

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks :A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

Rania Muhammad Qassrawi*

Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Sultan Qabus University, Muscat, Oman
Department of Languages and Translation, Birzeit University, Palestine

Haya Fayyad Abu Hussien

Department of Languages and Translation, Birzeit University, Palestine

Samih Mahmoud Al Karasneh

University of Sharjah, UAE
Department of. of Education, / Yarmouk University, Jordan

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Abstract

In the context of the dynamic social and cultural transformations experienced globally, educational curricula and syllabi assume a significant role in preserving societies' values and socio-cultural identities. This qualitative study investigated the representations and misrepresentations of Arab socio-cultural identity in international English language textbooks used in middle schools in Jordan and Palestine during the academic year 2022-2023. A purposive sample of eight textbooks, published by three prominent international publishers, was subjected to content analysis. The analysis focused on socio-cultural representations of Arab identity and potential misrepresentations within these textbooks, employing a criteria checklist developed and validated for reliability and accuracy by the researchers. The findings indicated that, although the textbooks included some representations of Arab socio-cultural identity, they predominantly featured elements that contradict and undermine Arab cultural values.

Keywords: middle school, social-cultural identity, international textbooks.

1. Introduction

Like other nations, Arab countries have witnessed significant transformations in their social and cultural identities. Throughout history, Arab socio-cultural identity has been considered a distinguished heritage that contributes to their sustainability, preserves their existence, and protects societies from the influences of foreign cultures that may threaten community structures. Thus, educational systems, particularly academic programs and curricula, play a fundamental role in confronting these potential impacts. Consequently, educational programs and curricula are urged to embrace comprehensive learning experiences that enhance societies' specific cultural and social values by shaping learners' cognitive, perceptual, skill-based and emotional learning structures, especially among the most essential sources of learning responsible for providing these comprehensive experiences, which are school textbooks.

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* Corresponding Author: rqassrawi@birzeit.edu

Textbooks are a source of learning materials that can enhance students' autonomy and deepen their learning experiences (Tevdovska 2018). They are also a vital component in the teaching-learning process, providing opportunities for social interaction between learners and teachers, which stimulates students' thinking and shapes identities (Kazemi et al. 2017). Identity formation through textbooks is recognized as an inevitable learning outcome, as they immerse learners in academic experiences within a social context that can be understood and acquired in classrooms (Priyanti 2019; Köroğlu and Elban 2020). Furthermore, it is asserted that the content, topics, and activities in textbooks can enhance qualities beyond cognitive aspects, triggering and transferring cultural and social signals, especially in language instruction (Norton 2013; Priyanti 2019; Köroğlu and Elban 2020).

As language and culture are inseparable (Risager 1991; Byram and Morgan 1994; Kramsch 2005), Brown (2007) stated that "A language is part of a culture and a culture is part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either" (189). Culture is described as a set of values, traditions, and social and political connections shared by a group of people who live together and have a shared history, language, religion, geographic location, and so forth (Nieto 1996). Spencer-Oatey (2000) further defined culture as "a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, and basic assumptions and values that a group of people shares, and that influences each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of the meaning[s] of other people's behavior" (p. 4). Conversely, language functions as a system of signs born and used in a cultural context and represents the speaker's/learner's social identity (Kramsch 1998). In learning foreign languages, acquiring any language (first or second) is linked to learning and mastering the target language's culture. Thus, learning a foreign language cannot be achieved proficiently without being culturally appropriate and acquiring the cultural competence of the language as used by native speakers (Omaggio 2001). Overall, learning a foreign language and achieving its competence and proficiency entail immersion in its culture.

Integrating culture into foreign language textbooks, such as English language textbooks, is a well-recognized and essential practice, as culture and language are intertwined. Teaching a language outside of its social and cultural context can be an incomplete mission (Rodríguez and Espinar 2015). For instance, English (British or American) culture can be portrayed in English textbooks by presenting values, beliefs, and practices based on people's cultural and social perspectives (Lie 2017; García-Pastor 2018). Such textbooks should be rich in socio-cultural representations because they are designed and published to represent foreign cultures (Gao et al. 2015). It has also been confirmed (Omaggio 2001; Mandarani et al. 2021) that English language textbooks should include context-appropriate content about the realities of the target language and its culture to enhance learners' foreign language proficiency. Cultural aspects in textbooks are divided into observable or material elements, such as clothing, food, language, and geography, as well as non-material elements, including values, beliefs, religion, and social norms. Culture can be categorized into "big C," which includes norms like history, politics, geography, and education, and "small c," characterized by lifestyles, food, greetings and body language.

Furthermore, English language textbooks worldwide tend to represent culture in three ways. The first category, "Source Culture Textbooks," is regarded as a primary cultural source, particularly as they are

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

designed to represent aspects of the foreign language learners' native culture (McKay, 2000). The second category, "Target Culture Materials," includes textbooks that target and present the culture of learners who speak English as their first language. The third type, "International Culture Textbooks," is designed for global students and adopts an intercultural approach, representing the culture of any country in the world (McKay 2000; Awayed-Bishara 2015; Rodríguez and Espinar 2015; Kazemi et al. 2017).

International English language textbooks, a focal point in the current study, are designed and published by native speakers from the perspectives of foreign publishers for use in numerous countries worldwide, including Arab countries. Consequently, in the Arab context, international English language textbooks implemented in Arab private schools are expected to expose students to language and learning resources that address representations of different cultures globally while avoiding culturally sensitive issues that may threaten the unique values of Arab socio-cultural unity and identity, in alignment with the Charter of Arab Cultural Unity and the Constitution of the Organization (2016).

This study purposefully investigated international English language textbooks for middle school students (ages 12-14) as this level represents a critical stage in identity development, based on Erikson's Psycho-social Development Theory (1968). According to Erikson (1968), teenagers are highly influenced by sociocultural factors and variables that shape their identity. Erikson also identified adolescence (ages 12-18) as a crucial period for developing individuals' social and cultural traits. This development is a complex process influenced by social, cultural, environmental, and personal interactions, which extend beyond family, friends, and peers to include various educational experiences and curricula. Additionally, some social and cultural exchanges present challenges and opportunities that shape learners' self-esteem and social position. Failure in this process can result in what is known as identity confusion (Harklau and Moreno 2019).

The current study was instigated by the researchers' field observations, particularly during Practicum courses where they supervised student teachers during their in-field training. This provided the researchers with a deeper insight into the international English language textbooks used in the hosting schools. Analyzing the content of these textbooks has become significant due to the cultural and social context they provide in classroom discussions and interactions. This significance was also highlighted in the feedback from student-teachers after completing their field training courses. Moreover, previous literature and studies have consistently confirmed that language textbooks significantly impact learners' personal, social and global identities at different school stages. Additionally, the correlation between language learning and the formation of social and cultural identities has been well-documented (McKay and Wong 1996; Peirce 1995; Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Garcia 2005; Oriyama, 2010; Norton and Toohey 2011; Andrews 2013; Flores et al. 2015; Gao et al. 2015; Baxter 2016; Danping 2016; Lie 2017; Collett 2018; García-Pastor 2018; Harklau and Moreno 2019; Priyanti 2019; Koroğlu and Elban 2020; Rezaei 2021).

This study investigated the representations and misrepresentations of Arab socio-cultural identity in international English language textbooks used in middle private schools in Jordan and Palestine during

the academic year 2022-2023 by analyzing eight textbooks, published by three prominent international publishers.

1.1 Questions of the Study

This study aimed to counter two main questions.

RQ1: Is the Arab social-cultural identity represented in the international English language textbooks applied in the Jordanian and Palestinian private middle schools and how?

RQ2: Is the Arab social-cultural identity misrepresented in the international English language textbooks applied in the Jordanian and Palestinian private middle schools and how??

1.2 Definitions of Terms

1.2.1 International English language textbooks

International English language textbooks refer to a diverse range of textbooks introduced by Western and international publishers and agencies for use in private schools in Arab countries.

Operationally, the international English language textbooks in the recent study refer to three international English as a second language (ESL) textbook publishers (MacMillan et al.) for the middle school stage (Grade 7-Grade 9).

1.2.2 Middle School

Middle School is an educational stage that refers to the teenage phase where students age between (12-13Y). This stage ranges between Grade 7 to Grade 9. Hence, it was selected purposefully as teenagers, according to Erikson (1968), can be highly affected by social-cultural factors and variables that influence their identities.

2. Methodology

In a qualitative approach, the current study examined the representation and possible misrepresentations of Arab social and cultural identity features in international English language textbooks. Therefore, the Arab cultural representation and the cultural misrepresentations embedded in such textbooks were explored following a content analysis method.

2.1 The Context of the Study

The current research effort investigated the representations and inclusion of Arab social and cultural features in international English language textbooks parallel with the misrepresentations. Two types of English language textbooks have been applied in Arab countries, as discussed earlier, categorized as source culture textbooks and international language textbooks. The *Source Culture Textbooks* indicate the textbooks developed to address the Arab learners' culture, so they are officially regarded as the primary textbooks for public/ governmental schools. Action Pack and English for Palestine are source culture textbooks in Jordan and Palestine. On the other hand, international English language textbooks are applied mainly in private schools in these two Arab countries.

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

2.2 Data and Textbook Selection

In the current study, the textbooks were selected by following specific systematic steps. At first, a list of international English language textbooks used in Jordan and Palestine was obtained from the ministries of education in these two countries. Then, three international English as a second language (ESL) textbook publishers (MacMillan, Oxford University Press, Pearson) were selected. After that, three series of textbooks (from Grade 7-Grade 9), which sprang from the mentioned publishers and were used at Jordanian and Palestinian private schools, were selected as a sample in this study. The titles of international English language textbooks are displayed in Table (1) below.

Table 1: International English Language Textbooks Content-analyzed in the Current Study

Publisher	Textbooks and Year	Grade	Country
Pearson	Longman Keystone – A (2007)	Grade 7	Palestine
	Longman Keystone – B (2007)	Grade 8	Palestine
	Longman Keystone – C (2007)	Grade 9	Palestine
MacMillan	Headway Plus- Pre-intermediate (2016)	Grade 7	Palestine/ Jordan
	Headway Plus- intermediate (2016)	Grade 8	Palestine/Jordan
Oxford University Press	English World -7 (2018)	Grade 7	Palestine/Jordan
	English World-8 (2018)	Grade 8	Palestine/Jordan
	English World-9 (2018)	Grade 9	Palestine/Jordan

Table (1) shows that three international English language textbooks were selected to be content-analyzed in the current study. It is worth noting that the three series belong to three famous ESL textbook publishers worldwide and have been used at the middle school level (Grade 7—Grade 9) in Jordan and Palestine. This range of textbooks was selected due to the significance of this stage (teenage) in shaping adolescents' identity based on the Social Developmental Theory presented by Erikson (1968).

2.3 Textbooks Analysis

Content analysis is regarded as a method for analyzing any communication material's manifest or latent content by categorizing, formulating and evaluating the content using coding and inducting themes (Krippendorff 2018). In the context of the current study, the unit of analysis in addition to the criteria applied are displayed as follows:

2.3.1 Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis used in the current investigation were the themes, questions, texts and illustrations presented in the international English language textbooks.

2.3.2 Criteria of Analysis

The researchers designed and formulated the analysis criteria based on the Charter of the Arab Cultural Unity (2016), considering the previous analysis frameworks (e.g., Byram and Morgan 1994; Byram 1989; Risager 1991; Byram et al. 2002).

The Charter of the Arab Cultural Unity (2016) has been the base for establishing the Arab League as a cooperation between Arab countries in different sectors (i.e., education) to preserve the Arab cultural heritage as one nation. The Charter of the Arab Cultural Unity (2016) states to preserve the coherence and

unity of the Arab culture through education, such as raising the awareness of Arab generations, who are proud of their beliefs, values, customs and traditions. These enlightened generations should also be raised to have faith and confidence in their nation parallel with being open to other cultures and aware of their humanitarian role by adhering to their ethics and values to grow in balance.

Thus, pre-determined criteria used in the current analysis were based on the Charter of the Arab Cultural Unity and consulting the previous framework of study (i.e., Byram and Morgan 1994; Byram 1989; Risager 1991; Byram et al. 2002). A sample of these criteria is displayed in Table (2) below.

Table 2: A Sample of the Criteria and Indicators Utilized in Content-Analyzing English Textbooks

Criteria	Indicators Based on the Charter of Arab Cultural Unity and Social Foundations of Curricula
1. Social unity	<p>1. Social Equity and Status in Arab Culture Under this category, the content (text, illustrations, questions and themes) is expected to highlight the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of education and achieving academic degrees in Arab countries. • Significance of work and occupation/ employment in the Arab World in any field (e.g. academic, vocational, or crafts, such as shepherd hood, farming). • Location and type of housing in the Arab World (e.g. owning a house vs. renting an apartment; living in urban and rural places). • Social networks in the Arab World (e.g. family gatherings, friendship unions, tribes cooperation ...etc). <p>2. Respect for Ethnic Minority in Arab countries Under this category, the content (text, illustrations, questions and themes) is expected to highlight the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for cultural practices and traditions (such as food, dress, and religious rituals); • Respect for religious and historical places and monuments (churches, ceremonies..) • Experience of prejudice and discrimination. • Sense of belonging to a wider ethnic group.

Table (2) shows that specific criteria and indicators were used in the analysis. It is worth stating that nine (9) criteria were utilized in the current investigation. Each criterion implied other sub-indicators generated in harmony with the features of the Arab social and cultural identity features (For the whole criteria and indicators used in the current study see, Appendix A)

2.4 Validity and Reliability

Concerning data validity, the pre-determined criteria used in this analysis were validated by (10) experts from different countries (Kuwait, Jordan, and Palestine). They were also specialists in other fields: educational psychology, educational sociology, social studies education, curriculum and instruction, and curriculum and teaching of English as a foreign language. Some amendments were made, such as merging some criteria, based on the jury of experts' remarks and suggestions.

The reliability of the obtained data and results was achieved by conducting inter and intra-coding techniques. The inter-reliability was performed by involving two analysts. The researchers compared the percentage of agreement between the two coders' analysis checklists. After this comparison, the reliability indicator was high, and it reached 97%. It was calculated using Holsti's method (Holsti, 1969;

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

Wang, 2011), and the findings were as follows: $Pao = 2A / (N1+N2) = 2(295)/308+2952 = 590/603 = 0,97$ (97%).

3. Findings

The current investigation was instigated to identify the representations of the Arab social-cultural identity and the possible misrepresentations included in three international English language textbooks. The results, regarding the representations of the Arab social-cultural identity in these textbooks, the misrepresentations, and their distribution, are displayed in the Tables below.

3.1 Representations

To begin with, the representations of the Arab social-cultural identity that were inducted from the Longman Keystone series (A, B, and C), English World Textbooks, and New Headway series, the results of which are displayed in Tables (3), (4), and (5).

Table 3: The Representations of the Arab Social-Cultural Identity Included in Longman Keystone Textbooks Series

Textbooks Criteria	Textbooks: Longman Keystone A, B, C				
	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
1. Social Unity	0	2	2	4	17.3%
a. Social Equity and Status in Arab Culture					
b. Respect for Ethnic Minority in Arab countries					
2. Social Contact and Interaction	0	1	0	1	4.3%
a. Interaction among Social Group/s in Arab Culture					
3. Belief and Lifestyle	0	0	1	1	4.3%
a. Moral and Religious Beliefs in Arab Culture					
b. Routines and Lifestyle in the Arab World					
4. Socio-political Institutions	0	1	1	2	8.6%
a. Significance of Health Care in Arab culture.					
b. Social Security, Governments, Law and Order in Arab Countries					
5. Socialization	0	2	3	5	21.7%
a. Family Image and Significance in Arab Culture					
b. Significance of Schools and Education in Arab Culture					
c. Ceremonies and Celebrations in Arab Culture					
6. National Geography	0	1	0	1	4.3%
a. Geographical Locations and Sites in the Arab World					
b. Land Uses and Ownership in the Arab World					
c. Architecture and Infrastructure in the Arab World					
7. Cultural and Historical Heritage	1	2	1	4	17.3%
a. Historical Sites and Monuments in the Arab World					
b. Arts and Crafts in Arab Culture					
c. Literature and (Language) in Arab Culture					

Textbooks	Textbooks: Longman Keystone A, B, C				
Criteria	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
8. International and Intercultural Communication	0	1	1	2	8.6%
a. Representation of Knowledge, skills and attitudes about Arab Culture					
9. Stereotypes	0	1	2	3	13%
a. Stereotypes about the Arab Identity or Culture (e.g. positive, negative)					
b. Stereotypes about Arabs as Individuals (e.g. positive, negative).					
Total	1	11	11	23	100%

As shown in Table (3), the Longman Keystone series (A, B, and C) published by Pearson has only twenty-three (23) representations. It is also evident that 21% of such representations were related to *Socialization*, which had ten (10) representations. In contrast, cultural and historical heritage and social unity were represented by eight (8) representations only (for detailed representations, see Appendix B).

Regarding the representations included in English World Textbooks, Table (4) displayed the results.

Table 4: The Social-Cultural Representations Included in English World Textbooks 7,8 and 9.

Textbooks	Textbooks/ English World 7+8+9				
Criteria	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
1. Social Unity	0	0	2	2	3.70%
a. Social Equity and Status in Arab Culture					
b. Respect for Ethnic Minority in Arab countries					
2. Social Contact and Interaction	0	8	0	8	14.81%
a. Interaction among Social Group/s in Arab Culture					
3. Belief and Lifestyle	0	5	4	9	16.67%
a. Moral and Religious Beliefs in Arab Culture					
b. Routines and Lifestyle in the Arab World					
4. Socio-political Institutions	0	0	0	0	0
a. Significance of Health Care in Arab Culture.					
b. Social Security, Governments, Law and Order in Arab Countries					
5. Socialization					
a. Family Image and Significance in Arab Culture	1	3	9	13	24.07%
b. Significance of Schools and Education in Arab Culture					
c. Ceremonies and Celebrations in Arab Culture					
6. National Geography					
a. Geographical Locations and Sites in the Arab World	0	7	4	11	20.37%
b. Land Uses and Ownership in the Arab World					
c. Architecture and Infrastructure in the Arab World					
7. Cultural and Historical Heritage					
a. Historical Sites and Monuments in the Arab World	0	2	9	11	20.37%
b. Arts and Crafts in Arab Culture					
c. Literature and (Language) in Arab Culture					

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

Textbooks Criteria	Themes and Questions	Textbooks/ English World 7+8+9			
		Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
8. International and Intercultural Communication a. Representation of Knowledge, skills and attitudes about Arab Culture	0	0	0	0	0
9. Stereotypes a. Stereotypes about the Arab Identity or Culture (e.g. positive, negative) b. Stereotypes about Arabs as Individuals (e.g. positive, negative).	0	0	0	0	0
Total				54	100%

As displayed in Table (4), the frequencies of the social-cultural representations obtained from English World textbooks were (54) distributed over some categories. *Socialization* obtained the highest frequency (24.07%), followed by National Geography and Cultural and Historical Heritage, with 11 frequencies (20.37%) for each. *Belief* and *Lifestyle* were represented with nine frequencies (16.67%), followed by *Social Contact and Interaction* and *Social Unity* with eight frequencies (14.81%) and two frequencies (3.70%), respectively. Table 4 also reveals the absence of other cultural categories, including Socio-political Institutions, International and Intercultural Communication, and *Stereotypes*. (for the detailed representations, see Appendix B).

The findings regarding the social-cultural representations detected in the New Head Textbook series are displayed in Table (5) below.

Table 5: The Social-Cultural Representations Included in New Headway Textbooks

Textbooks Criteria	Themes and Questions	Textbooks: New Headway/ Pre-intermediate and Intermediate			
		Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
1. Social Unity a. Social Equity and Status in Arab Culture b. Respect for Ethnic Minority in Arab countries	0	0	1	1	2.5%
2. Social Contact and Interaction a. Interaction among Social Group/s in Arab Culture	0	7	2	9	22.5%
3. Belief and Lifestyle a. Moral and Religious Beliefs in Arab Culture b. Routines and Lifestyle in the Arab World	1	0	3	4	10%
4. Socio-political Institutions a. Significance of Health Care in Arab culture. b. Social Security, Governments, Law and Order in Arab Countries	0	0	0	0	0%
5. Socialization a. Family Image and Significance in Arab Culture b. Significance of Schools and Education in Arab Culture c. Ceremonies and Celebrations in Arab Culture	0	1	5	6	15%
6. National Geography a. Geographical Locations and Sites in the Arab World b. Land Uses and Ownership in the Arab World c. Architecture and Infrastructure in the Arab World	0	10	2	12	30%
7. Cultural and Historical Heritage a. Historical Sites and Monuments in the Arab World b. Arts and Crafts in Arab Culture c. Literature and (Language) in Arab Culture	0	4	4	8	20%

Textbooks Criteria	Textbooks: New Headway/ Pre-intermediate and Intermediate				
	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
8. International and Intercultural Communication	0	0	0	0	0
a. Representation of Knowledge, skills, and attitudes about Arab Culture					
9. Stereotypes	0	0	0	0	0
a. Stereotypes about the Arab Identity or Culture (e.g. positive, negative)					
b. Stereotypes about Arabs as Individuals (e.g. positive, negative).					
Total				40	100%

As presented in Table (5), the frequencies and percentages of social-cultural representations obtained from Headway textbooks were (40). *National Geography* achieved the most dominant value with 12 (30%) frequencies, followed directly by *Social Contact and Interaction* with 9 (22.5%) frequencies. *Socialization* was also represented with six frequencies (15%). Other cultural representations have shown low frequencies; for example, *Belief and Lifestyle* had only four frequencies (10%), and *Social Unity* appeared with one occurrence (2.5%). However, there were no representations of other categories, such as *Socio-political Institutions*, *International and Intercultural Communication*, and *Stereotypes*. Overall, it can be concluded that the representations of the Arab social-cultural identity in the nine (9) books were one hundred seventeen (117) representations divided on some criteria, such as *Socialization*, *National Geography*, and *Cultural-historical Heritage*.

3.2 Misrepresentations

Based on the content analysis conducted in the current study, the misrepresentations of the Arab social-cultural identity spotted in the Longman Keystone series (A, B, and C), English World Textbooks, and New Headway series were displayed in Tables (6), (7), and (8).

Table 6: The Social-Cultural Misrepresentations Included in Longman Keystone Textbooks Series

Textbooks Criteria	Textbook: Longman Keystone (A, B, C)				
	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
1. Social Unity	0	0	0	0	0 %
a. Social Equity and Status in Arab Culture					
b. Respect for Ethnic Minority in Arab countries					
2. Social Contact and Interaction	1	6	7	14	27.4%
a. Interaction among Social Group/s in Arab Culture					
3. Belief and Lifestyle	0	16	0	16	31.3%
a. Moral and Religious Beliefs in Arab Culture					
b. Routines and Lifestyle in the Arab World					
4. Socio-political Institutions	0	0	0	0	0%
a. Significance of Health Care in Arab Culture.					
b. Social Security, Governments, Law and Order in Arab Countries					
5. Socialization	0	7	1	8	15.6%
a. Family Image and Significance in Arab Culture					
b. Significance of Schools and Education in Arab Culture					
c. Ceremonies and Celebrations in Arab Culture					
6. National Geography	0	0	0	0	0 %
a. Geographical Locations and Sites in the Arab World					
b. Land Uses and Ownership in the Arab World					
c. Architecture and Infrastructure in the Arab World					

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

Textbooks Criteria	Textbook: Longman Keystone (A, B, C)				
	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
7. Cultural and Historical Heritage	0	0	0	0	0%
a. Historical Sites and Monuments in the Arab World					
b. Arts and Crafts in Arab Culture					
c. Literature and (Language) in Arab Culture					
8. International and Intercultural Communication	0	0	1	1	1.9%
a. Representation of Knowledge, skills and attitudes about Arab Culture					
9. Stereotypes	0	2	10	12	23.5%
a. Stereotypes about the Arab Identity or Culture (e.g. positive, negative)					
b. Stereotypes about Arabs as Individuals (e.g. positive, negative).					
Total	1	31	19	51	100%

Table (6) shows that more than fifty (50) misrepresentations of the Arab social-cultural identity were in the Longman Keystone series. These misrepresentations were categorized under *Belief and Lifestyle* (31%), *Social Contact and Interaction* (27%), *Stereotypes and Socialization* (23.5%). (For the detailed misrepresentations, see Appendix B). As for the English World Textbooks series, the misrepresentations are presented in Table (7) below.

Table 7: The Social-Cultural Misrepresentations Included in English World Textbooks

Textbooks Criteria	Textbooks/ English World 7+8+9				
	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
1. Social Unity	0	3	3	6	6.06%
a. Social Equity and Status in Arab Culture					
b. Respect for Ethnic Minority in Arab countries					
2. Social Contact and Interaction	0	0			
a. Interaction among Social Group/s in Arab Culture			67	67	67.67%
3. Belief and Lifestyle	0	3			
a. Moral and Religious Beliefs in Arab Culture			17	20	20.20%
b. Routines and Lifestyle in the Arab World					
4. Socio-political Institutions	0	0			
a. Significance of Health Care in Arab Culture.			0	0	0
b. Social Security, Governments, Law and Order in Arab Countries					
5. Socialization	0	2			
a. Family Image and Significance in Arab Culture			3	5	5.05%
b. Significance of Schools and Education in Arab Culture					
c. Ceremonies and Celebrations in Arab Culture					
6. National Geography	0	0			
a. Geographical Locations and Sites in the Arab World			0	0	0
b. Land Uses and Ownership in the Arab World					
c. Architecture and Infrastructure in the Arab World					

Textbooks	Textbooks/ English World 7+8+9				
Criteria	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
7. Cultural and Historical Heritage	0	0			
a. Historical Sites and Monuments in the Arab World			0	0	0
b. Arts and Crafts in Arab Culture					
c. Literature and (Language) in Arab Culture					
8. International and Intercultural Communication	0	0			
a. Representation of Knowledge, skills and attitudes about Arab Culture			0	0	0
9. Stereotypes	0	1			
a. Stereotypes about the Arab Identity or Culture (e.g. positive, negative)			0	1	1.01%
b. Stereotypes about Arabs as Individuals (e.g., positive, negative).					
Total				99	100%

As shown in Table (7), the frequency of the cultural misrepresentations obtained from English World Textbooks was 99. *Social Contact and Interaction* had the highest number of frequencies (67.67%), followed by *Belief and Lifestyle* with 20 frequencies (20.20%). It is also evident that *Social Unity* and *Socialization* had close frequencies, with 6 (6.06%) and 5 (5.05%) for each, respectively. One (1) Stereotype threat was also obtained having a percentage of (1.01%). Nonetheless, other cultural aspects did not show any misrepresentations including *Socio-political Institutions*, *National Geography*, *Cultural and Historical Heritage*, and *International and Intercultural Communication*.

The results are presented in Table 8 below in the New Headway Textbooks.

Table 8: The Social-Cultural Misrepresentations Included in Headway Textbooks/ Pre-intermediate and Intermediate

Textbooks	Textbooks: New Headway / Pre-Intermediate and Intermediate				
Criteria	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
1. Social Identity and Unity	0	0	0	0	0
a. Social Equity and Status in Arab Culture					
b. Respect for Ethnic Minority in Arab Countries					
2. Social Contact and Interaction	0	0	6	6	14.63%
a. Interaction among Social Group/s in Arab Culture					
3. Belief and Lifestyle	0	5	14	19	46.34%
a. Moral and Religious Beliefs in Arab Culture					
b. Routines and Lifestyle in the Arab World					
4. Socio-political Institutions	0	0	0	0	0
a. Significance of Health Care in Arab culture.					
b. Social Security, Governments, Law and Order in Arab Countries					
5. Socialization	0	10	2	12	29.29%
a. Family Image and Significance in Arab Culture					
b. Significance of Schools and Education in Arab Culture					
c. Ceremonies and Celebrations in Arab Culture					

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

Textbooks	Textbooks: New Headway / Pre-Intermediate and Intermediate				
Criteria	Themes and Questions	Texts	Illustrations	Total	Percentages
6. National Geography	0	0	0	0	0
a. Geographical Locations and Sites in the Arab World					
b. Land Uses and Ownership in the Arab World					
c. Architecture and Infrastructure in the Arab World					
7. Cultural and Historical Heritage	0	0	0	0	0
a. Historical Sites and Monuments in the Arab World					
b. Arts and Crafts in Arab Culture					
c. Literature and (Language) in Arab Culture					
8. International and Intercultural Communication	0	0	0	0	0
a. Representation of Knowledge, skills and attitudes about Arab Culture					
9. Stereotypes	0	0	4	4	9.75%
a. Stereotypes about the Arab Identity or Culture (e.g., positive, negative)					
b. Stereotypes about Arabs as Individuals (e.g., positive, negative).					
Total				41	100%

As shown in Table (8), the frequency of the social-cultural misrepresentations obtained from Headway Textbooks was 41. *Belief and Lifestyle* had the highest number of frequencies (46.34), followed by *Socialization* (29%). It is also apparent that *Social Contact and Interaction* achieved (14.6%) of the misrepresentations, and (9.7%) were categorized under *Stereotypes*. Nonetheless, no misrepresentations were categorized under some categories, such as *Socio-political Institutions*, *National Geography*, *Cultural and Historical Heritage* and *International and Intercultural Communication*.

Based on the above tables, it can be concluded that the misrepresentations of the Arab social-cultural identity in the nine (9) books were one hundred ninety-one (191) misrepresentations divided on some criteria, such as Beliefs and Lifestyles, Social Contact and Interaction, and Stereotype.

4. Discussion

Upon close analysis of the results in the previous section, it can be stated in light of the research questions, that although international English language textbooks analyzed in the current study included Arab social-cultural representations, they embraced way more misrepresentations that must be highlighted in the light of the Charter of the Arab Cultural Unity (2016) that emphasizes preserving the coherence and unity of the Arab culture through education by bringing up Arab generations who are proud of their beliefs, values, customs and traditions.

Most representations were related to socialization, national geography, and historical *heritage*. Besides, most of the representations under the mentioned categories can be regarded as international cultural aspects and general values, such as taking care of elderly people, family gatherings, cleanliness and so forth, not exclusively representing the social-cultural aspects of Arabs. Some other representations were also related to the historical places and remarks. Jerusalem in Palestine, Pyramids in Egypt, and Burj

Al-Arab in Dubai, for instance, were some of the historical sites and landmarks in Arab countries highlighted in these textbooks, in addition to listing some Arabic names in some texts. These representations, moreover, belong to the materialistic and general aspects of culture, such as history, art, and music (small “c”), not to the cultural components that are related to values, lifestyle, and beliefs (big “C”), which are relevant to developing a coherent social-cultural identity.

The few representations included in the analyzed textbooks can be interpreted in the context of presenting the general Arab culture based on the worldly and tourism perspective. However, exhibiting the specific values of the culture that can be generated from Arabs’ beliefs and lifestyles was ignored.

These neglected values have been confirmed as a milestone in shaping identities, especially among teenagers in middle schools. As a result, the social-culture aspects and values of Arab students’ personalities in middle school in the analyzed textbooks were replaced by foreign values or international values that may be established for global teenage citizens, but that can also result in Arab citizens who experience confusion in their social-cultural identity, as the specific values of culture have obvious impacts in shaping coherent identity among adolescents (Erikson 1968; Hihara et al. 2019; Branje et al. 2021). Therefore, implementing these textbooks with the scarcity of social-cultural representations may result in negative impacts and contradict the recommendations of the Charter of Arab Cultural Unity (2016) that urged for enhancing the Arab social-cultural identity aspects among new generations through education and curriculum. Furthermore, the low representation of some Arab cultural values and the total absence of others can be regarded as threatening to the coherence of the Arab learners’ cultural identity. These findings may be in harmony with previous studies (Yuen 2011; MostafaeiAlaei and Ghamari, 2014; Gao et al. 2015; Rodríguez and Espinar 2015).

Regarding the misrepresentations inducted from the international English language textbooks in the current study, it is evident that the misrepresentations outweighed the representations, and most of them were grouped under main categories, such as Belief and Lifestyle, Social Contact and Interaction; Stereotypes and Socialization. Most of the misrepresentations were related to presenting Greek ideas, such as the presence of gods, goodness, and other myths. In addition, the lifestyle presented in most texts and revealed in many illustrations was the Western lifestyle that portrayed a family with a single mother or father, boy-girl friendship and co-education among teenagers, dating and romantic conversations and images. Other misrepresentations, additionally, were related to a negative stereotype about Arabs that displayed them as refugees and tribes living in deserts. Some also were related to the costumes, especially for women, that demonstrated many pictures with inappropriate clothing in a way that did not respect the Arab social-cultural perspective that considers covering bodies as an essential element in the Arab heritage. One of the significant misrepresentations that emerged in the findings and should be highlighted was triggering sensitive political issues that concern most Arabs, especially regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In one of the textbooks (Keystone C, p156-159), Palestine was replaced with Israel as the leading country in the Middle East, and other texts included Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon as countries that should cooperate to achieve understanding in the Middle East as “Peace Seeds.” Regardless of the internationally controversial perspectives towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, presenting such a

Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

sensitive issue in International textbooks by adopting the Israeli viewpoint can be a significant threat that may pass hidden curriculum to Arab Palestinian teenage students.

Interpreting such misrepresentations in the context of forming Arab social-cultural identity among teenagers, it can be stated that although the Arab social-cultural representations were related to the general values and perspectives about Arabs, the misrepresentations belonged to the domain of demolishing the specific values that are in charge of shaping the social-cultural identity of adolescents at middle school. Thus, they can acquaint incoherent social-cultural identity that has a global mindset and lacks unity in their personalities as Arabs. According to Erikson (1968), this may lead to generations that experience social-cultural dilemmas and are ambivalent towards their culture. This came in vein with previous studies that insisted on creating harmony between the cultural content and the learners' culture (Smith 1983; Post and Rathlet 1996; Li 2004; Hihara et al. 2019; Branje et al. 2021).

5. Conclusions

This study investigated the representations and misrepresentations of Arab socio-cultural identity in international English language textbooks used in middle schools in Jordan and Palestine through analyzing eight textbooks, published by three international publishers. The results indicated that, although the textbooks included some representations of Arab socio-cultural identity, they predominantly featured elements that contradict and misrepresent Arab cultural values. Based on the content analysis conducted in the current study, some conclusions can be drawn:

- As a leading learning resource, international English textbooks can shape learners' social, cultural and civilizational identities. Therefore, international English language textbooks used in Arab private schools can be a two-edged sword that exposes learners to foreign cultures to achieve language proficiency. In contrast, they may include multiple misrepresentations that must be highlighted and dealt with cautiously.
- International English language textbooks include diverse and attractive learning resources, such as illustrations, texts, and questions with social and cultural representations that may be familiar or odd to the Arab context (misrepresentations). These can significantly influence students' comprehensive learning, which is incredibly emotional, affective, and social, known as the accompanying effects (positive or negative) of hidden curricula.
- Any learning resource included in English language textbooks comprises implicit and explicit (latent and manifest) content. Analyzing such content can be sensitive as teaching a foreign language embraces diverse cultural aspects encompassing knowledge, concepts, ideas, stories, situations, narratives and events. Introducing such elements can also tap into the learners' subconsciousness, especially during adolescence (12-18), which may cause confusion in the students' cultural, social, and civilizational identity and can trigger specific responses and formulate attitudes.

- Acquiring languages parallel to the context and culture is inevitable as this can promote students' linguistic and cultural awareness, especially in teenagers (12-18). However, many Arab students learn and study English as a foreign language utilizing international English textbooks that may contain threatening content and themes that are culturally and socially related to the specific values of the publishers' (foreign) contexts. This may cause contradictions and confusion between Arab students and foreign cultures, resulting in dilemmas in identity and cultural conflicts.
- Identifying potential misrepresentations in international English language textbooks and taking proactive actions can be of significance, so Arab educational specialists should perform an evaluation and review process before introducing such textbooks to students.
- Training and preparing English language teachers to content-analyze international English textbooks based on the social-cultural framework of the Arab identity can be essential to acquaint them with skills that enable them to be critical when assessing any learning resource they need to expose their students to. As a result, teachers may become qualified to identify and tackle the harm of the implicit and hidden misrepresentations transmitted by any learning resources(texts, pictures, questions and so forth).

Before utilizing international textbooks, foreign textbook publishing institutions worldwide should be acknowledged with a reference framework and specific criteria that suit the Arab context and should be adhered to. This is to avoid provoking any cultural sensitivity and dilemmas.

حضور الهوية الاجتماعية الثقافية العربية في كتب اللغة الإنجليزية الدولية: دراسة في المدارس
الإعدادية الخاصة في فلسطين والأردن

رانيا محمد قصراوي

قسم المناهج وطرق التدريس، جامعة السلطان قابوس، مسقط، عُمان
قسم اللغات والترجمة، جامعة بيرزيت، فلسطين

هيا فياض أبو حسين

قسم اللغات والترجمة، جامعة بيرزيت، فلسطين

سميح محمود الكراسنة

جامعة الشارقة، الإمارات العربية المتحدة
قسم التربية / جامعة اليرموك، الأردن

الملخص

في سياق التحولات الاجتماعية والثقافية الديناميكية التي يشهدها العالم، تلعب المناهج والمقررات المدرسية دوراً مهماً في الحفاظ على قيم المجتمعات وهوياتها الاجتماعية والثقافية. وبذلك، هدفت هذه الدراسة النوعية في البحث في التمثيلات والتحديات للهوية الاجتماعية والثقافية العربية المتضمنة في كتب اللغة الإنجليزية الدولية المستخدمة في المدارس المتوسطة (الإعدادية) في الأردن وفلسطين والمطبقة خلال العام الدراسي 2022-2023، وتكونت عينة الكتب من ثمانية كتب مدرسية نشرت من قبل ثلاث دور نشر دولية بارزة، ولتحليل محتواها تحليلًا قصدياً. ركز التحليل على التمثيلات الاجتماعية والثقافية للهوية العربية والتحديات المحتملة وذلك باستخدام قائمة مرجعية للمعايير التي تم تطويرها والتحقق من صحتها من حيث الموثوقية والدقة من قبل الباحثين، وأشارت النتائج إلى أنه على الرغم من أن الكتب المدرسية تضمنت بعض تمثيلات للهوية الاجتماعية والثقافية العربية، فإنها تضمنت مكونات تتعارض وتتنافى مع القيم الثقافية العربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرحلة المتوسطة (الإعدادية)، الهوية الاجتماعية الثقافية، المقررات المدرسية الدولية.

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A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

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Arab Social-Cultural Identity Presence in International English Language Textbooks:
A Study at Private Middle Schools in Palestine and Jordan

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