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An analysis of the English textbook for secondary students in Meghalaya: The Text as a mirror of cultures

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Abstract:

English textbooks for schools have an important role to play whether in developing literary competence or communicative competence. The literary text including school textbooks for English have always been a great source both for cultural awareness and cultural preservation. The study seeks to find out the cultural content of the English Textbook prescribed for class IX Students in Meghalaya as per the State Board. The main objectives of the study are to seek the teachers' opinion of the textbook based on its cultural content and to analyse the textbook. Descriptive research method was adopted, the sample included secondary school teachers. Questionnaire and content analysis have been used for data sources and analysis. The main findings reveal that the textbook contains cultural content ranging from source culture to target culture and even to international target culture. A significant finding from both the teachers' opinion and textbook analysis by the researcher is that source culture is evident in the text highlighting the diverse Indian cultures but neglecting the local contextualization or in other words the local source culture which has been identified as an essential component in National Curriculum Framework for School education 2023 recommended as per National Education Policy, 2020.

Keywords: Cultural content, textbook analysis, local culture.

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INTRODUCTION:

The textbooks have always served as important sources of knowledge and

information. Textbooks have even a greater role than merely transacting the syllabus. No

doubt the textbooks and the syllabus form an essential component under a curriculum, but the content in the textbooks can educate our learners in different ways from different perspectives and for varied purposes. Similarly in the context of learning English, English literature textbooks have a significant role to play in enabling our learners to learn a language while also learning relevant language skills, develop awareness about the different cultures through the cultural representation in the text. It must be borne in mind that Text books must be written in collaboration among concerned authorities and to write good textbooks, they should be prepared on the basis of the needs, interests and ability of learners and modified according to the demand of time and context (Dammar Singh Saud, 2022).

Statement of the problem

The study has been conducted due to the growing concern about the quality of school textbooks from the perspective of the textbook as a source material for promoting cultural values through its cultural content. Most of the textbooks represent imbalance in terms of distribution of cultural content especially with regards to the local content. A need was felt to study the Secondary

School level English textbook and its cultural content.

Objectives

1. The main objectives of the study are to seek the teachers' opinion of the textbook based on its cultural content
2. To analyse the English Reader for Class IX incorporating the Cortazzi & Jin model

2. Review of related literature

Textbooks have a very significant role to play in the teaching learning process. English literature goes beyond transfer of mere factual knowledge and information but by transferring the different cultures embedded in the text. Al-Haj Eid et al. (2023) reveals the cultural home where all the respondents strongly agreed that the inclusion of literature components contribute to transferring cultures of other nations. Several studies examining cultural content in English textbooks have been administered over the last couple of years, with different focal points and results (e.g., Awayed-Bishara, 2015; Kazemi et al., 2017; Medina, 2008; Rodríguez & Espinar, 2015). The studies conclude that cultural representations are present in the investigated textbooks, but to different extents. There is also a noticeable

variation in what types of cultural content are represented in the textbooks. The results of some textbook studies have indicated that the balance between source culture, target culture and international culture is quantitatively equal in the textbooks, while others have identified the opposite (e.g., Siddiqie, 2011 and Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015). The categories of culture in the text or textbook included source culture, target culture and international culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). A general finding is that while some text included more of target cultures some differ. The predominance of target cultures in the textbooks has been identified in the study, *An Analysis of Local and Target Culture Integration in the English Textbooks for Senior High School in Palembang* by Syahri and Susanti (2016) which investigated the local and target culture integration in nine English textbooks used in senior high school classes in Palembang, Indonesia show that target cultures were featured far more than local cultures. Several studies have demonstrated otherwise where the source culture is a dominant culture in the text, this helps to promote comprehension and students perform better on reading tasks when the content aligns with their cultural experiences, and that unfamiliar cultural references can hinder comprehension (Mado

et al., 284). Further, the analysis of cultural dimensions in the "Bahasa Inggris: English for Change" textbook revealed a notable predominance of source culture. (Hakim & Wahyuni, 2024). Saikia & Kalita (2026) *Silences in the curriculum: an analysis of missing social realities in secondary English textbooks* most chapters are set in universal or unspecified locations, and narratives by authors from the North-East are notably absent. The findings which highlighted the dominance of native culture (Indonesia) in EFL textbooks was by Ariawan's (2020) study. Studies on representation of international culture was rather low where most to text, *Cultural Representations in Indian English Language Teaching Textbooks* (Bose & Gao, 2022), among all the textbooks which were analysed, the category with the lowest representation was international cultures (16%). The textbook's minimal representation of international culture indicated a preference for familiar cultural elements over a broader, more diverse cultural scope (Pulungan et al., 2024).

3. Methodology: Descriptive research design has been used for the present study. The textbook for evaluation was Class IX textbook titled *English Reader 9* prescribed by Meghalaya Board of School Education. The sample for the study was based on

random sampling which comprised of 60 teachers teaching English in secondary schools of East Khasi Hill District of Meghalaya. The tool for the study included a

self-prepared questionnaire and content analysis of the textbook incorporating Cortazzi & Jin (1991) framework for analysis of cultural content.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Analysis of the Class IX English Reader based on the Teachers' opinion

Table 1: Socio cultural background of the students in the English Textbook

Statement	N	Yes	%	No	%
The poems and prose pieces represent different cultures	60	59	88.06	8	11.94
Cultural sensitivity has been considered in the text.		54	90	6	10
The stories and poems help students to develop sensitivity towards other cultures and people		54	90	6	10
Learners' socio cultural background is included in the prose pieces		49	81.67	11	18.33
Learners' socio-cultural background is included in the poems		35	58.33	25	41.67
Local contextualization has been integrated in the text		22	36.67	38	63.33

Table 1 shows that 88.06% of the teachers have responded positively to the statement that poems and prose pieces represent different cultures. In connection to this, 90% have also affirmed that cultural sensitivity has been considered in the text. When the teachers were asked whether the stories and poems help students to develop sensitivity towards other cultures and people, majority of the teachers (90%) agreed. Further, the

teachers were also asked if the learners' socio-cultural background is included in the prose pieces to which 81.67% responded in the affirmative, however, only 58.33% of the teachers agreed that the learner's socio cultural background is included in the poems. Many teachers (63.33%) responded negatively with regards to local contextualization in the text.

4.2 Textbook analysis of the Class IX English Reader

Table 2: Summary of the textbook analysis on the basis of cultural content (Cortazzi & Jin 1999)

Type of Cultures	Chapters	%	Type of Material	No of items	%
Source Culture Indian (SC)	6	42.86	Text	6	42.86
			Illustration (Visual)	3	21.43
Source Culture Local (SC)	0		-	-	-
Target Culture (TC)	4	28.57	Text	2	14.29
			Imagery	1	7.14
			Illustration(visual)	1	7.14
			Dialogue	1	7.14
International Target Culture (ITC)	2	14.29	Text	2	14.29
Neutral	2	14.29	-	-	-
Total	14				

It may be reported that the textbook has 6 chapters which reflected the source culture that is Indian culture and no reflection of local culture. Next, regarding Target culture 4 chapters focus on target culture i.e. English

which included 2 related to textual content, 1 to the imagery which focused on the target culture, another 1 is related to the dialogue in the play and only 1 visual illustration representing target culture from the 4

chapters. Further, only 2 chapters have been identified to focus on international target culture based on the textual content.

Findings and Discussions

The findings based on the teachers' responses revealed a high percentage of the teachers responded favourably towards statements related to poems and prose pieces representing different cultures, cultural sensitivity considered in the text, the stories and poems help students to develop sensitivity towards other cultures and people. These findings are in consonance with the findings in a study conducted by Al-Haj Eid et.al (2023) where all the respondents strongly agreed that the inclusion of literature components contribute to transferring cultures of other nations.

One of the findings revealed that the teachers responded in the affirmative towards the inclusion of learners' socio-cultural background in the prose pieces, however, only 58.33% of the teachers agreed that the learners socio cultural background have been included in the poems. Many teachers (63.33%) responded negatively with regards to local contextualization in the text. Thus, the findings revealed a high percentage of teachers responded affirmatively towards the cultural content in the textbook. Similarly

in a study by Saikia& Kalita (2026) Silences in the curriculum: an analysis of missing social realities in secondary English textbooks most chapters are set in universal or unspecified locations, and narratives by authors from the North-East are notably absent.

Another set of findings were obtained from analysing the textbook on the basis of cultural content (Cortazzi & Jin model,1991). Major findings related to textbook analysis revealed that 6 chapters were based on source culture i.e the diverse Indian culture. The analysis of cultural dimensions in the "Bahasa Inggris: English for Change" textbook reveals a notable predominance of source culture. (Hakim& Wahyuni,2024). However, in terms of Source culture not a single chapter was based or referred to local culture. This finding contradicts Ariawan's (2020) study, which highlighted the dominance of native culture (Indonesia) in EFL textbooks. With regards to target culture ,4 chapters were found to reflect the target culture, 2 chapters on international culture. Similarly, Syahri and Susanti (2016) investigated the local and target culture integration in English textbooks used in senior high school classes in Palembang, Indonesia. Their results show that target cultures were featured far more

than local cultures. Likewise, Böcü and Razi (2016) explain that the textbooks in their case study covered a variety of cultures but without any direct references to the source culture (Turkish cultures). It may be mentioned that 2 chapters did not focus on any specific culture. Thus, textbook or the English reader had chapters which reflected different cultures which can provide cultural awareness for the students. The presence of all three cultural sources in the textbook suggests a comprehensive approach to cultural representation through literature textbook.

Conclusion

Textbook or the English reader has chapters which reflect different cultures which is important to provide cultural awareness for the students. The presence of all three cultural sources in the textbook suggests a comprehensive approach to cultural representation through literature textbook. The present study has resulted in the teachers' opinion of the textbook as well as the content analysis with relevance to the cultural content in the textbook as mostly favorable where all the three sources of cultures have been presented. A finding which requires attention was the lack of local

culture in the English Reader since even as per NEP.

Recommendations:

1. Include more local cultural content and to rationalize the textbook in terms of socio-cultural background of the students.
2. International cultures need to be included which will equip students to be good host to such cultures as well as visitors.

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