
Analyzing Intercultural Communicative Aspects in *English for Palestine 12th Grade Textbooks*

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ABSTRACT: *This study probed the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) aspects introduced in English for Palestine 12th grade textbooks. Byram's ICC model (1997) was employed as a theoretical framework to analyze content of the textbooks. The main findings, among others, revealed that ICC aspects were not distributed evenly throughout the curriculum. The textbooks lacked numerous basic aspects required for developing students' ICC. Little attention was devoted to raise students' critical cultural awareness and understanding about other cultures. In light of these findings, the study recommended placing due emphasis on more ICC aspects in the curriculum and maintaining proper balance among them.*

KEYWORDS: Intercultural communicative competence, cultural aspects, English for Palestine grade 12th textbooks, Byram's (1997) model, descriptive analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Presently, the English language has become a quintessential global language. As the number of non-native speakers of English is growing rapidly, the need to learn English and its culture has become pivotal (Crystal, 1997). A language cannot be learned or taught without referring to its key cultural elements (Byram, 1997; Ho, 2009). Moreover, the relation between language and culture has been accentuated with the development of the term intercultural awareness (Kramsch, 1993). Beside other competencies (e.g., linguistic, pragmatic, and discourse), ICC is considered a potential component of any communicative competence (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006). Thus, developing ICC is vitally important to help students understand foreign cultures and become competent intercultural speakers (Tran & Seepho, 2015). Baker (2012) argues that developing ICC requires acquisition of linguistic competence and communicative competence.

Evidently, the main goal of learning a language is to develop interculturality, i.e., the linguistic and cultural competences which can lead to intercultural awareness (Council of

Europe, 2001). In recent years, teachers have begun to change their traditional methods of teaching in which culture is neglected, and move to a new method that reinforces and acknowledges ICC (Ho, 2009). Through this intercultural teaching, it is realized that language and culture are interwoven, and learning about culture is fostered energetically via its language (Byram & Peiser, 2015).

Most of the studies conducted worldwide on ICC have focused mainly on ICC development using specific techniques (e.g. Thome-Williams, 2016). Others explored techniques and teaching methods to enhance ICC (e.g. Reid, 2015). Moreover, a number of researchers analyzed the ICC content in EFL textbooks and proposed suggestive programs for developing students' ICC (e.g. Kian, 2016; Obaid, Ismail, Razali, & Mansor, 2019). However, the number of foreign studies aim at developing ICC is large compared to the Palestinian studies that tackle ICC development and textbooks analysis. Furthermore, according to a study conducted by Imperiale (2021), Palestinian teachers seem to lack intercultural competence. Therefore, this insinuates a dire shortage of ICC studies in the Palestinian context. This study aims at analyzing ICC aspects in 12th grade textbooks and raising Palestinian teachers' awareness about the importance of integrating ICC in teaching English as a foreign language.

Research Questions

- 1- What are the ICC domains that should be present in *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks?
- 2- To what extent are these domains available in *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks?

LITERATURE REVIEW

When Byram introduced the concept of ICC in 1997, it challenged the notion of intercultural competence, which was prevalent in foreign language teaching at that time. He replaced the concept of intercultural competence with intercultural communicative competence (Gu, 2016). It may seem that they have the same meaning, but there is some differences between them. According to Byram (1997, p. 71), intercultural competence refers to people's "ability to interact in their own language with people from another country and culture", while intercultural communicative competence concerns with language teaching and includes "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language". Intercultural communicative competence means to gain knowledge about other cultures and help others understand one's own native culture. In other words, it is about the ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In addition, (Byram's, 1997) model of ICC highlights distinctive domains such as attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Attitudes includes curiosity and openness, relativizing one's own values and behaviors, and valuing others. Knowledge involves knowing about the products and practices of social groups, knowing about other cultures, and knowing about individual and societal interactions. Skills of interpreting and

relating domain focuses on interpreting documents from other cultures and relating them to one's own culture. Skills of discovery and interaction refer to learning about cultural practices and operating knowledge and skills. In addition, critical awareness includes evaluating practices and products of one's own culture and other cultures.

In the context of foreign language teaching, this model has had a significant influence on curriculum design and teaching materials in different countries. It has been mostly influential in Europe, South and East Asia, the U.S.A, and Australia (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2015). Byram's (1997) ICC model provides a detailed explanation for the concept of intercultural communicative competence and specifies the skills needed for foreign language learning contexts. Interestingly, it is especially designed to be utilized in foreign language classrooms, for it caters for students' needs and determines the outcomes they are expected to achieve (Vorstman & Sariaslan, 2020).

There are many strategies to develop ICC in foreign language classrooms. For instance, Deardorff (2011) suggests that learners' ICC can be developed through an internationalizing process, which integrates global and intercultural aspects. She firmly believes that curriculum activities have a great influence on enhancing learners' ICC level. Some of these activities may include creating meaningful interaction between local and foreign students in the classroom, listening to people from different backgrounds telling their perspectives and views on certain cultural issues, and reflecting on foreign movies inside the classroom. Moreover, Kramsch (1983) emphasizes employing the teaching approaches that focus on teaching the aspects of deep culture. For her, examining students' ability to develop and use cultural knowledge is highly required.

Furthermore, Hoa (2011) recommends some cultural activities that can be done in the classroom such as discussing readings on cultural differences, presenting cross-cultural actions, conducting presentations about cultural diversity, cultural simulation games, and role plays. He believes that acquiring ICC needs more than merely learning facts about culture. To promote their ICC level, learners should be able to understand people's manners and behaviors, and show attitudes toward intercultural interaction.

A number of studies have been conducted on analyzing ICC aspects in English textbooks. For example, Arias (2015) analyzed the ICC content in a textbook taught in Latin America to determine the intercultural aspects introduced in the textbook and examine the extent to which the content of the curriculum fosters ICC acquisition. The findings showed that the textbook offered some visible and invisible cultural aspects. While the elements of knowledge and skills were available in the textbook, the elements of awareness and attitudes were not addressed well. The researcher concluded that the intercultural activities provided in the textbook were not enough to help learners become culture mediators who understand their own culture vis-à-vis other cultures.

Moreover, the study of Obaid et al. (2019) analyzed the content of EFL textbooks at the intermediate level in Iraq and to explore whether it really developed ICC level of Iraqi students. The findings showed that there was an imbalanced emphasis on the various intercultural elements and sharp differences in the frequencies of these elements. As a result, they concluded that the textbooks did not seem to improve the Iraqi learners' intercultural communicative competence.

Similar to the purpose of this study, Al-Najjar (2020) conducted a study in the Gaza Strip to analyze ICC aspects in the curriculum of *English for Palestine 7th grade* textbooks. She also identified the levels of cultural content to enhance ICC in English teaching. The findings of the study uncovered that the content of these textbooks enhanced ICC largely. She indicated that the curriculum included many strategies and activities that support ICC development like poems, role-plays, and conversations. It was concluded that the textbooks fostered students' awareness about their own native culture, identity, and other foreign cultures. The present study analyzes the extent to which the intercultural communicative competence aspects are available in *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks.

METHODOLOGY

This research aimed at analyzing ICC content in *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks and identifying the strengths and weaknesses in addressing ICC development. To that aim, the study used the descriptive analytical method. Brown and Rodgers (2002) argue that the descriptive method is a kind of research that deals with a group of aspects or behaviors numerically. It seeks to identify and describe an existing problem through reflecting on reality, then tries to change the circumstances that controls that reality. Consequently, the research began with describing the situation of *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks, analyzing their content to identify the ICC aspects comprised in the textbooks, and comparing them with the ICC criteria prepared beforehand.

Presumably, textbooks are considered as one of the most practical and accessible tools for learning (Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012). The current study analyzed the activities in the two English textbooks namely, *English for Palestine* and *Reading Plus Book*. English for Palestine contains 12 units, while the Reading Plus Book contains 6 units. Each unit consists of 6 periods. Practically speaking, a content analysis card was prepared beforehand to investigate the frequency occurrences of the intercultural aspects in the texts and activities of the English textbooks. The study adopted Byram's (1997) model of ICC, so the analysis card contained Byram's five intercultural domains, namely, knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction and critical awareness. The validity of the analysis card was evidently derived from the validity of Byram's ICC model, and reliability was also achieved through an effective cooperation of a peer researcher. The researchers conducted the analyses separately using the same criteria of analysis.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This section presents the results of data analysis and classifies the frequency occurrences of the intercultural domains included in the two textbooks as follows:

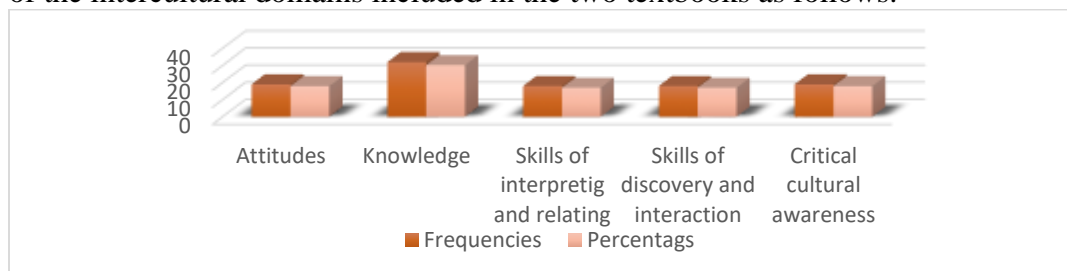


Figure (1) Frequencies and Percentages of ICC Domains in 12th Grade Textbooks

As can be seen in figure 1, there seemed to be a clear imbalance in addressing the different ICC domains. For example, knowledge domain had the highest percentage among the rest of domains by having a percentage of 30.19% and 32 frequencies. After knowledge, the domain of attitude domain had 19 frequencies and a percentage of 17.92%. Ironically, critical cultural awareness domain came in the same place with 19 frequencies and a percentage of 17.92%. However, in the last place came the domain of interpreting and relating skills with 18 frequencies and a percentage of 16.98%. Similarly, the domain of discovery and interaction skills obtained 18 frequencies and a percentage of 16.98%; therefore, it occupied the same position as the domain of skills of interpreting and relating.

Attitudes

Seemingly, the curriculum of 12th grade lacked many attitude aspects. For example, in Pupil's Book, only 3 out of 10 aspects occurred, and they are (learning about other cultures' norms and beliefs, interest in learning new cultural aspects, and cultures' different norms and beliefs). Reading Plus Book also included the same aspects as Pupil's Book. The rest of aspects did not occur in the two textbooks despite their importance in achieving effective intercultural communication. Wandel (2003) argues that textbooks should include exercises that arouse class debates to discuss meaning to tolerate cultural ambiguity. Clearly, discussing intercultural topics with students enables them to accept cultural differences and develop real empathy for the other.

Knowledge

12th grade curriculum included many aspects of knowledge domain (see figure 1). In addition, in Pupil's Book, 8 out of 10 ICC aspects were presented. Therefore, the textbook lacked only 2 aspects: (knowledge about social groups in one's own culture and other cultures, and reasons behind different cultural worldviews). However, in Reading Plus Book, 3 aspects were missing: knowledge about social groups in one's own culture and other cultures, knowledge about products in one's own culture and other cultures, and reasons behind different cultural worldviews. Focusing on knowledge aspects is not enough to develop intercultural communication. Textbooks should rather focus more on

providing activities that require a deep level of cultural debates to depict culture as a complex set of beliefs and customs rather than a set of strict rules imposed on peoples (Hilliard, 2014).

Skills of interpreting and relating

Skills of interpreting and relating got low proportion in *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks. It lacked many aspects of interpreting and relating skills. Moreover, in Pupil's Book, two aspects were not available at all (identifying causes of misunderstandings while interacting with people from other cultures and comparing and contrasting cultural events). Reading Plus Book was free from many aspects of interpreting and relating skills. It included only one aspect, i.e., enabling students to identify differences and similarities between cultures. Moreover, there was no variation in providing activities pertaining interpreting and relating skills. It is worth noting that interpreting and relating cultural aspects help learners to interpret, relate, or compare their own native culture with other cultures. According to Byram's (2004) skills of interpreting and relating would eventually help students possess analysis skills required to improve their ICC.

Skills of discovery and interaction

The analysis revealed that the discovery and interaction skills seemed insufficient. For example, Pupil's Book lacked 2 aspects out from 5: Presenting sufficient information about different cultural elements and inviting learners to explore new knowledge of cultures from different sources. Similarly, Reading Plus Book included the same aspects as Pupil's Book. In this stage, the intercultural information was not directly offered in the textbook. To conclude, skills of discovery and interpreting domain got the lowest proportion in the content of the textbooks (16, 98%). Therefore, the textbooks lacked a significant intercultural domain that can promote students' ICC level.

Critical cultural awareness

The curriculum included some awareness aspects. However, Pupil's Book lacked 2 aspects: developing critical cultural awareness of one's own culture practices and products and promoting ability to identify and evaluate explicit cultural values and behaviors. Further, Reading Plus Book lacked one aspect, namely promoting ability to identify and evaluate explicit cultural values and behaviors. Interestingly, in the latest version of Byram's (2009) ICC model, cultural awareness has been moved to the center of the model to highlight its growing importance. Consequently, critical cultural awareness is expected to be prioritized as a pivotal pedagogical goal.

DISCUSSION

The results of analyses showed that the majority of the intercultural activities addressed the knowledge domain. Most of the aspects of this domain were available in the curriculum. Providing suitable intercultural knowledge is an essential part of learning a culture, for it helps language learners understand cultural differences and realize foreign cultures' norms

and behaviors. Nonetheless, focusing on introducing aspects of knowledge while placing less emphasis on other cultural aspects may not assure students' intercultural development (Skaugen, 2020; Bal, 2019).

Attitudes domain refers to promoting positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors towards other cultures and showing appreciation and respect for to them. The curriculum focused only on presenting few of these aspects while neglected vital ones like suspending disbelief towards other cultures and emphasizing equality between all cultures. This result concurs with Obaid's et al. (2019) in that attitudes got little percentage compared to the category of knowledge in an EFL textbook used in Iraq.

Likewise, critical cultural awareness raises students' cultural awareness about foreign cultures and their own native culture. Despite its outstanding importance, few activities appeared. Arias's (2015) study revealed that the EFL textbook used in Latin America did not include various critical cultural awareness activities required to enable students establish relations between cultures. Critical cultural awareness is the core of intercultural communicative competence, for it comprises the ability to evaluate aspects of one's own native culture and other cultures (Byram, 2012; Kramsch, 1983).

In addition, skills of interpreting and relating involves comparing between cultural differences and avoiding cultural misunderstandings. Skills of interpreting and relating activities appeared in Pupil's Book more than Reading Plus Book. Although there were some activities that address skills of interpreting and relating domain, not all its aspects were addressed. This result goes in line with the result of Kian (2016) who found that the dimension of interpreting and relating skills got low percentage 16% compared to knowledge dimension which got 48%, and attitudes 35%.

Further, skills of discovery and interaction refer to motivating students to explore new cultures and evaluate implicit and explicit cultural elements and practices. Activities that address skills of discovery and interaction are important because they encourage learners to discover new elements of culture. The curriculum did not include activities that encourage learners to discover new knowledge about cultures from different sources and discover information. In a nutshell, although all domains of intercultural communication were addressed in *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks, their distribution was uneven, and their aspects were not equally emphasized.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded that the distribution of ICC domains in *English for Palestine 12th grade* textbooks was imbalanced. The textbooks lacked certain important ICC aspects required to developing students' intercultural level. Further, the analyses showed that there was a tendency to highlight elements of knowledge domain more than other ICC domains. Similarly, some aspects of the attitude domain were completely missing, especially

elements responsible for inspiring students to respect the other. Crucial aspects of discovery skills domain that encourage students to discover new information about other cultures were absent, too. There was little focus on critical cultural awareness that enables students to evaluate cultural values and behaviors. It is vitally important to integrate ICC in *English for Palestine*, as it enables students to use English communicatively and interculturally.

To sum up, the 21st century is characterized by globalization, digitization and multilingualism; therefore, the ministry of education, curriculum designers, and teachers in Palestine are invited to provide appropriate intercultural materials to help students' achieve ICC and keep up with the recent developments in the field. To develop students' ICC, teachers are particularly recommended to employ state-of-the-art teaching methods, provide appropriate intercultural activities and materials, and raise cultural awareness.

Future research

Future research can focus on teachers and students' attitudes towards integrating ICC in teaching English as a foreign language in Palestinian high schools. They can examine the challenges of integrating ICC in the Palestinian university context. Future studies can also investigate a suggested proposal to develop university students' ICC.

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