plays no or very limited governmental or historical roles, but it is starting to serve as a lingua franca for international communication “across national and linguistic boundaries” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 160).

Although ELT materials depicting the inner circle countries cultural norms should be included in ELT textbooks, the ever-increasing number of English varieties in outer and expanding circle countries calls for more attention to the cultural norms and values of these countries (Graddol, 2006; McKay, 2003; Nguyen, 2011). According to Nguyen (2011) if the foremost pedagogical objective of ELT is to train L2 learners for the purpose of prosperous global communication, it should focus on not only the target language culture but also the international one. This will help L2 learners to negotiate their understanding of the interlocutors’ values and that of themselves to establish solidarity (Nguyen, 2011; Nunn, 2007). On the course of analysis, the purpose of this study is to investigate ELT textbooks produced and used in inner, outer, and expanding circle countries for their cultural content and elements.

2. Literature review

There has been a growing body of research on the extent to which cultural content has been included in ELT textbooks. These studies used qualitative (e.g. Garcia, 2005; Ndura, 2004), quantitative (e.g. Tajeddin & Teimoureznahad, 2014), and recently, semiotic approaches (Kiss & Weninger, 2013; Weninger & Kiss, 2013) to examine the cultural content of ELT textbooks. Not all researchers, however, consider ELT textbooks as the adequate sources of representing cultural content (Tseng, 2002; Yuen, 2011). Nguyen (2011), for instance, stated that ELT textbooks fail to pay due attention to the development of intercultural competence in L2 learners, suggesting that ELT textbooks are impotent...
to represent pragmatic and meta-pragmatic content. Moreover, some of the studies done showed that ELT textbooks exercised cultural biases (Garcia, 2005), favoring target language cultural values and norms. Alptekin (1993) believed that it is not cost-effective for ELT material developers to contain L2 learners’ cultural content in the ELT textbooks. Moreover, Alptekin (1993, p. 138) posited that “the schematic focus on the target-language culture may offer a lucrative deal to the writer(s) as well as the publisher in those cases where the textbook is made use of in both EFL and ESL contexts.”

Most of the studies examining the representation of cultural content in ELT textbooks used quantitative approaches such as frequency counts (e.g. Hamiloglu & Mendi, 2010; Lee, 2009; Matsuda, 2002). Magogwe (2009), for example, investigated ELT textbooks for their cultural bias. Magogwe, moreover, explored the attitude of Khoe students learning English about the ELT textbooks they used to learn English. The results of Magogwe’s study indicated that while the cultural content of the surveyed ELT textbooks was not varied, it did not affect the attitude of Khoe students to learn English. In like manner, Yuen (2011) conducted a case study to investigate how frequent the cultural content was in the two ELT textbooks taught in Hong Kong secondary schools. By categorizing aspects of different cultures into products, persons, practices, and perspectives, Yuen found out that the representation of cultural content was in favor of English-speaking countries, while there was an under-representation trend with regard to African cultures.

In one of the recent studies exploring the cultural content representation in ELT textbooks, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) carried out a comparative study between international and localized ELT textbooks to examine their cultural content representation. The results of their content analysis showed that most of the cultural content represented in the localized ELT textbooks were neutral, referring not to a specific culture. They also reported that in the localized ELT textbooks the sociological cultural elements were more highlighted than the esthetic ones. On the contrary, the international ELT textbooks were more in favor of esthetic cultural elements and they represented less neutral cultural content.

Some of the researchers used a qualitative methodology to examine the representation of cultural content in the ELT textbooks. García (2005) conducted a study to explore the international and intercultural content of ELT textbooks in Spain. By analyzing listening and reading sections, García tried to obtain cultural content represented in the ELT textbooks. García used a cultural analysis table to examine the cultural content. The results of the study revealed that the intercultural and international relations were not demonstrated in the ELT textbooks taught in Spain. Moreover, these textbooks did not represent cross-cultural content.

In a study done by Taki (2008), the ideological imports of international and local ELT textbooks in Iran were examined. Using critical discourse analysis procedures, Taki analyzed the ELT textbooks conversations in three dimensions of meaning: social relations among the characters of textbooks, the subject positions, and the content of the texts. The results of his study revealed that the international ELT textbooks tried to represent western economy and consumer society. He also found out that the local ELT textbooks suffered from providing EFL learners with cross-cultural awareness.

Recently, Rodríguez and Espinar (2015) carried out an analysis to examine the cultural content of six B1 and B2-level ELT textbooks used to teach English to adults in Spain. Doing a comparative study, they reported that the number of big “C” cultural content, i.e. literature and art, had similar frequency counts in both levels; however, there were some dissimilarity in other cultural aspects such as subjectivity in the textbooks of the two levels. Moreover, the findings of their study showed that culture in general was dealt more in the B1 level while in the B2 level more attention was paid to small “c” cultural content, i.e. culture of everyday life.

Criticizing qualitative and quantitative approaches for reducing the conception of cultural content of the ELT textbooks, Weninger and Kiss (2013) proposed a new approach to do the analysis of cultural content in the ELT textbooks: a semiotic approach. They believed that “an approach that
examines learning materials as carriers of cultural information alone cannot do justice to the complex process of meaning making through which cultural meanings emerge” (p. 2). They stated that due to the fact that cultural meaning is constructed socially by the interaction among teachers, students, and materials; there should be an approach to examine both text and visual products together to show a reliable representation of cultural content in the ELT textbooks. While they did a rather critical analysis, Weninger and Kiss did not aim to conduct a comparative study but to propose a new model of cultural content analysis. The assumptions of their approach were established on several statements. First, they argued that “it is the activity (and not so much solitary images or texts) which should be the unit of examination when studying the cultural potential of language teaching materials” (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 2). Second, they questioned how students interpreted cultural content. Finally, they stated that the relationship between textual and visual information is denotational, forcing textbook users to focus on linguistic rather than cultural content.

3. Purpose of the study

It is believed that there is a paradigm shift with regard to the status of English which casts doubt on the superiority of native speakers’ culture to consist the line’s share of cultural content in the ELT textbooks (Cogo, 2012; Shin et al., 2011). Phillipson (1997) and Seidlhofer (2003) state that the new paradigm considering English as an international language (EIL) and ELF provides more room for the inclusion of English-language learners’ cultural values in the ELT textbooks. Owing to this, this study was an attempt to investigate the cultural content and elements represented in the ELT textbooks produced and taught at secondary schools in three different environments, namely inner, outer, and expanding circle countries to explore their (1) cultural content and (2) cultural elements. While the first aim was to examine the representation of the cultural content of the three environments in terms of L1, L2, international, and neutral cultural types, the latter aim was an attempt to indicate the cultural elements represented in the ELT textbooks in terms of esthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic cultural senses. The following research questions were posed to address the purposes of this study:

(1) How is the cultural content represented in the ELT textbooks produced and taught in inner, outer, and expanding circle countries in terms of L1, L2, international, and neutral cultural types?

(2) How are the cultural elements represented in the ELT textbooks produced and taught in inner, outer, and expanding circle countries in terms of esthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic cultural senses?

4. Method

4.1. The corpus

The purpose of this study was to examine the cultural content and elements of the ELT textbooks produced and taught in inner, outer, and expanding circle countries. For this purpose to be achieved, three ELT textbook series were required. For this purpose to be achieved, three ELT textbook series were required. The inner circle, as Kachru (1985, p. 242) states, is the first concentric circle which “refers to traditional bases of English – the regions where it is the primary language...” Given that, the ELT textbooks published and used in the UK were surveyed to find one series to be in line with the thrust of this study. After examining different secondary school syllabuses in the UK, we found out a series of ELT textbooks called Edexcel functional skills English and written by Constant and Washington (2010). These ELT textbook series include two volumes and are used to teach English to the students with age range of 11–15. All four skills are integrated in these ELT textbook series and the textbooks follow Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to language teaching.

According to Kachru (1985), the outer circle countries are institutionalized by the native English countries in different aspects. That said, the ELT textbooks for the outer circle were chosen from those published and taught in India. For this purpose, a series of ELT textbooks called Celebrate
written and edited by Rajagopal and Burman (2011) were surveyed. Celebrate series which follow CLT approach to language teaching and learning including eight volumes of which the third, fourth, and fifth volumes were surveyed in this study, since these volumes were compatible with the secondary school students’ level with the age range of 11–15.

Finally, the ELT textbooks produced and taught in the secondary schools in Iran were chosen to address the cultural content and elements of the ELT textbooks in the expanding circle. In recent years, there has been a shift in ELT textbooks taught in secondary schools in Iran. The Curriculum Development Center published a series of ELT textbooks benefiting from CLT approach: Prospect series written by Khadir et al. (2013). Prospects series include three textbooks taught in secondary schools in Iran to the students with age range of 11–15.

As can be implied, the selection of the ELT textbooks in the three circles was done through three criteria. Firstly, all the selected ELT textbooks were taught at secondary school. Secondly, they were practiced among the students who were at 11–15 year-of-age. Finally, all the selected ELT textbooks followed CLT approach to teaching and learning English. After choosing the ELT textbooks, the dialog and reading sections of these textbooks were extracted to be analyzed for their cultural content. These sections were chosen so as to minimize the dissimilarity among the textbooks. Each textbook series owned different sections which did not exist in other textbooks, yet the dialog and reading sections were integrated in all the selected ELT textbooks. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the ELT textbooks selected in this study to be analyzed for their cultural content.

| Textbook     | Circle/Country | No. volume | No. dialog/reading | No. dialog/reading per unit |
|--------------|----------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Functional skills English | Inner/The UK | 2          | 40                 | 2                           |
| Celebrate    | Outer/India    | 8/3 vol. selected | 48                | 1                           |
| Prospect     | Expanding/Iran | 3          | 48                 | 2                           |

4.2. The data analysis framework

To achieve the cultural content types, we used Cortazzi and Jin’s (1999) framework. This framework divides cultural content represented in the ELT textbooks into three types, namely L1 (source) cultural materials; L2 (target) cultural materials; and international cultural materials. However, as other researchers such as Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) state, one more section needs to be added to this part to include the cultural content which does not belong to any of the three divisions. We followed Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) and called this section culture-neutral. For instance, advising teenagers can be attached to every culture so it is culture-neutral in this sense.

The second data analysis framework we used was the one proposed by Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) to draw cultural elements of the ELT textbooks. Adaskou et al. (1990) distinguish four separate sorts of meaning for culture. The first types called esthetic sense which is analogous to big “C” culture. It includes the media, literature, music, and so on. In the second sense, they propose a sociological meaning to culture. This is what small “c” culture means. “The organization and nature of family, of home life, of interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure, customs and institutions” (Adaskou et al., 1990, p. 3). The third type of cultural elements is called semantic sense. It is related to the system of conceptualization of language in association with culture. For instance, as Adaskou et al. (1990) exemplify, “you cannot use the name of meals without learning the main meal times” (p. 3). The final sense is called the pragmatic or sociolinguistic sense (hence after the sociolinguistic type). Adaskou et al. (1990, p. 4) define this sense as “the background knowledge, social skills, and paralinguistic skills that, in addition to mastery of the language code, make possible successful communication.”
4.3 Data analysis procedure

Using the aforementioned frameworks, the dialog sections of the ELT textbooks in the three circles were examined for their cultural content and elements. The examples of the cultural types along with their cultural elements of the ELT textbooks of inner circle are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the *Edexcel functional skills English* series contains information about L1 culture and all types of cultural elements. For instance, it is drawing upon the cultural aspect of tea in the UK as a type of esthetic cultural type. Moreover, the small “c” or sociological type of cultural content is paid attention in some examples suggesting the UK people believe in being hard-working. Semantic type of cultural content which focuses on the cultural concepts in different cultures is represented in L1 culture of *Edexcel functional skills English* by differentiating tea concepts in the UK and other parts of world. Finally, with regard to L1 cultural type and sociolinguistic cultural elements, which address the ability of people of a specific culture to do something, is represented by showing, for example, the ability of the UK people to give good suggestion about something. L2 cultural type pays attention to three cultural elements, namely esthetic (New Zealand see sighting), sociological (people work in the USA), and sociolinguistics (/r/ pronunciation). With regard to the international cultural type, one can see examples such as cooking around the world as esthetic cultural element. Finally, there was no neutral-culture in *Edexcel functional skills* series.

The cultural content in the outer circle ELT textbooks were analyzed by the same frameworks on the *Celebrate* textbook series. Table 3 shows the transcription of the different types of cultural content and cultural elements.

Table 3 indicates that the *Celebrate* series contain all types of cultural elements with regard to L1 cultural type. These series contain stories about Indian kings (esthetic), refer to some costumes (sociological), focus on some taboos (sociolinguistic), and tap upon the importance of sharing thoughts in Indian culture (semantic). Besides, they include L2 cultural elements such as the origin country of baseball (esthetic), people in the UK and USA (sociological), and the concept of food in the L2 countries (semantic). In case of international culture, *Celebrate* series contain information about the life of people such as Louis Braille and Hellen Keller (esthetic), international slogan such as clever mind is better than doing quarrel (sociological), the definitions of education around the world (semantic), and how to be polite in a queue (sociolinguistic). Moreover, there are some cultural elements categorized as culture-neutral: chance walk to the door (esthetic), value for success (sociological), and respect to family (sociolinguistic).

Finally, the *Prospect* series were analyzed for their cultural content types and elements. Table 4 indicates some examples of each cultural type and element.

### Table 2. Cultural types and elements of ELT textbooks of inner circle (Edexcel functional skills English)

| Culture types | Esthetic | Sociological | Semantic | Sociolinguistic |
|---------------|----------|--------------|----------|-----------------|
| L1 culture    | Eating habits in the UK | Social values in the UK; hard-working people in the UK; teenagers ability in different aspects of life in the UK | Tea concepts in the UK | Giving appropriate suggestions about something by the people of the UK |
| L2 culture    | New Zealand see sighting | People work in the USA | - | How to pronounce /r/ in the UK and USA |
| International culture | Cooking around the world | - | - | - |
| Culture-neutral | - | - | - | - |
Table 3. Cultural types and elements of ELT textbooks of outer circle (celebrate)

| Culture types  | Cultural elements                              |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| L1 culture     |                                               |
| Esthetic       | Castel in the air; a story about Krishnadevaraya; Being in a queue for getting ticket to cinema |
| Sociological   | Being kind with the guests; the value of faith |
| Semantic       | Think aloud your decisions                    |
| Sociolinguistic| Referring to some taboos                      |
| L2 culture     |                                               |
| Esthetic       | Reference to baseball                         |
| Sociological   | Dialogue about people’s life in the UK         |
| Semantic       | Food in the UK                                |
| Sociolinguistic| -                                             |
| International culture | Story about Louis Braille; Hellen Keller life; Reference to cities around the world |
| Esthetic       | Having clever mind is better than starting quarrel; Let’s fly together: one for all, all for one |
| Sociological   | Education meaning around the world            |
| Semantic       | Using polite utterance in the queue; Safety measures are so important to avoid unwanted accident |
| Sociolinguistic| -                                             |
| Culture-neutral| Chance walks to the door                      |
| Esthetic       | Valuing the success of your friends           |
| Sociological   | -                                             |
| Semantic       | Respect to Family, friends, and teachers      |

Table 4 shows that with regard to L1 cultural content types the Prospect series contain cultural elements about national day (esthetic), value of visiting grandparents (sociological), the order of Persian calendar months (semantic), and how to pronounce “chador” in English (sociolinguistic). Moreover, L2 cultural elements were paid attention in Prospect series, for instance, greeting in English (sociological), the order of Christian months (semantic), and how to pronounce /θ/ in English (sociolinguistics). International cultural elements of Prospect series contain examples such as the life of Louse Postor (esthetic), the concept of buying souvenir (semantic), appropriate intonation for asking questions (sociolinguistic). Finally, with regard to culture-neutral elements, Prospect series contain examples for sociolinguistic elements such as to hope others have an enjoyable trip. It should be stated that 20% of each ELT textbook series were given to another coder to codify, addressing the coder agreement. The kappa value showed the index of r = .83 between the two coders.

Table 4. Cultural types and elements of ELT textbook of expanding circle (Prospect)

| Culture types  | Cultural elements                              |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| L1 culture     |                                               |
| Esthetic       | New day holiday; Norooz; cultural Monuments; Knowing about Iran; using Islamic names like Fatemeh |
| Sociological   | Value of visiting grandparents                |
| Semantic       | The order of month in Persian calendar; the concepts of chador |
| Sociolinguistic| How to pronounce chador in English            |
| L2 culture     |                                               |
| Esthetic       | -                                             |
| Sociological   | Greeting; nice to meet you (greeting using such expression is not comment in Persian |
| Semantic       | The order of month in L2 countries             |
| Sociolinguistic| Appropriate pronunciation of /θ/ in English    |
| International culture | Louse Postor’s name; name of countries (e.g. Germany) |
| Esthetic       | -                                             |
| Sociological   | The concept of buying souvenir                 |
| Semantic       | Appropriate intonation for asking questions; How to do hotel reservations appropriately |
| Sociolinguistic| -                                             |
| Culture-neutral| -                                             |
| Esthetic       | -                                             |
| Sociological   | -                                             |
| Semantic       | -                                             |
| Sociolinguistic| Hope others have an enjoyable trip; helping sick people |
5. Results

The first research question of this study was posed to address the cultural content of the ELT textbooks in the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries. Using the adopted framework of Cortazzi and Jin (1999), the frequency counts of each cultural type was obtained. Table 5 shows the frequency counts in this regard.

Table 5 indicates that all three ELT textbooks pay their foremost attention to their L1 culture (inner, frequency \(f = 24\); outer, \(f = 25\); expanding, \(f = 24\)). However, the ELT textbooks in outer and expanding circle countries contain more international cultural content \((f = 15\) and \(f = 10\), respectively); the inner circle ELT textbooks do not pay fair attention to international culture \((f = 3)\). On the other hand, the inner circle ELT textbooks contain more L2 cultural content \((f = 12)\) than outer and expanding circles \((f = 10\) and \(f = 5\), respectively). There is no frequency count for culture-neutral content in the inner circle textbook series; however, the outer and expanding circle ELT textbooks show such cultural content \((f = 3\) and \(f = 5\), respectively). Table 5 presents that the outer circle ELT textbook series contain more cultural content \((f = 53)\) than the expanding circle \((f = 47)\) and the inner circle ones \((f = 39)\).

As a whole, Table 5 demonstrates that the ELT textbooks of the three circles contain the most cultural content in association with their L1 culture. While the ELT textbooks of the inner and outer circles also contain more cultural content in relation to L2 culture, it is not that much frequent for the ELT textbook series of the expanding circle. Moreover, both the ELT textbooks of the outer and expanding circles tend to include more international cultural content than the inner circle ones.

The second research question of this study was posed to investigate the cultural elements of the inner, outer, and expanding circle ELT textbooks by addressing esthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic cultural senses. Figures 2–4 show the results.

Figure 2 shows that the L1 cultural elements of *Edexcel functional skills English (inner circle)* textbooks include all cultural senses, namely esthetic \((f = 15)\), sociological \((f = 6)\), semantic \((f = 2)\), and sociolinguistic \((f = 1)\). Moreover, L2 cultural content of *Edexcel functional skills English (inner circle)* textbooks include esthetic \((f = 8)\), sociological \((f = 3)\), and sociolinguistics \((f = 1)\), yet there is no representation of semantic L2 cultural content. The international cultural content of *Edexcel functional skills English (inner circle)* series just contain information about esthetic type \((f = 3)\). Figure 2 presents no cultural element with regard to culture-neutral in *Edexcel functional skills English (inner circle)*. Figure 2 indicates most of the cultural contents of *Edexcel functional skills English (inner circle)* have been composed of esthetic senses and sociological ones.

Figure 3 illustrates the cultural elements of the *Celebrate* series, addressing esthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic senses (outer circle).
Figure 3 shows that like the Edexcel functional skills English series, the Celebrate series contain more L1 cultural content with regard to esthetic elements ($f = 13$) and sociological ones ($f = 6$). However, in Celebrate series more L1 cultural content can be seen related to sociolinguistic elements ($f = 4$) when compared with Edexcel functional skills English series. The L1 cultural content of the two textbooks are similar in terms of semantic senses ($f = 2$). Similarly, with regard to the L2 cultural content, the two textbooks show similar trend about esthetic ($f = 6$) and sociological ($f = 3$) types of cultural content. There can be seen one case of semantic cultural element and no sociological one in L2 cultural content. The Celebrate series are in contrast to Edexcel functional skills English with regard to international cultural content. They contain more cultural contents in terms of esthetic ($f = 8$), sociological ($f = 2$), semantic ($f = 2$), and sociolinguistic ($f = 3$) types. Moreover, the Celebrate
series show cultural-neutral elements esthetic \( (f = 1) \), sociological \( (f = 1) \), sociolinguistic \( (f = 1) \) and with no representation of semantic element. Over all, the Celebrate series indicate more focus on esthetic, sociological, and sociolinguistic elements. The sociolinguistic elements are not emphasized in the Edexcel functional skills English series.

Figure 4 presents the cultural element senses of the Prospect series (expanding circle) in terms of the four cultural elements: esthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic.

It can be seen through Figure 4 that the Prospect series (expanding circle) are more in line with the Celebrate series when L1 cultural contents are addressed: esthetic \( (f = 12) \), sociological \( (f = 6) \); semantic \( (f = 2) \), and sociolinguistic \( (f = 4) \). With regard to showing L2 cultural content, it can be seen that no representation of esthetic element is occurred in Prospect series; however, there are some representations of sociological \( (f = 3) \), semantic \( (f = 1) \), and sociolinguistic \( (f = 1) \) cultural senses. The international cultural elements in Prospect series are divided among three cultural elements: esthetic \( (f = 6) \), semantic \( (f = 2) \), sociolinguistic \( (f = 2) \), and no representation of sociological senses can be seen. Finally, all of the culture-neutral contents of Prospect series are of sociolinguistic sense \( (f = 5) \); with no representation of other cultural elements. Over all, two things can be drawn from Figure 4 about Prospect series. First, with regard to L2 cultural elements, it decreases the frequency of esthetic type to none. Second, it tries to increase the use of sociolinguistic sense with regard to L1 culture. Moreover, the sociological sense of international cultural content has no representation in Prospect series.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to probe the representation of cultural content in the ELT textbooks of inner, outer, and expanding circle countries taught at secondary schools. Additionally, the cultural elements were examined in these ELT textbooks. The results of the corpus analysis indicated that the ELT textbooks of each circle contained the most cultural content about their L1 culture. Moreover, the findings revealed that the ELT textbooks of the inner and outer circle countries emphasized L2 culture more when representing cultural content than the ELT textbooks of the expanding circle. The results also demonstrated that the common point between the ELT textbooks of the outer and expanding circles, which was in direct opposition with the ELT textbooks of the inner circle, was that
they contained more international cultural content than the inner circle ELT textbooks. These findings are partially consistent with that of Garcia (2005), Rodriguez and Espinar (2015), Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) and Taki (2008). Given that, the following cultural content model can be proposed to show the preferences of the ELT textbooks in showing the cultural content:

Figure 5 depicts the results obtained in this study. It can be seen that the outer and the inner circle ELT textbooks' commonality point is their use of L2 culture (zone 1). Moreover, the commonality point of the outer and expanding circle ELT textbooks is their use of international cultural content (zone 2). This model shows that the outer circle comes between the other two circles, bearing out the model proposed by Kachru (1985) in which outer circle countries are located between inner and outer circle ones. In addition to that, the outer circle ELT textbooks are like a “mediator” between the inner and expanding circle ELT textbooks which share some common cultural content with them.

Some explanations can be given for the results obtained in the current study. The inner circle ELT textbooks investigated in this study were chosen from the UK. Traditionally, the inner circle countries, due to be the origin of English language, are thought to be responsible to produce ELT textbooks for other countries. Although the inner circle ELT textbooks examined in this study were taught in the UK, it is believed that the inner circle ELT textbooks can be used in outer and expanding circle countries, yet it is not vice versa. That said, from one aspect, the marking issue may cause this situation (Alptekin, 1993; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). The fact is that if the inner circle countries play favoritism regarding a specific culture this may trigger different feelings, sometimes leading to make that ELT textbooks unpopular. Consequently, this seems not to be cost-benefit for the ELT textbook developers to contain specific culture in association with specific region in their products.

To be more critical in this regard, it can be stated that the inner circle ELT textbooks that can be used internationally by L2 learners “describe discourse as it might be in a better world rather than discourse as it is” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 10). It seems that, as Taki (2008) believes, the ELT material designers in the inner circle countries try to represent their cultural values and voices within the ELT materials designed for international use. It is like “killing two birds with one stone.” First, since the prior focus of the inner circle ELT textbooks is to be used in the country of their origin, the cultural content is in line with the inside needs. Second, since this is used internationally, the agenda (mostly hidden) of the inner circle ELT material designers is transmitted globally.

The obtained findings about the outer circle ELT textbooks investigated for their cultural content revealed that these ELT textbooks had the cultural tendency toward the L2 culture and the international one. This two-way tendency, as can be seen in Figure 5, in presenting L2 and international cultural content can be directed to the transition of outer circle countries to more political independency. Although there is a belief that in most of the outer circle countries English is recognized in a de jure manner (Bolton, 2012) in their law, education, and government, they plan to use more L1 and international cultural content in their ELT textbooks. This transition shows that while ELT material designers in the outer circle countries try to detach their cultural content from the L2 culture, they include more international cultural content to redress this detachment and promote their L2 learners’ intercultural competence.

The results of the current study, moreover, showed that the cultural content representation of the expanding circle ELT textbooks tended to include more L1 and international cultural content than L2 cultural content (Figure 5). English is considered as an international language by the people of expanding circle countries; consequently, they do not think the internalization of native-speakers’ cultural norms to be necessary (Smith, 1976). Moreover, they believe in “denationalized” ownership for English as an international language. With respect to this, McKay (2003) states that if we believe in “denationalized”, there will be no need to learn cultural information about other countries; however, the learners of expanding circle countries need to follow “sphere of interculturality” the term coined by Kramsch (1993), stating that L2 students learn other cultures through their own culture. Moreover,
the historical and political detachment (Hamiloğlu & Mendi, 2010) existing between the inner and expanding circle countries seem to have effects on the way material designers prepare ELT textbooks for expanding circle countries, trying to focus more on L1 and international cultural values and less L2 cultural content.

The second research question of this study addressed the cultural elements of the ELT textbooks of the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries in four senses: esthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic. The findings indicated that with regard to L1 cultural content represented in the
ELT textbooks of the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries, the most focus was devoted to esthetic cultural elements. As Adaskou et al. (1990) mention esthetic cultural elements related to the definition of culture in terms of big “C” sense. It is logical to think that the material developers of each of the examined ELT textbook series emphasized the esthetic cultural elements associated with their L1 to help L2 learners to learn cultural content through their own esthetic cultural elements. The big “C” cultural elements are powerful tools encompassing media and literature which can be very beneficial in L2 teaching (Kramsch, 2013). Additionally, there is a difference between the outer and expanding circle ELT textbooks and that of inner circle with regard to sociolinguistic sense of representation of L1 cultural content. The reason can be due to the fact that ELT material developers in the outer and expanding circles tend to impose L2 learners with their own cultural conventions through sociolinguistic norms.

Nevertheless, the cultural elements represented through L2 cultural content in the ELT textbooks examined in this study showed the similarity between the trends of the inner and outer circle ELT textbooks. Figures 2 and 3 indicated the similarity in the trends of these two ELT textbooks when using esthetic cultural elements. This can be explained using the notion of imperial expansion of English native-speakers’ countries in the outer circle countries which had effects on media and literature of these countries (Kachru, 1988). These effects were conveyed through media, suggesting that the ELT textbooks in the outer circle tried to demonstrate it. Interestingly enough, the opposite is true for the ELT textbooks of the expanding circle. There cannot be seen any example of esthetic L2 cultural elements in this ELT textbook (Figure 4). However, the same as other two types of ELT textbooks, the ELT textbook of expanding circle highlighted the sociological sense with regard to L2 cultural content. This is in line with Tajeddin and Teimournezhad’s (2014) findings. They were reasoning such findings are because sociological “sense encompasses everyday culture” (p. 10), leading to more contribution to matching cultural and sociocultural norms of the local society to L2 pedagogical needs.

Finally, with regard to international cultural elements of the ELT textbooks in the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries Figures (2–4) showed that the outer and expanding circles had a similar trend. This is a proof that the ELT textbooks of the outer and expanding circles tend to promote their intercultural content through using international cultural content. The outer and expanding circle ELT textbook series draw more on esthetic cultural sense. However, the ELT textbooks of the inner circle except for some very limited frequency counts (f = 3) about esthetic cultural type did not show any other intercultural element when compared to the other ELT textbooks. The ELT textbooks of the inner circle did not represent any other cultural elements, tapping on the fact that since these ELT textbooks mostly highlighted L1 and L2 cultural content and elements, they did not consider international cultural elements in their cultural content.

7. Conclusions and implications
This study was an attempt to investigate cultural content and elements represented in the ELT textbooks produced and taught in the secondary schools of the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries. The findings of the current study showed that the ELT textbooks of the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries tended to be different in the way they represented L2 and international cultural content, thus supporting the findings of the studies done previously in this respect (Hamiloglu & Mendi, 2010; Taki, 2008). The results of this study support the hypotheses that (1) different countries try to contain their L1 cultural content more than any other cultural content when developing ELT textbooks, (2) the inner circle countries highlight their L1 and L2 cultural content in the ELT textbooks, (3) the outer circle countries are in a transition path; detaching their cultural content from L2 culture and relying more on international culture to compensate for their intercultural content, and (4) the expanding circle countries are more relying on international cultural content to meet their intercultural content needs.
Addressing the cultural element senses, this study revealed that the ELT textbooks of inner, outer, and expanding circle countries used different cultural elements to represent their cultural content. While the examined ELT textbooks in this study showed similar tendency about the inclusion of L1 cultural elements, other cultural elements were allocated different attention by different ELT textbooks. The findings revealed that the ELT textbooks of inner and outer circles had the tendency to highlight the esthetic cultural elements more than other cultural elements, whereas the examined ELT textbooks of expanding circle tended to rely on esthetic and sociolinguistic senses of cultural content. This tendency, although in a weaker sense, was seen in the ELT textbooks of outer circle. It is thought that the political, economic, and cultural constrains lead material developers to use different cultural elements to represent cultural content in the ELT textbooks.

That said, the findings of the current study acknowledge the fact that the ELT textbooks of inner, outer, and expanding circles have a hidden curriculum addressing the representation of cultural content in these textbooks. This taps upon the rejection of one-size-fits-all in the ELT textbook cultural content representation (Canagarajah, 2002). This means that L2 culture is not the panacea for all language learning contexts. Given that, the ELT material developers consider a hidden curriculum in the ELT textbooks representing the L1 cultural content. This might be due the fact that the political groups have the desire of familiarizing their L2 learners with other cultures through their L1 culture. In this respect, Giroux (1988) states that “an extensive amount of research suggests that what students learn in school is shaped more by the hidden curriculum, the underlying pattern of social relationships in both the classroom and the larger school, than by the formal curriculum” (p. 51). However, for inner circle ELT textbooks the hidden curriculum is of two important roles. First, like the ELT textbooks of outer and expanding circles, they expose their native learners to their own cultural values. Second, since their ELT textbooks are used in other parts of the world as institutional ELT materials, they try to spread their cultural values.

The findings of this study bear some implications for L2 teachers and ELT material developers. The results of this study indicated that ELT textbooks emphasized L1 cultural representations more than other cultural types. More often than not, it may cause L2 learners to be less intercultural competent. However, as Adaskou et al. (1990) believe, by representing cultural content through L1 culture, L2 learners will be more motivated; consequently, it can help them in the process of language learning provided that L2 teachers focus on intercultural competence through the lens of L1 culture. On the part of ELT material developers, the results of this study, which showed the existence of culture-neutral content in the ELT textbooks of outer and expanding circles, suggest that this type of cultural content needs to be decreased since as Tajeddin and Teimournezhad’s (2014) state “such an agenda may alienate learners from the authentic, real-life cultural context and work against their awareness of culture specific features” (p. 12). Moreover, the wishy-washy of this type of cultural content may act as a barrier in the process of language learning (Abdullah & Kumari, 2009).

Finally, it should be noted that the corpus of this study was collected through the ELT textbooks published and taught in the secondary schools of three countries affiliated with inner, outer, and expanding circles. That said, other research can be done focusing on the other countries of these circles; moreover, addressing other ELT textbooks taught in other levels such as high school.
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