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A Content Analysis Study of the Cultural Content in the “English for Iraq” Series Used in Iraqi Intermediate Schools

A B S T R A C T

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the cultural representations embedded within the "English for Iraq" textbooks used at the intermediate level, specifically Books 5 and 6. Book 5 represents the first Intermediate grade textbook while book 6 represents the second intermediate grade textbook. These books are taught to students aged approximately 13–15 years across Iraq. Each textbook includes units featuring dialogues, reading texts, grammar sections, listening tasks, and cultural notes. Drawing upon Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) typology of cultural content (source, target, and international culture) and Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), the study investigates how these textbooks portray cultural elements and to what extent they promote intercultural awareness among Iraqi learners. The present study adopts a mixed-methods design including both content analysis and empirical data collection from 30 English language teachers and 120 intermediate students in Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. A detailed coding scheme is applied to the textbook content to identify the frequency and balance of cultural categories, while questionnaires and semi-structured interviews captured participants' perceptions of cultural exposure and communicative relevance. Findings reveal that the "English for Iraq" textbooks predominantly emphasize source culture (Iraqi and Arab cultural contexts), which constitute 59% of the identified cultural content. The representation of target (English-speaking) culture is limited to 22.1%, and international cultures accounted for only 18%. Although this approach supports cultural identity preservation, it restricts learners' opportunities to engage in genuine intercultural dialogue and reduces their readiness for global communication. Teachers and students generally express positive views toward the inclusion of cultural content but highlight the need for a more balanced integration of diverse cultural perspectives. The study concludes with pedagogical recommendations for textbook developers and curriculum designers to integrate intercultural elements more systematically, and for teacher-training programmes to emphasize strategies for fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

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دراسة تحليلية للمحتوى الثقافي في سلسلة كتب اللغة الانكليزية "English for Iraq" المستخدمة في

المدارس المتوسطة العراقية

مروان مزهر سحاب / جامعة تكريت / كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

الخلاصة:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم تحليل شامل للتمثيلات الثقافية المتضمنة في سلسلة كتب "الإنجليزية للعراق" المقررة على طلبة المرحلة المتوسطة، وتحديدًا الكتابين الخامس والسادس اللذين يُدرّسان في الصفين الأول

والثاني المتوسط على التوالي، للطلبة الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين (١٣-١٥) سنة في مختلف مناطق العراق. تتألف هذه الكتب من وحدات دراسية تتضمن حوارات ونصوص قراءة وأقساماً نحوية وتمارين استماع وملاحظات ثقافية. استندت الدراسة إلى تصنيف كورتازي وجين (١٩٩٩) لأنواع المحتوى الثقافي (الثقافة المصدر، والثقافة الهدف، والثقافة الدولية)، وإلى نموذج بايرام (١٩٩٧) للكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات، بهدف استكشاف كيفية تصوير هذه الكتب للعناصر الثقافية ومدى إسهامها في تعزيز الوعي بين الثقافات لدى المتعلمين العراقيين. اعتمدت الدراسة تصميمًا بحثيًا متعدد الأدوات، جمع بين تحليل المحتوى والبيانات التجريبية الميدانية التي شملت (٣٠) مدرسًا للغة الإنجليزية و(١٢٠) طالبًا من مدن بغداد والبصرة والموصل. طُبِّقَ مخطط ترميز دقيق لتحليل محتوى الكتب وتحديد توزع فئات المحتوى الثقافي وتوازنها، في حين استخدمت الاستبيانات والمقابلات شبه المنظمة لرصد تصورات المشاركين حول طبيعة التمثيل الثقافي وأهميته في التواصل اللغوي. أظهرت النتائج أن كتب الإنجليزية للعراق تميل بشكل واضح إلى الثقافة المصدر (المتتملة في السياقات العراقية والعربية)، إذ بلغت نسبتها ٥٩٪ من إجمالي المحتوى الثقافي. بينما جاءت الثقافة الهدف (المرتبطة بالمجتمعات الناطقة بالإنجليزية) بنسبة ٢٢.١٪، والثقافة الدولية بنسبة ١٨٪ فقط. ورغم أن هذا التوجه يسهم في ترسيخ الهوية الثقافية الوطنية، إلا أنه يحدّ من فرص المتعلمين في الانخراط في حوار بين-ثقافي فعّال ويضعف استعدادهم للتفاعل اللغوي العالمي. عبّر المعلمون والطلاب عمومًا عن مواقف إيجابية تجاه تضمين المحتوى الثقافي في الكتب الدراسية، إلا أنهم شدّدوا على ضرورة تحقيق توازن أكبر في تمثيل الثقافات المتنوعة. وتختتم الدراسة بجملة من التوصيات التربوية الموجهة إلى مؤلفي الكتب ومصممي المناهج لتعزيز إدماج العناصر البنائية الثقافية بصورة منهجية، وإلى برامج إعداد المعلمين لتأكيد أهمية تطوير استراتيجيات تعليمية تدعم الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التمثيل الثقافي، الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات، تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية لغة اجنبية، الإنجليزية للعراق

1. Introduction

In the modern era of globalization and cross-cultural communication, the role of English as a global lingua franca extends far beyond grammatical proficiency. The English language serves as a gateway to intercultural understanding, enabling learners to engage with diverse communities and perspectives. Accordingly, English language textbooks play a critical role in shaping learners' worldviews and

developing their intercultural communicative competence (ICC, for short) (Byram, 1997; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

In Iraq, *English for Iraq* series represents the official English curriculum at different educational stages, developed by the Ministry of Education with support from international agencies. These textbooks aim to foster linguistic competence while introducing cultural content that reflects both local identity and global awareness. However, scholars and practitioners have raised concerns that many EFL textbooks used in the Arab world, including Iraq, may overrepresent local culture (source culture) and underrepresent target and international cultures, leading to limited exposure to global perspectives (Al-Issa, 2014 and Taki, 2008).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of intercultural competence in English education, the extent to which *English for Iraq series* achieves this objective remains underexplored. While the series includes culturally relevant materials intended to enhance learner motivation and national pride, it is unclear whether these materials also encourage intercultural awareness and communicative competence. The dominance of source culture may inadvertently restrict learners from understanding and interacting with global cultural contexts. Therefore, there is a pressing need to examine the cultural balance within these textbooks and the perceptions of teachers and students toward their cultural relevance and authenticity.

Previous studies conducted in Iraq have primarily focused on linguistic features, language skills, or teaching methodologies in EFL textbooks, with limited emphasis on cultural representation. Few comprehensive analyses have systematically evaluated *English for Iraq* from an intercultural perspective that combines both content analysis and empirical perception data. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a dual investigation of the cultural dimensions in Books 5 and 6 through both textual analysis and participant perceptions guided by established theoretical frameworks of culture in language teaching.

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims to:

1. examine the types and frequency of cultural representations in the *English for Iraq* textbooks (Books 5–6).
2. identify the balance among source, target, and international cultures in these textbooks.
3. explore teachers' and students' perceptions of the cultural content and its role in promoting intercultural competence.
4. provide pedagogical recommendations for enhancing cultural representation in Iraqi EFL materials.

These aims are supposed to be achieved through answering the following questions:

1. What types of cultural representations are included in the *English for Iraq* Books 5 and 6?
2. What is the relative frequency of source, target, and international culture representations?
3. How do teachers and students perceive the cultural content presented in these textbooks?
4. To what extent does the cultural content promote intercultural communicative competence among learners?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing field of EFL textbook evaluation by highlighting the role of cultural representation in language learning within the Iraqi context. It provides empirical evidence on how cultural exposure in textbooks shapes learners' perceptions, motivation, and readiness for intercultural communication. Moreover, it offers practical insights for curriculum developers, policymakers, and teacher educators seeking to align Iraqi EFL materials with the principles of intercultural communicative competence.

1.4 Limits of the Study

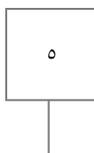
The study is confined to analyzing *English for Iraq* Books 5 and 6, which are used in intermediate schools across Iraq during the academic year 2024-2025. Data collection is limited to three major urban centers—Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul—representing geographic and cultural diversity. The findings may not be generalizable to other educational levels or regions; however, they provide a valuable basis for future research across different contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Role of Culture in Language Education

The inextricable relationship between language and culture is a central tenet of modern linguistics and applied linguistics. Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a repository of cultural knowledge and a vehicle for transmitting values, beliefs, and worldviews (Kramsch, 1998; Risager, 2007). Teaching a language, therefore, necessarily entails teaching the culture(s) that it encodes. Without such integration, language instruction becomes sterile and detached from the social realities of communication. As Kramsch (1993) explains, “language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality” (p. 8). Consequently, learners who acquire linguistic forms without understanding their cultural meanings are limited in their ability to interpret or participate effectively in authentic communicative contexts.

In the evolution of English language teaching (ELT), the understanding of culture has expanded in scope and pedagogical importance. Earlier methods such as the Grammar- Translation and Audiolingual approaches focused almost exclusively on grammatical accuracy and memorization. However, with the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 20th century, the goal shifted toward the development of communicative competence—an ability to use language appropriately in different sociocultural contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980). Later, this paradigm evolved into the concept of **intercultural communicative competence (ICC)**, as proposed by Byram (1997), which adds a critical and reflective dimension. ICC emphasizes not only the ability to communicate effectively with members of other cultures but also the capacity to interpret, compare, and mediate between cultural perspectives.



The integration of cultural elements in ELT materials thus plays a dual pedagogical role: it provides learners with linguistic input contextualized within authentic cultural scenarios, and it helps develop the attitudes and skills necessary for intercultural understanding (Byram & Wagner, 2018). In EFL contexts such as Iraq where exposure to English-speaking environments is minimal textbooks often serve as the primary, and sometimes only, source of cultural input. Therefore, the way culture is represented in these textbooks carries significant implications for learners' worldviews, self-perception, and intercultural readiness

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence Framework

Byram's (1997) model of ICC provides a theoretical foundation for integrating culture into language education. It comprises five dimensions, as follows:

1. **Attitudes** – curiosity and openness toward other cultures.
2. **Knowledge** – understanding of social groups, products, and practices in both one's own and other cultures.
3. **Skills of interpreting and relating** – the ability to interpret cultural phenomena and relate them across contexts.
4. **Skills of discovery and interaction** – the ability to engage in communication with cultural awareness.
5. **Critical cultural awareness** – the ability to evaluate perspectives and practices from multiple cultural viewpoints.

This framework underscores that intercultural learning goes beyond factual knowledge about culture; it requires developing attitudes, skills, and critical awareness. Textbooks play a central role in achieving these goals by embedding culturally rich materials that allow learners to reflect and compare.

2.3 Frameworks for Analyzing Cultural Content in Textbooks

Cultural content analysis in ELT textbooks has developed into a specialized field, combining linguistic, pedagogical, and ideological perspectives. Among the most influential frameworks are those of **Cortazzi and Jin (1999)** and **Byram (1997)**, both adopted in this study.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) classify the cultural orientation of ELT materials into three main categories:

1. **Source Culture (C1):** The learner's own national or local culture (e.g., Iraqi, Arab-Islamic).
2. **Target Culture (C2):** The culture of countries where English is a first language (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia).
3. **International Culture (C3):** Cultures of countries where English is used as a lingua franca or in multilingual global contexts (e.g., India, Japan, Brazil, Nigeria).

This tripartite framework helps identify not only the *presence* but also the *balance* of cultural representation in ELT materials. Ideally, a well-designed textbook should include all three cultural orientations to support both cultural identity and intercultural openness. Overrepresentation of source culture can limit students' exposure to global perspectives, while overemphasis on target culture can alienate learners or promote cultural dependence (Shin et al., 2011).

Complementing this typology, Byram's (1997) model allows for deeper coding of **cultural dimensions**:

- **Products:** Tangible or intangible creations of a culture (literature, art, monuments, laws, technologies).
- **Practices:** Daily behaviors, rituals, customs, and communicative norms.
- **Perspectives:** The values, beliefs, and attitudes that underlie practices and products.
- **Persons:** Individuals (real or fictional) who embody or symbolize cultural ideals and contributions.

Integrating these two frameworks enables both quantitative measurement (frequencies of culture types) and qualitative interpretation (ideological or pedagogical implications).

2.4 Cultural Content in EFL Textbooks: Global Perspectives

Globally, several studies have examined how EFL textbooks reflect cultural ideologies. Ndura (2004) has found that American ESL textbooks often reinforce Western-centric values and overlook multicultural representation. Similarly, Yuen (2011) has noted

that Hong Kong textbooks prioritize Western culture, marginalizing Asian cultural diversity. In contrast, Iranian studies such as Taki, 2008; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015 have revealed that national textbooks heavily favour local culture, limiting learners' intercultural exposure.

These findings collectively emphasize that textbook cultural balance is vital for developing ICC. Balanced representation can help learners maintain cultural identity while engaging with global cultures critically and communicatively.

2.5 The Iraqi Context and the “English for Iraq” Textbook Series

The Iraqi educational landscape has been marked by decades of socio-political upheaval, reconstruction, and reform. English has long been part of the Iraqi curriculum, but its role has shifted over time—from a colonial import, to a neutral academic subject, to a tool for modernization and global participation (Mahdi, 2019). In 2013, the Ministry of Education launched the “*English for Iraq*” series to modernize English instruction and align it with international standards while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The series, designed for primary, intermediate, and secondary levels, was developed with input from international publishing partners and Iraqi curriculum specialists. Officially, its stated goals include improving communicative competence, enhancing motivation, and integrating cultural awareness. However, the **concept of cultural awareness** in the Iraqi curriculum tends to emphasize appreciation of local traditions and Islamic values rather than engagement with global cultural diversity (Al-Azzawi, 2020). This reflects a broader tension in national education policy between globalization and cultural preservation.

Existing studies (e.g., Al-Khafaji, 2018; Jasim & Aziz, 2021) suggest that “*English for Iraq*” textbooks contain abundant references to Iraqi landmarks, festivals, and Islamic practices but limited representation of Western or international cultures.

Furthermore, few of these materials encourage learners to reflect on similarities and differences across cultures or to engage in critical discussion of global issues. Teachers, operating within a highly exam-oriented system, often prioritize linguistic accuracy over intercultural exploration, reinforcing this limitation.

Given Iraq's historical and sociopolitical context, these tendencies are understandable. Post-conflict reconstruction and identity consolidation have prioritized national pride and moral education. Yet, as Iraq increasingly interacts with the global community, there is a pressing need for English education to equip students with **intercultural competence**—the ability to communicate, collaborate, and empathize with people from diverse backgrounds without undermining their own cultural identity.

Therefore, the present study positions the “*English for Iraq*” series as a revealing site for examining the intersection of **cultural representation, ideology, and pedagogy**. It seeks to determine whether the series functions primarily as a tool of cultural preservation, an avenue for intercultural engagement, or a hybrid of both.

2.6 Studies on “English for Iraq” Textbooks

Research on Iraqi EFL textbooks remains relatively scarce. Early evaluations (Abbas, 2015 and Kareem, 2019) concentrated on linguistic skills and grammatical coverage rather than cultural dimensions. More recent analyses (Al-Salihi, 2020; Hasan, 2022) explores cultural aspects, noting an overrepresentation of Iraqi and Arab contexts. However, few studies have combined systematic content analysis with empirical data from teachers and students.

Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by:

- Conducting a **systematic content analysis** of *English for Iraq* Books 5 and 6.
- Gathering **perception data** from both teachers and students.
- Employing **two theoretical frameworks**—Cortazzi and Jin's typology and Byram's ICC model—to interpret findings.

This comprehensive approach offers a more holistic understanding of how Iraqi EFL textbooks shape learners' intercultural awareness and communicative readiness.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative content analysis of the textbooks with qualitative and quantitative data collected from teachers and students. This design allows for triangulation of findings and a more robust interpretation of cultural representation and perception patterns.

3.2 Population and Sampling

Population refers to any collection of a specified group of human beings or non-human entities such as, objects, institutions, time, units, etc. (Mills and Gay, 2019). The study population specifically includes English language teachers from the three cities who teach the first and second intermediate grades. A sample is a group of individuals, items, or events representing the larger group's characteristics from which the sample is taken Mills and Gay (2019, p.155). To select the study sample, 30 English language teachers and 120 students select from three major Iraqi cities: Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul have been selected. The teachers have between 5 and 20 years of teaching experience, while the students represent both genders and diverse socio-economic backgrounds. A purposive sampling technique is employed to ensure participants had direct experience with the selected textbooks.

Table (1) *Population and Sampling*

Group	Number Gender	Distribution Location
Teachers 30	18 females, 12 males	Baghdad, Basra, Mosul
Students 120	60 females, 60 males	Baghdad, Basra, Mosul

3.4 Instruments and Data Collection

To ease the content analysis process and create a consistent and relevant context in determining cultural represents, three primary instruments are used as tools of analysis:

1. Textbook Content Analysis Checklist

2. Questionnaire

3. Semi-Structured Interviews

A detailed description of each instrument is provided below.

3.4.1 Content Analysis Checklist

This instrument is designed to systematically identify and categorize cultural content within the selected textbooks. The checklist is developed based on the seminal cultural typology framework by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). The coding scheme operationalizes this framework to classify each cultural reference into one of three categories:

- 1. Source Culture:** References to the culture of the English-speaking countries (e.g., the UK, USA).
- 2. Target Culture:** References to the learners' native culture (Iraqi Arab, Kurdish cultures and Turkmen).
- 3. International Culture:** References to other cultures worldwide or to a universal, non-specific culture.

The unit of analysis includes all texts, images, dialogues, reading passages, and pedagogical tasks within the textbooks. Every unit is meticulously examined to determine its dominant cultural orientation, allowing for a quantitative summary of cultural representation.

3.4.2 Questionnaire

Two distinct versions of the questionnaire are developed, one for teachers and one for students to gauge their perceptions of the cultural content in the textbooks. The questionnaires are structured to collect both quantitative and qualitative data:

1. Quantitative Component: This section utilizes a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) to measure participants' attitudes towards the effectiveness of the cultural materials in promoting intercultural awareness, their relevance, and their engagement level.

2. Qualitative Component: This section includes open-ended questions that allowed participants to elaborate on their views, provide specific examples, and suggest improvements regarding the cultural content.

The questionnaires are piloted and validated to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability before being administered to the intended study sample.

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

To gain deeper, nuanced insights beyond the questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a sub-sample of participants (30 teachers and). This qualitative instrument provides a flexible framework that allows for:

1. probing complex perceptions about how cultural materials influence classroom dynamics and student engagement.
2. exploring personal experiences and anecdotes related to teaching or learning about different cultures.
3. eliciting detailed opinions on the adequacy of the cultural content in fostering genuine intercultural understanding.

An interview protocol with guiding questions is prepared to ensure consistency across all interviews, while allowing the interviewer the flexibility to follow up on interesting or relevant points raised by the participants.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the methodological rigor, trustworthiness, and replicability of the study, several measures are taken to establish the validity and reliability of the research instruments as follows.

3.5.1 Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy and appropriateness of the instruments in measuring what they are intended to measure. The following steps are undertaken:

1. **Face Validation:** The content analysis checklist, based on Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework, is reviewed by ten specialists in methodology and linguistics from various Iraqi universities. They assess the checklist for its comprehensiveness, clarity, and relevance to the study's objectives, leading to minor revisions that enhanced its face and content validity.
2. **Pilot Study:** A pilot study is conducted prior to the main data collection phase. It involves 5 English language teachers and 10 students who were not part of the main sample. The purpose is to:
 - Identify any ambiguities or difficulties in the questionnaire items.
 - Estimate the time required for completion.
 - Assess the effectiveness of the interview protocol. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the wording, structure, and sequence of questions in both the questionnaires and the interview guides, thereby improving their construct validity.

3.5.2 Reliability

Reliability concerns the consistency and stability of the research instruments. The study address reliability in the following ways:

1. Inter-coder Reliability (for Content Analysis): To ensure the consistency of the textbook analysis, *two independent coders are trained to use the content analysis checklist. They analyze a randomly selected sample of units from the textbooks. The level of agreement between the two coders is calculated using Cohen's Kappa statistic, which yielded a score of 0.87. This value indicates a high degree of inter-coder reliability, confirming that the coding scheme could be applied consistently.

2. Internal Consistency (for Questionnaires): The internal consistency of the Likert-scale sections of the questionnaires is measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The analysis results in a high reliability coefficient of ($\alpha = 0.84$) for the teacher questionnaire and ($\alpha = 0.88$) for the student questionnaire. Both values

exceed the accepted threshold of 0.70, demonstrating strong internal consistency and reliability of the scales used to measure perceptions.

Asst. Prof. Ibrahim Khalaf Salih (Ph.D.)

Asst. Prof. Fuad Hussein Ali (Ph.D.)

4. Results

4.1 Overview

This section presents the findings concerning the cultural content of the *English for Iraq Series* (Books 5 and 6), as seen by EFL teachers and students. Results are organized according to the research questions and the three categories of culture—**source, target, and international**—as outlined by Cortazzi and Jin (1999).

4.2 Cultural Representations

A total of 412 cultural items is identified across both textbooks. Each cultural reference (text, image, or task) is classified under one of the three categories. Table 2 summarizes the frequency and percentage of each cultural type.

Table 2 *Distribution of Cultural Representations in English for Iraq Books 5–6*

Cultural Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Source Culture (Iraqi/Arab)	247	59
Target Culture (English-speaking)	91	22.1
International Culture (Global/Other)	74	18.0
Total	412	100

As shown in Table 1, **source culture** dominates the textbooks, representing approximately **60%** of the total cultural content. Examples include traditional Iraqi foods, landmarks (e.g., Babylon, Basra), and references to Arab customs. The **target culture** appears in about **22%** of the material, typically through short texts about British or American life, famous cities, and holidays. **International culture** accounts for only **18%**, mostly appearing in global topics, such as technology, environmental issues, or sports.

4.3 Distribution of Cultural Types by Textbook

Table 3 displays the cultural representation in each book separately.

Table 3 Comparison of Cultural Categories in Books 5 and 6

Book	Source Cultural (%)	Target Cultural (%)	International (%)
Book 5 (first intermediate grade textbook)	62.4 %	20.8 %	16.8 %
Book 6 (Second intermediate grade textbook)	57.3 %	23.3 %	19.4 %

The data indicate a slightly higher inclusion of international culture in Book 6, suggesting an effort to introduce broader global topics at higher levels. However, both books remain predominantly oriented toward Iraqi and Arab contexts.

4.4 Teachers' Perceptions

The teachers' questionnaire (n = 30) explored perceptions of cultural balance, authenticity, and pedagogical usefulness. Table 4 summarizes the main findings.

Table 4 Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Content in English for Iraq (n = 30)

No.	Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	The textbooks adequately represent Iraqi culture	83.3%	10.0 %	6.7%
2	The textbooks expose students to foreign (English-speaking) culture.	56.7%	23.3%	20.0%
3	The textbooks include sufficient international/global perspectives.	40.0%	30.0%	30.0%
4	The cultural content supports intercultural Competence.	53.3%	26.7%	20.0%
5	Teachers need more training to teach culture effectively.	86.7%	6.7%	6.6%

Overall, most teachers have expressed appreciation for the inclusion of Iraqi culture, but more than half of them believed that the books do **not** sufficiently expose students to diverse global cultures. Nearly 87% acknowledge the need for **professional development** in teaching intercultural topics effectively.

4.5 Students' Perceptions

Student data (n = 120) show similar trends. Table 4 summarizes their responses.

Table 5 *Students' Perceptions of Cultural Content in English for Iraq (n = 120)*

No.	Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	The textbooks include interesting cultural topics.	78.3%	12.5%	9.2%
2	I can learn about other countries' cultures from the textbooks.	54.1%	25.0%	20.9%
3	The textbooks help me understand people from other countries.	49.2%	30.8%	20.0%
4	I prefer learning more about Iraqi culture.	70.0%	18.3%	11.7%
5	I would like to learn about different world cultures.	82.5%	10.0%	7.5%

Students are generally satisfied with the cultural topics but expressed a strong desire for greater global variety. About 83% indicated that they would like to learn more about international cultures, suggesting that while national culture is valued, learners are open to cross-cultural exploration.

4.6 Interview Findings

Interviews with 30 teachers reveal the following several qualitative themes:

1. **Dominance of Source Culture:** Teachers noted that the cultural content reinforces national identity but lacks intercultural exposure.
2. **Limited Authenticity:** Some teachers mention that the foreign culture examples are simplified or outdated, reducing students' engagement.
3. **Student Curiosity:** Students express curiosity about global lifestyles, traditions, and customs, indicating readiness for more intercultural learning.

4. **Pedagogical Constraints:** Teachers cite limited class time and lack of training materials as barriers to effective cultural teaching.

5. Discussion

5.1 Cultural Imbalance in the Textbooks

The results confirm the first aim: the *English for Iraq* textbooks heavily emphasize source culture, accounting for nearly 60% of total content. This aligns with previous findings in EFL contexts such as Iran (Taki, 2008) and Jordan (Al-Issa, 2014), where textbooks also prioritize national culture to strengthen identity and relevance. While this approach fosters cultural pride, it limits opportunities for students to engage with target and international cultures, which are crucial for developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

5.2 Limited Exposure to Target and International Cultures

The relatively low representation of target (22%) and international cultures (18%) suggests a lack of balance. According to Byram's (1997) ICC model, exposure to diverse cultural perspectives enhances learners' attitudes of curiosity, empathy, and tolerance. The current imbalance may restrict learners' ability to interpret and relate cultural differences, thereby narrowing their global communication competence.

5.3 Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

The perception data confirm the third aim: both teachers and students value cultural content but perceive it as narrowly focused. Teachers emphasize the need for teacher training in cultural pedagogy consistent with recommendations by McKay (2003) and Sercu (2005) to help educators integrate culture meaningfully into language lessons.

Students, on the other hand, demonstrate positive motivation toward intercultural learning, suggesting a readiness for more globally balanced materials. This supports previous research (Yuen, 2011 and Shin et al., 2011) indicating that learners in EFL contexts desire authentic intercultural engagement.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

The findings underscore several key pedagogical implications:

1. **Curriculum Designers** should reconsider the balance of cultural content, ensuring inclusion of authentic materials representing target and international cultures.
2. **Teacher Education Programmes** must emphasize intercultural communicative competence and provide teachers with strategies to discuss and compare cultures effectively.
3. **Textbook Developers** should collaborate with cultural experts to avoid stereotypical depictions and incorporate real-life intercultural situations that promote critical reflection.

6. Conclusion

This study has conducted a comprehensive investigation into the cultural content embedded within the *English for Iraq Series* used in Iraqi intermediate schools, focusing specifically on Books 5 and 6. By employing both content analysis and perception-based methods, the research explores how these textbooks represent cultural dimensions and how such representations influence learners' and teachers' perceptions of intercultural learning.

The results clearly reveals that **source culture**—comprising Iraqi and Arab contexts—dominates the textbooks, accounting for nearly **60%** of the total cultural content. **Target culture** (English-speaking countries) and **international culture** are included only marginally, representing **22%** and **18%**, respectively. This imbalance, while supportive of national identity, restricts learners' opportunities to develop intercultural communicative competence as conceptualized by Byram (1997).

Teachers' and students' perceptions reinforce this finding: both groups have valued cultural representation but expressed a desire for **broader international exposure** and **authentic intercultural experiences**. Teachers also highlight a need for more **training and pedagogical guidance** on how to teach cultural elements effectively.

The study thus concludes that while *English for Iraq Series* successfully promote cultural familiarity and pride, they fall short in offering balanced intercultural perspectives essential for preparing Iraqi students for global communication. A systematic integration of **target** and **international cultures**, alongside pedagogical support for teachers, is therefore necessary to achieve a well-rounded intercultural education.

7. Recommendations

Based on the obtained results, the study offers the following recommendations:

7.1 For Curriculum and Textbook Developers

1. **Increase Cultural Diversity:** Future editions of *English for Iraq Series* should incorporate a balanced range of source, target, and international cultural content to broaden students' worldviews.
2. **Embed Authentic Materials:** Include real-life contexts news articles, digital media, global figures, intercultural case studies—to reflect the use of English in authentic intercultural communication.
3. **Avoid Cultural Stereotyping:** Ensure that cultural representations are accurate, inclusive, and free of bias, reflecting dynamic rather than static images of cultures.
4. **Integrate Global Citizenship Themes:** Link lessons to global issues such as sustainability, peace, technology, and cultural exchange,

7.2 For Teacher Education and Professional Development

1. **Training in Intercultural Teaching:** Provide workshops and in-service training focused on developing teachers' intercultural awareness and teaching strategies.
2. **Use of Supplementary Materials:** Encourage teachers to enrich textbook content with videos, online resources, and projects that highlight cross-cultural communication.
3. **Collaborative Learning:** Foster activities that involve cultural comparison, reflection, and discussion to enhance students' critical cultural awareness.

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