

## Localising the Local Culture in the Algerian Second Generation Middle School Textbooks

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### Abstract:

This paper reports on the results of a case study that aims to explore whether second-generation Algerian middle school textbooks include the representation of the local culture. The second concern of the study is how teachers in the area of Mascara cope with a diverse Algerian range of cultural practices. In this vein, the local cultural content is classified in compliance with Byram's (1993) framework for textbooks' cultural content evaluation. 24 teachers from 5 middle schools have responded to a questionnaire and an interview. The document analysis of the series "My Book of English" has revealed that the local culture took the biggest share in the series. The results also have demonstrated that localising the local content with references to the learners' area is a common practice in the 5 schools.

**Keywords:** Algerian middle school; culture; local culture; localizing; second generation textbooks.

### Résumé:

Il est reconnu que l'enseignement de la culture est incontournable dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères. Cette recherche s'intéresse à la représentation de la culture locale dans les manuels scolaires deuxième génération du collège algérien avec l'adoption du modèle Byram (1993). Vu la diversité de la culture locale en Algérie, notre contribution se focalise sur les stratégies déployées par les 24 enseignants participants à la recherche. Les résultats révèlent que la majorité des enseignants utilise les références locales propres à la région de Mascara dans l'enseignement de la culture.

**Mots-clés:** collège algérien; culture; culture locale; localisation; manuels scolaires de deuxième génération.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The advent of globalization and the skyrocketing advances of communication and information technologies (ICT) have enabled the young generation to “integrate the local and the global in hybrid forms, as part of what Roland Robertson has called ‘glocalization’ (Benrabah, 2013, p.17). English is currently an international language whose foreign speakers outnumber its natives by a ratio of 3 to 1 (Crystal, 2003). Therefore, communication in this language will involve native English speaker and non-native English speakers yet; such encounter poses challenges to all involved. Learners, in particular, need to be equipped with inter and cross-cultural competence to minimise any misunderstanding while communicating with the “Other” of this global village.

Though ranking in the second position after the French-a language irredeemably tainted by its 132 years of colonial history and currently considered the first Foreign language-, English is commonly acknowledged as being the language that opens doors to people's aspirations in education or market opportunities, to studies abroad and publishing scientific researches. To this end, Algeria has never spared an iota of effort or investment of any kind to catch up with the developments occurring wide world in the teaching of English as a foreign language (ELT). In the same flow of ideas and for sake of enabling the learners to communicate effectively with the inhabitants of the global village, the ministry of education has issued what is known as the Second Generation Textbooks

Teaching to communicate at times of globalisation entails incorporating culture in the teaching/learning process. Henceforth, textbooks have turned out to be a major instrument of culture teaching, besides fostering English language acquisition. Indeed, they offer good opportunities to connect native cultures and the target cultures to promote learners’ cultural awareness and motivate intercultural understanding. In this sense, Kramsh and Zhu Hua (2016) assert that English both facilitates global citizenship and prompts a return to local forms of community membership.

Algeria, being the largest country in Africa (2.382 million km<sup>2</sup> ) with a diversity of indigenous tongues (Algerian Arabic, Classical Arabic, French, Berber-Kabyle, Mزاب, Shaouia, Chenoua and Tamshek-) and cultures, may

witness tensions where everyone endeavours to monopolize both the language and culture issues. The argument becomes nevertheless less threatening when adequate measures like -tolerating and encouraging the "Other" - are taken in due time. Even though Algerian EFL "Second Generation" textbooks are local, most teachers and learners alike struggle to recognise the native cultural insights incorporated in those books.

Despite being a significant, though not thoroughly dealt with, feature of successful learning, researchers have devoted little focus on how EFL teachers deal with local culture in their daily practices. Considering the key role of EFL textbooks and local culture and addressing this particular gap, this study aims to scrutinize whether EFL teachers in Mascara "localise" the local culture. Localising the local culture, in this study, is understood as adapting the cultural content implemented in second-generation textbooks to meet the needs and interests of learners of the area of Mascara.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Textbooks**

Textbooks are essential tools that help teachers follow the path of the national curriculum. They prevent novice teachers from digressing and henceforth wrapping the syllabus up neatly which is incumbent upon them to do as required by the ministry in charge. They not only provide both linguistic and cultural input to teaching (Rasiger, 1998) but mediate learning by offering diverse opportunities to internalize language learning (Swain et al, 2015). Tomlinson (2008) asserts that these tools foster English language acquisition as the learners have the opportunity to complete exercises and tasks as assignments. Not only that, textbooks introduce cultural meanings to learners (Kramsch, 1993). Indeed, textbooks' contents entail both the linguistic component and also the cultural component.

While textbooks, as a valuable learning material in the learning/teaching process, serve as the main, foundation for almost the major part of the language input and practice learners receive in the classroom (Richards, 2014), they primarily act as a supplement to teachers' instruction. In the former case, they are in fact the first and most significant encounter learners have with this foreign language. They are designed to fit the learners' needs

in the classroom, and at home as well. In the latter situation, they provide less experienced teachers with adequate training where hints on how to plan lessons and how to pace them according to the learners' levels are neatly displayed. Textbooks yield a systematic structure of lessons that is based on the learning objectives specified in the syllabus and adapted to the learners' requirements and interests in order to firmly develop the learners' four language skills. Textbooks, on the other hand, are not only confined to improving learners' four learning and communicative abilities but also encouraging the learners' cultural interests, among other things.

## **2.2Second Generation Textbooks**

English is currently becoming a global lingua franca enabling millions of professionals and non-professionals to deal with their day-to-day activities. English has enabled its users not only to transcend borders but also to bridge language barriers to communicate and exchange knowledge worldwide. The rise and fast spread of the Internet have accentuated its absolute monopolization of a strategic status: the Language of Research. With this in mind, Algeria like the rest of the world is striving body and soul to adjust its educational priorities accordingly.

Yet, in our case, and due to the assimilation policies and the annexation of Algeria as an integral part of France (Benrabah, 2013), the French language cannot be easily superseded by English for plenty of reasons. Benrabah (2013) explains that English “the language without a political place cannot be all means replace overnight a language imposed on them by a 132-year-long. Yet, he assumes an uncompromised stance as he states that the battle between the world lingua franca and the beautiful language that holds bitter memories is not over.

In the words of Saluveer (2004), foreign language textbooks are of two major headings: international/global textbooks and local/locally produced textbooks. For illustration, “The New Headways” series which is written by Liz and John Soars and released by Oxford University Press in 1996 falls into this category, designed for the global market because of its universal nature. The contents of such books can be applied anywhere (Pulverness, 1995,p.7)

Locally designed textbooks, in a broad sense, constitute ideological

apparatus (Luke, 2015) reproducing a cloned image of the social, cultural, economic and political values of the country presented in such modes to impact potentially the learners' development of thinking patterns and cultural orientations. They yield these materials to assist in the formation and development of a future good citizen aware of his country's values and beliefs and today's and tomorrow's problems and difficulties.

Second-generation Algerian middle school textbooks bear the title "My Book of English". It is a series of four books written collegially by teachers and inspectors of English As stated in the Algerian syllabus of EFL at middle school, The series comply fully with the principles of the second generation's reforms (2016) which prioritise the core values and the cross-curricular competencies using the learning objectives of the subject as an effective way to introduce and make a learner a good cultivated and civilized citizen in the future, who respect his identity and culture and accept the culture of the others. More importantly, it endeavours to help students to become more aware of their own cultural identity as well as gain a better understanding of the target culture. "Local textbooks frequently build learners' understanding of their own cultural identity as well as containing resources that encourage learners' awareness of the target culture," writes Skopinskaja (2009, p. 42).

The middle school syllabus stipulates that the central aim of learning English is to acquire communicative competence in English. There is a profound shift from a paradigm of linguistic knowledge accumulation to a paradigm of interaction and integration. It hinges upon teachers to focus on the learners to enable them to engage actively in deeper cognition, information acquisition and the development of a variety of competencies (Ministry of National Education, 2015, p.4).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The design of the current research is a case study in which both quantitative and qualitative measures were employed to achieve the research objective. It was conducted in Mascara (Algeria) during the 2020/2021 school year at five different middle schools. Data were collected through document analysis, a questionnaire and an interview.

#### **3.2 Questions of the Study**

The study reported in this paper was designed to investigate the following research questions:

To what extent, is the local culture inserted in the series My Book of English?

To what extent do middle school teachers in Mascara “localise” the local cultural insights found in the Middle School Second Generation’s textbooks?

#### **3.3 The Research Instruments**

As mentioned earlier, In the present study used 3 research instruments: document analysis, a questionnaire and an interview.

The first instrument namely the document analysis scrutinized the series “My Book of English” to provide the researchers with a valuable corpus of how local culture was depicted. To do that, each written representation of local culture found in the series “My Book of English” was classified in compliance with Byram's (1993) framework for textbooks' cultural content evaluation. Analysing the four books in the light of the eight features of cultural content found in foreign language textbooks identified by Byram (1993) would provide detailed data on the presentation of local culture in the four textbooks. The presentation emphasised the use of images words, texts, and motifs to portray the local culture in the aforementioned books which follow the same structure on organization and sequencing.

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**Table 1.**Byram's (1993) framework for cultural content in textbooks

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**Criteria for textbook evaluation focus on cultural content**

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1. Social identity and social groups (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities)
  2. Social interaction (different levels of formality, as outsider and insider)
  3. Belief and behaviour (moral, religious beliefs, daily routines)
  4. Social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)
  5. Socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passage)
  6. National history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity)
  7. National geography (geographic factors seen as being significant by members)
  8. Stereotypes and national identity (what is 'typical', symbols of national stereotypes)
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**Source:**Byram, 1993, p.35

The second instrument is a five-item Likert questionnaire elaborated by the researchers to delve into the informants' cultural teaching practices. To eschew the intrinsic limitations of this tool, the questionnaire was initially piloted with five EFL middle school teachers who were not part of the sample. Based on their feedback, an ultimate version of seven items was generated. The latter targeted the participants' modifications, adaptations, adding or eliminations of the cultural textbooks contents to reach the nationally oriented objectives.

Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted to explore in more detail the teachers' "localising" the textbook's local cultural contents.

### **3.4 Participants**

As the study addresses the EFL practitioners' practices with the cultural

textbooks content, it was deemed compulsory to elicit this data from a conveniently chosen sample of EFL middle school teachers. The sample of the present study was made up of 24 middle school English language teachers in 5 middle schools located in Mascara. The main consideration when selecting the participants was that they were well-experienced teachers. In fact, 16 out of 24, that is 66 % have been teaching for more than 15 years, while 8 out of 24, that is 33.33% have 5 -10 years of experience. Also, a large percentage were Licence Diploma holders (75%) and only 25% were Master’s holders. These criteria put them in a favourable position to have to say about the issue under investigation.

**4. Results and Discussion**

The series selected in the study was analysed page by page. A total of 623 pages (book 1 & 2 &3 160pp; book 4, 143 pp) encompassing local cultural insights were sorted out and tabulated in the table below (Table 2). As illustrated in the table below, there is a certain consistency in the distribution of local culture in the four middle school textbooks. The focus is on the distribution of social identity and social groups, national history and national geography. The presentation of these three items is depicted through pictures, maps, not to mention texts and dialogues.

**Table 2 :** Local culture in “My Book of English”

<b>Criteria for textbooks evaluation</b>	<b>Bo</b>	<b>Bo</b>	<b>Book</b>	<b>Book4</b>
<b>Focus</b>	<b>ok1</b>	<b>ok2</b>	<b>3</b>	
1. Social identity and social groups	30	6	12	2
2. Social interaction	0	2	3	8
3. Belief and behaviour	8	8	8	3
4. Social and political institutions	9	0	7	0
5. Socialization and the life cycle	2	6	5	3
6. National history	3	4	6	34



7. National geography	13	16	7	4
8. Stereotypes and national identity	4	4	10	9
9. Total number of pages with cultural content	69/160	46/160	58/160	63/143

#### **4.1 The Questionnaire**

As shown in Table 3, 20 out of 24 teachers that is the vast majority (83.33 %) agree that the local culture implemented in the series My of English is not identifiable by themselves, let alone by their learners. Therefore, it was predictable that they would agree on adapting the cultural content to suit the interest of their learners. Indeed all the respondents, that is (100 %) opted for strongly agree (22 ) and agree (4) response options.

For items 3 and 4 which gauged the effect of localising on the learners' understanding of both the cultural differences and situations, most of the teachers (62% and 83.33 respectively) agreed that localising the cultural contents would widen the learners' vision of cultural differences.

Items 4, 5 and 6 probed into the respondents' daily practices as far as the issue is concerned. 23 teachers, that is 95% stated that the learners' needs are taken into consideration and but only 66.66% were eager to modify the content to alleviate the difficulties when encountered.. 19 out of 24 teachers that is 79.16% said that they adopted the strategy of localizing to assist their pupils to understand the lesson.

**Table 3:**EFL Teachers' Use of "Localising" Local Culture

<b>Items</b>	<b>S. A.</b>	<b>A.</b>	<b>U.</b>	<b>D.</b>	<b>S .D.</b>
1. All local cultural insights are recognized by teachers and learners	0	0	0	20	4
2. In the case of non-recognition of some local cultural insights, EFL teachers use "localising" culture.	22	2	0	0	0
3. "Localising" local culture facilitates the understanding of cultural	5	10	9	0	0

differences.

4. “Localising” local culture helps learners grasp the meaning in real situations.	15	5	4	0	0
5. EFL teachers take into consideration the learners’ needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds before selecting the lexis and topics of the chosen tasks.	20	3	1	0	0
6. In the case of the unknown cultural topic from the book, EFL teachers try to modify the content as an effective step to make the activity easier.	9	7	8	0	0
7. In the case of a strange local cultural topic, EFL teachers adopt an activity or a text to facilitate the understanding of the lesson.	10	9	5	0	0

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#### **4.2 The interview**

In-depth interviews were conducted with 6 well-experienced teachers because interviews allowed the researchers to explore detailed information about their practice. This instrument was also meant to offer a more complete picture of how and why teachers localise the local culture and therefore increase the reliability of the findings. In order to ensure a stress-free atmosphere, interviews were conducted in the teacher school where they work. The interviewed teachers were given the freedom to choose any language (Arabic, English, French, or Algerian Arabic) they prefer to respond in.

To the question What are your views of the representation of the local culture in My Book of English, most of the interviewees acknowledged the value of the learners’ own culture in the teaching process. Even though all the respondents believed that the cultural issues were appropriate for the Algerian context, they doubted whether their learners would easily understand those issues.

The 6 interviewed teachers hold different views of how important the textbooks in general and My Book of English in particular are. Some adhered to the idea that an organised and pre-packed set of teaching/learning materials (Hutchinson & Hutchison, 1996, p.322), should be the starting point of any teacher for the purpose of approaching the pre-designed syllabus. It provides the initial framework and sequencing and helps enhance the learners' effectiveness. However, it remains a resource centre for most of them to pick and choose and adapt here and there to suit their own interests and by the same token their learners'. Others believe that as a guide to both experienced and novice teachers written by experts, a textbook is a trustful tool that provides the nuts and bolts of the planning and sequencing of lessons.

However, the majority of the interviewees do not adhere to considering the textbook a master. They refute the idea of being the slave of the textbook, so to speak. Struggling slavishly to complete the coursebook from cover to cover, going through the activities as they appear on the manual come hell or high water is not their daily ritual.

All the interviewees acknowledged that the series My Book of English comprises topics that are out of the reach and most interest of the learners. They reckon that it is a daunting task to try to explain texts *like wise quotes by wise people* in *I read for pleasure* (book 3, p.43) or tasks 5 and 7 (book 2, pp.90-91).

Regarding the final question which highlights the way the teachers tackle the issue of how to deal with the unfamiliar local cultural contents, all of them responded that localising is the answer. Indeed they customize texts and tasks to their learners' regional backgrounds, interests, prior knowledge, and needs. Rather than wasting one's breath explaining long texts full of high-level terms and themed to a local but unfamiliar culture, the adaptation and modification method uses recognizable native cultural aspects as an easy way to teach new lexis and enables learners to apply them to construct oral and written messages/texts. Though the predominant culture used in the series My Book of English is the local culture, it remains unfamiliar to Mascara middle school learners. Teachers responded with a plurality of opinions as to how they localise the local culture but all of them believe that

introducing the mascara context opens the way to better learning and enables the pupils to communicate easily about the context they live in. dealing with Zemalet Emir Abdelkader at SidiKada (Mascara) might "localise" the productive theme of "I think and write" p. 46, which is to produce a brief descriptive text of a historic Algerian monument, as mentioned in a fact file about Roman Timgad. The learners would have more to say about the former site than the latter. Teachers explained that the pupils even involved their parents in their research of information.

Going back to the initial question ( To what extent, is the local culture inserted in the series My Book of English?) and upon the consideration of the fact that the series My Book of English is ubiquitously used as the core teaching material in the Algerian middle school, it is expected that the native cultural elements are predominantly inserted to foster the learners' awareness and eagerness of who they are. More than this, these cultural elements are infused to educate the new generations about all that ties up a nation together, be it history, geography, customs and traditions and so forth. The purpose of such an enterprise is to teach the hands and brains of tomorrow their responsibilities and duties towards their country, their family and community. In the long run, it aspires that this would preserve the country from the effects of Globalisation due to the advent of the Internet.

To this end, the analysis of the textbooks scrutinized in this research has shown that there is a fair distribution of the local culture with a slight emphasis on two criteria of Byram's framework of cultural analysis namely, geography and social identity and social groups. It must be confessed that all the regions of the country are included in the series and so are the ethnic groups with their traditions. However, all the teachers in this study expressed their bewilderment of not finding the most known figure of the nation Emir Abdelkader who is a native of Mascara. This explains why they mentioned this historic figure instead of the ones used in the textbooks.

However, all the participants who answered the questionnaire or the interview found the textbooks with their native cultural contents less inviting. The cultural content is inviting when it interests the learners (Richard-Amato, 2003, 339). When they localise the local culture, teachers

stated, their learners are eager to inquire further. There are instances where parents are questioned to provide further details. In “I think and write (My Book of English 2, pp 77-79) the activities entitled *Setif about 100 years ago* and *Constantine today* if localised into Mascara about a hundred years ago, and Mascara today, the learners would have more to say and therefore more to write. In doing so, teachers will supply the learners with opportunities to relate the content of the material to their own lives. It will also encourage them to draw on prior knowledge (Richard-Amato (2003,p.340) as localised materials include local references.

One might argue that by shrinking, so to speak the culture of a whole nation to the culture of a region through localisation, the researchers might encourage regionalism and ethnicity. This is utterly disputable. The researchers’ concern in this endeavour is facilitating the learning process by focusing on local references, the learners’ self-awareness will be fostered and by comparing and contrasting their customs to the customs of the whole nation, the teachers will broaden the horizon. And as matter of fact, the classroom is the crucible for this exertion. The point is to encourage negotiation among the learners and foster tolerance within the same culture and with the culture of the Other.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The current research has presented a content analysis of four Algerian middle school textbooks to investigate whether the series “My Book of English’ encompasses elements of the local culture. To do so, Byram’s (1993) framework for cultural analysis has been adapted. The results show that social identity and social group, national history and national geography are the most common topics covered in the series. These items are represented mostly through pictures and maps. However, the four books do include but to a much lesser degree contents linked to “belief and behaviour”, “social and political institutions” and “socialization and the life cycle.

To the issue of how teachers cope with the unfamiliar local content included in the series “My Book of English, the research reveals that the practitioners of the region of Mascara “localise” the local cultural contents. They do so by incorporating local references. The participating teachers

believe that this process enhances their learners' motivation to learn and widens their cultural horizons. Toledo-Sandoval (2020) states: “ materials targeted for children demand the incorporation of different features of the local culture to bridge the gap between children's home context and the international culture where English is expected to be used”.

It is understood that by dealing with the learners' local references, teachers will enable their learners to participate actively in the classroom. They claim that this process motivates the learners to learn because they know the contents. The fact of being aware of the cultural content enables the learners to develop their four language skills. They can talk about it and have too much information when they are writing about historical figures such as Emir Abdelkader.

Drawing on the results presented in this study, the researchers argue that by localising the local cultural insights in the Algerian middle school textbooks, the practitioners provide an input (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000) that does not contradict the young learners' prior knowledge, nor does it interfere with their attitudes, emotions, and values. The interaction between these elements and the familiar input will enrich learning. conversely, the absence of this particular interaction will weigh a great deal in curbing the learners' empathy to acquire knowledge.

However, if this process of localizing the local culture is harnessed, this will incite the learners and teachers alike to search further and deeper about a local event, a local monument, or a local historical figure. The search for knowing oneself may result in astonishing findings. Let us exemplify the researchers' argument with the instance of a little quiet remote town called Fertassa- now known as Oued El Abtal- in the area of Mascara. Hardly does anyone know about it. Yet, through reading the poetry of Ahmed Ben Mahmoud Ben Sahnoun El Rachidi, it was brought to the open that this area was the theatre of wars between the local tribes and the Turks. Cases like this one will only motivate the learners to learn more about themselves while acquiring the language of the global world and tolerating the Other.

There are many shades of opinion about how to use textbooks, and these views are complex. Rather than following textbooks slavishly, the

researchers recommend precise coordination between not only teachers who use the textbooks through their intuition, observation and trial (Littlewood, 1999, p.82) but also professionals of an area to select local cultural contents that incite the learners to discover more about their past to tune up their future. This goes consistent with the recommendations of Toledo-Sandoval (2020) who suggests that it would be advisable to “create a national board of EFL material writers and designers and TESOL specialists to examine the topics, cultural contents and task sequences presented in textbooks published for children in state-run schools.

As the results have revealed, the local culture has received more input in the series under scrutiny when compared to the target culture. The results have also revealed when the respondents localise the input with known cultural facts in the learners’ experiences, they provide their learners with more opportunities to communicate. It might be worth examining the attitude of the learners towards the presentation of the local culture in the textbooks and also towards the localisation of the local culture, the issue of the present study.

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