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Research Paper

A Comparative Intercultural Analysis of Two English School Textbooks from Iran and Egypt

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Abstract

The present study aimed to analyze two secondary English school textbooks from Iran and Egypt to see to what extent these two middle-eastern countries with similar religious, historical, and social backgrounds include culture in their official textbooks. For this purpose, *Vision I*, the Iranian secondary school textbook, and *Hello I,* the Egyptian English school textbook, were chosen. Four aspects of culture (topics, cultural dimensions, international/intercultural issues, and cultural references) were investigated in these two textbooks. The results show that *Vision I* has a more limited number of cultural content compared to *Hello I*. However, a lack of in-depth cultural information could be observed in both textbooks. Thus, it is necessary to take special measures concerning Vision I by including a greater array of cultural content and giving this content depth and detail. For *Hello I*, the cultural content needs to exceed in quality. The present study's findings might be insightful for syllabus designers, textbook publishers, and teachers to reconsider the essential role of culture qualitatively and quantitatively.

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To understand what is meant by intercultural communicative competence, one can refer to Byram (1997), who defines it as the ability "to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p. 71). More specifically, Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen. (1992) believe that the process of interculturalization (our terminology) has with itself some changes in attitudes, beliefs, identity, and values. For Berry et al., becoming an intercultural person requires a change in who we previously were; and a change in the ideas, positions, and the thought patterns we held toward the *out-groups* (Sercu's, 2005 terminology); we do all these to become members of this out-group (Sercu, 2005).

Language education rests upon such a level. Hilliard (2014) stresses that culture is an important part of language, and teaching a specific language, yet not teaching its culture, would be difficult. In addition, some researchers and teachers realize the effectiveness of developing the students' intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2008; Sercu, 2010). Thus, to "understand and communicate individual and collective feelings, values, ideologies, thoughts, etc.," one should master the cultural and intercultural components of a language, too (Arias, 2015, p. 1).

In language education, textbooks manifest interculturality. Oakes and Saunders (2004) consider textbooks important mediators that can transfer intercultural information to L2 learners. They are also authentic sources for boosting learners' knowledge about different aspects of the target language.

In fact, in an EFL context where English is 'foreign' and most people are not fluent in it (like Iran), the importance of EFL materials comes to be much

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protruded than ever. Since EFL learners are neither exposed to English nor have any contact with English native speakers, they do not experience any type of social interaction that deprives them of any knowledge they might gain about the foreign language culture, values, and social life.

This study explores school English textbooks in the two middle-eastern countries, Iran and Egypt, both having similar historical, cultural, religious, etc., backgrounds (Glen Rangwala, 2017). This encouraged the researchers to choose Egypt among other middle-eastern countries to see how these two countries deal with cultural information in their official English school textbooks, an attempt that had not been previously carried out. The textbooks were examined based on notions confirmed by Hall (2002), Sercu (as cited in Gray, 2010, p. 40), Risager (1991), and Ramirez and Hall (1990), which are turned into a digestible all-encompassing model compared to other models of ICC for textbook analysis.

Literature Review

Local (official) English school textbooks in Iran and Egypt at each country's secondary and high school levels were addressed in this study. For this purpose, an overview of some recent studies will be provided to see what and how other studies tackled this issue and what results were reached.

Alsaif (2016) attempted to analyze the *Touchstone* series taught in Saudi Arabia through textual analysis; he found an immoderate concentration on western culture. Another study carried out by Alsofi (2018) concentrated on *Well Read 1* series in which he aimed to identify instances of the target, international, and source culture. The results manifested that a number of cultures were pointed to in passing, and there was no emphasis on target cultures like British and American cultures. Dimici et al. (2018) investigated

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the perceptions of teachers in relation to the *English File* series in Turkey. The findings showed that the different contents as audio, visual, and textual content, integrated issues of gender and ethnicity while other topics like political directions and social class were not used enough. In an international level textbook analysis, four such textbooks were analyzed by Toprak and Aksoyalp (2015). This study targeted to identify inner-circle countries in textbooks; they found the frequent inclusion and overrepresentation of the UK and the USA cultures, and underrepresentation of cultures of New Zealand and Canada since these, too, are English speaking countries. On the other hand, what was found was the frequent exclusive reference to the UK and the USA cultures. Majdzadeh's (2002) aimed to focus on the eighth- and ninth-grade Iranian school English textbooks. What was in complete contrast with the above-mentioned studies was the emphasis on and the exclusive implementation of Islamic and local culture.

English Educational Policy in Iran

Here English is labeled as the language of the enemies (the USA and the UK) (Borjian, 2013), yet it is also considered as a tool for progress (Riazi & Rahimi, 2005). In Iran, the flourishing of English and the amount of emphasis put on it, as many authors note, depends upon the political and social exchanges and status (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2014; Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Borjian, 2013). English received much attention before the Islamic Revolution in 1979 because Iran had vast relationships with the West (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). It was nearly at these times that the British Council and Iran-American Society (IAS) came to expand English.

With the advent of the Islamic Revolution and its policy of opposing the *West*, the English language just faded away. Then, It was decided to

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nationalize and localize the content of ELT materials. Based on Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015), the newly developed textbooks were named Iran Language Institute (ILI) (the previous name of which was "Iran-American Society") with objectives in line with the current government. Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015) draw the status of ELT in the four decades of the revolution: despite the severe sensitivity toward this issue in the first decade of Revolution (1979), the second decade experienced economic privatization and the reopening of private language institutes (despite the officials' resistance) due to the non-efficient teacher-centered and also grammar-translation methods prevalent at those days. In the third decade that coincided with the beginning of the 21st century, communication, globalization, and technology made the world more connected. At this time, the public education system did not show acceptable performance in ELT, so the private sector came to be more successful than the public one. Eventually, by the passage of three decades, there is growing attention and interest toward English in Educational and developmental documents.

Finally, after three decades of curriculum inflexibility, and thanks to the private sector's success, this resistance gave way to modifications in public education. The result was publishing the first and the second volumes of six-series English textbooks for high schools in 2013 and 2014, respectively, named *Prospect*. This curriculum more than ever emphasized communicative skills and a decrease in mother tongue use (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).

Currently, English is taught in three years of junior/senior high school four/three hours (respectively) per week and is considered one of the main courses with a six-unit credit value (Secretariat of the Higher Council of Education, 2006). The English course in schools aims to improve students' reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar. After high school, students

are ready for a pre-university level, preparing them to enter university. Students have English for four hours a week (Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011). Khajavi and Abbasian (2011) referred to time limitation, which makes teaching all the skills together impossible. The use of educational technology and audiovisual material could not be ignored. Schools do not zoom on this aspect. The same source concludes that schools do not perfectly feed Iranian EFL learners' needs due to the absence of a neatly organized syllabus, lack of technology in teaching, and time limitation.

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English Educational Policy in Egypt

English is currently the main foreign language in Egypt (Abdel Latif, 2017). It is both used as a lingua franca in everyday interactions in Egypt and the official language in online communications by internet users (Warschauer et al. 2002, as cited in Abdel Latif, 2017). Since English plays a crucial role for Egyptians, it is considered a core subject taught to 1-12 graders (Abdel Latif, 2017). Based on Imhoof (1977), Egypt witnessed ambivalent feelings toward the English language from considering it as "a necessary evil during the British occupation" to reconsidering it as "a practical vehicle for educational, economic and…social mobility" (Abdel Latif, 2017, p. 3). Nevertheless, during the last two decades, there was notable growth in the number of Egyptians showing inclinations toward English and actually learning it. Accordingly, "the history of English in Egypt is rich, and English continues to be used in more and more domains, forms, and functions in contemporary Egypt" (Schaub, 2000, p. 236).

Egypt's educational system included the English language in "the first half of the nineteenth century" (Abdel Latif, 2017, p. 2). Egypt's political and social changes have also formed, changed, and reformed the way English has

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been taught. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, English first came along with other languages such as French, Turkish, Persian, and Italian as a language which was taught in few schools (in Egypt). English grew into a dominant language so that it became the mode of instruction in public schools, too. But in 1952, it was replaced by Arabic (Ministry of Education (MOE), 1964), which made English remain merely as a school subject at pre-university levels once again. With the advent of the nationalization movement in Egypt, English was annulled from primary schools in 1945 so that more attention would be directed toward Arabic- Egyptians' mother tongue. There were other reforms as well, such as the replacement of foreign teachers of English by Egyptian teachers in 1951 (MOE, 1964). Langsten and Hassan (2008) clarify that the 1952 revolution brought about some reforms in education, such as free access to education for all Egyptians. The 1952 revolution accompanied the nationalization movement, and it was at that time English was canceled from primary schools until the early 1990s (Abdel Latif, 2017). The free access to education to all Egyptians indirectly influenced English education. The Egyptian educational system witnessed a not very desirable educational output as a result. Among these, English was positively influenced by such policies because of the absence of English for pre-middle school graders in public schools along with the low-quality factor in the same schools. Parents had no choice except to send their children to private schools that rectified these two shortcomings (Abdel Latif, 2017). ElMeshad (2012) reports that nearly 8% of Egyptian students attend private schools today. By the progress of such private schools all around Egypt and with their methods of teaching, MOE decided to begin a series of reforms to enhance English taught in public schools as well. These are:

1. Establishing Other Types of Schools Providing Intensive English Instruction
2. Introducing English Education to Primary Graders
3. Adopting New Policies in English Language Teacher Recruitment and Education
4. English Curricular Reforms

(Abdel Latif, 2017, p. 6)

Here is a chronological summary of the textbook series in Egyptian governmental schools in the last few decades:

Table 1.

The Chronology of the Official English Textbooks Taught in Egypt's Schools

Educational stage	Textbook series taught and the academic years of their use			
Primary stage	**1993/1994-2002/2003**	**2003/2004-2012/2013**	**2003/2004-2012/2013**	**2013-present**
	Hello! (first series)	Hand in Hand	Hello! (second series)	Time for English
	Primary 4 & 5	Primary 1, 2 & 3	Primary 4, 5 & 6	Primary 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6
Prep stage	**1966/1967-1984/1985**	**1986/1987-1995/1996**	**1996/1997-2005/2006**	**2005/06-Present**
	Living English	Welcome to English	Hello! (first series)	Hello! (second series)
Secondary stage	**1971/1972-1985/1986**	**1986/1987-1998/1999**	**1999/2000-2007/2008**	**2008/09-Present**
	Practice and Progress	Excel in English	Hello! (first series)	Hello! (second series)

Note. Adapted from Haridy (2012)

The purpose of the present study was to study the parts in the texts of two English school textbooks of Iran and Egypt where culture is represented. For

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this aim, only the texts were considered as the subject of analysis. Overall, this study addresses two main research questions:

1. What are the instances of cultural topics, cultural dimensions, and cultural references in the *textual content* of Iranian school English textbooks?
2. What are the instances of cultural topics, cultural dimensions, and cultural references in the *textual content* of Egyptian school English textbooks?

Two series of official school English textbooks from Iran and Egypt (which are considered local textbooks developed by the ministry of education of both countries) were selected to address the above questions. The analysis was developed based on the occurrence of each instance of culture (what is meant by instances of culture are the cultural topics, cultural dimensions, cultural references, and their subcategories; explained more in detail in the Method/Model section). The analysis is divided into two main parts for Iran and Egypt. The findings are then compared and contrasted.

Method

Materials

This study is an attempt to analyze Iranian and Egyptian school English textbooks. Iran's *Vision I* textbook series taught in secondary levels is parallel to Egypt's *Hello I* series that is also taught at secondary levels. In both countries, students study three textbooks.

Vision I series has been developed and published by the Ministry of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran since 2013 as English textbooks for Iranian students. The *Vision I* series is designed for grades 10th to 12th of senior high school students. In this study, the first book of this level from both Iran and Egypt are analyzed in order to find the instances of cultural content

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in the 'texts'. Here are the textbooks: *English for Schools: Vision I (3rd ed.)* and *Hello I! English for Secondary Schools: Year One*.

Procedure

First of all, both textbooks were scrutinized to determine the cultural information within them. The textual instances of culture were noted. The textbooks were analyzed based on three models (explained in more detail below). The model chosen in this study prepares the ground for an analysis that considers different perspectives. In this way, it will be possible to identify more instances of culture. The main research design in this study is a qualitative one. However, the analyses' frequencies and percentages help boost the justifications and explanations. In all three parts of the model, the frequencies of specific cultural content were determined for textual content. Another rater examined the data to assess the inter-rater reliability as far as reliability is concerned. The result was reasonably acceptable (0.87).

Data Analysis

The two textbooks underwent extensive examination to find traces of culture based on the three models. The aspects of culture sought were in topics, cultural dimensions (with three categories of macro, micro, and international/intercultural issues), and cultural references (explained in Method/Model in more detail). Note that only "texts," i.e., written materials (not pictures, audio, etc.), were analyzed. The researchers, hence, went carefully through both textbooks twice to identify these cultural instances. The data analysis was carried out mainly qualitatively by explaining and describing the type, amount, and possible reasons (in some cases) why culture was employed in the textbooks. Data analyses are presented in two separate

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parts for Iran and Egypt to provide neat and clear borders while explaining each.

Model of Analysis

This study developed a model after examining models from Hall (2002), Sercu (in Gray, 2010, p. 40), Risager (1991). The model is divided into three parts: *part I*, cultural topics, which is based on Hall (2002) and Sercu (in Gray, 2010, p. 40) dealing with 'general information' or 'topics' about culture. Fourteen more topics were added (31-48) to these topics for a more comprehensive analysis (see the appendix).

Part II deals with cultural dimensions developed by Risager (1991); this further analysis can enhance the results of the study in that it offers a complementary analysis as well as a more solid sketch with respect to the textbooks under analysis: the first level, *micro-level* encompasses issues such as cultures and countries addressed, characters (age, gender, background), material environment, situations of interaction, and finally interaction and subjectivity of the characters (feelings, attitudes, values, perceived problems); the second level, *macro-level* addresses broader issues which may be identified within textbooks, such as broad social facts about contemporary society (geographical, economic, political, etc.), broad socio-political problems, and the historical backgrounds. The third level in Risager's model deals with the *international and intercultural issues,* which in turn are described in three levels of comparisons between cultures, intercultural situations, images, stereotypes, etc.

Part III encompasses Ramirez and Halls' (1990) model for content analysis; this model has been modified in order to serve the purpose(s) of the present study; this way, the main principles of the model were adhered to, but

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since this study was an attempt to study the Iranian and Egyptian school textbooks, the codes had to be modified.

Results

Here are the results of the analysis of instances of culture in Iranian and Egyptian secondary school textbooks. The order by which the tables are presented is the same order as presented in the model (appendix): topics (I), cultural dimensions (II), and cultural references (III). Numbers and letters have been used within the model itself for codifying all the instances.[2]

Cultural Topics

The frequency of cultural topics within the Iranian and Egyptian school textbooks (*Vision I* and *Hello I*) is presented in the following tables:

Table 2.
Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Topics in Vision I

	I. Cultural Topics	Frequency
	2. geography	1
	7. history	1
	11. society/social life	1
	13. environment	1
	24. science	1
Vision I	25. animal	1

[2] All through the analysis and explanations:
*The codes of part I (Cultural Topics) are referred to as **numbers** used to represent each topic (the model with all its numbered categories and sub-categories is placed in the appendix as a whole).
*In part II (Cultural Dimensions), numbers and letters are used as it is used in the main model (appendix) to represent each cultural instance (**1a-1e/2a-2c/3a-3c**).
*And the codes used to represent the cultural instances of part III (Cultural References), are the shortened form of the complete phrases (e.g. texts with culture specific reference is used for short in the analyses and explanations as **CSR**; texts with culture free reference as **CFR**; texts with culture general reference as **CGR**; texts with English culture reference as **ECR**; and finally texts with foreign culture reference as **FCR**)

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	26. religion	1
	28. travel	1
	38. achievement	1
	39. discoveries	1
	41. famous people	1
	Topics	**11**
	Sum of frequencies	**11**
	percentage	**7.58%**

Table 3.

Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Topics in Hello I

	I. Cultural Topics	**Frequency**
	3. transportation	2
	4. commerce/economy	3
	6. occupation	2
	9. media/communication	1
	11. society/social life	1
	13. environment	3
	16. national symbols	2
Hello I	19. mentality	2
	20. family	1
	24. science	2
	29. current events	1
	30. arts	4
	31. health	2
	32. safety	1
	33. possession	1
	37. technology	2
	38. achievement	1
	39. discoveries	1
	41. famous people	5
	Topics	**19**
	Sum of frequencies	**37**
	Percentage	**26.4%**

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Both tables clearly show that the range of topics used in Hello I is a wider one (19 topics), covering nearly twice more than *Vision I* (11 topics) covers. Moreover, frequencies of more than one are observable in *Hello I,* and for some of these topics, there are frequencies like 2, 3, 4, and 5. A point needs to be noted here: the researchers added topics because the topics already in the model (1-30) did not represent this aspect well enough. Again, in *Hello I*, more types of topics could be observed among the already existing topics (7 instances), meaning that the topics of the model could not cover the range of topics used in this textbook. For *Vision I*, three of the added topics were also used (topics added to the model in this analysis: health, safety, possession, technology, achievement, discoveries, famous people).

The use of topics represents that a textbook tends to focus on important information since it nourishes many students in schools. The topics mentioned in *Vision I* are mostly centered on Iran and Iranian examples. For instance, lesson one is about endangered animals. After an introduction, there is a focus on Iranian animals (cheetahs). In the same way, lesson three is about famous people where it talks about Iranian scientists and writers. However, it talks about two foreign scientists as well. Interestingly, in a conversation that begins lesson four, there is a dialogue between two foreigners who are consulting one another to find a place to travel to. After mentioning countries like China and India, Iran is proposed by one of them, and it is finally decided as their holiday destination. Here, the focus on Iran and its superiority is palpable. Again, in one of the last readings of the same lesson, Iran is the focus as the title "Iran: A True Paradise" well enough to signify, and the last paragraph totally speaks about Iran as an ideal place for tourists.

Compared to *Vision I,* the range and the number of topics used in *Hello I* is higher. In the same way, as in *Vision I*, the first lesson of *Hello I* is about an

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Egyptian Scientist Dr. Farouk El-Baz who excelled in a number of scientific achievements, resided in the USA, and graduated from Boston University. Units two and five present students with pieces of stories from English literature. Moreover, unit eight introduces the classic English poet Shakespeare and unit nine, the American author Helen Keller. Unit nine's complementary reading section is about two athletes from around the world, like Markus Rehm and Greg Rutherford, who played for Qatar and England. Unit eleven gets students to know another famous British writer Charlotte Brontë by her famous novel *Jane Eyre.* Naturally, there are many references to foreign culture within each one of these stories, which get the students better involved in foreign cultures. Lesson twelve is about two girls named Leila and Samira talking about their jobs and the prerequisite they need to fulfill for each job position. The interesting thing that caught our attention was the type of job mentioned; it was a sort of job that works with foreign companies, the need to know English at a good level, talk to customers from all over the world, and write and email to people from other countries. Again, in this unit, the focus is on getting connected with foreigners. And the tone used in this dialogue by Leila is positive as she says: "She enjoys her jobs since she meets and talks to people all over the world". Unit fourteen introduces Jules Verne's story *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and unit seventeen presents Canon Doyle a Scottish-British writer and his story, *The Hound of the Baskervilles.* Except for two units that partly touch Egypt, other units mainly focus on information from other countries or general phenomena like the brain's power, air pollution, technology, health, psychological information such as phobias and light pollution. Even if the constant references to other countries, cultures, and literature do not help students directly understand foreign cultures, that will

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give them clues and familiarity to pursue and find out more about cultures other than their own culture.

Cultural Dimensions (II) and Cultural References (III) Compared

Below Tables 4-6 depict cultural instances in two categories of culture for Iranian and Egyptian English school textbooks.

Vision I

Table 4 summarizes the number of times Cultural Dimensions (II) have occurred in *Vision I*:

Table 4.

The Frequency and the Percentage of Cultural Dimensions in Vision I

	II. Cultural Dimensions		Frequency	Percentage
Vision I	**1. Micro level**	a. Cultures and courtiers addressed	37	3.7%
		b. Characters (age, gender, background)	39	3.9%
		c. Material environment	75	7.5%
		d. Situations of interaction	18	1.8%
		e. Interaction and subjectivity of characters (feelings, attitude, values, perceived problems)	5	0.5%
	2. Macro level	a. Broad social facts about contemporary society (geographic, economic, political, etc.)	20	2%
		b. Broad sociopolitical problems	2	0.2%
		c. Historical background	0	0
	3. International and intercultural issues	a. Comparisons between cultures	0	0
		b. Intercultural situations	0	0
		c. Images, stereotypes etc.	0	0

And Table 5 summarizes the number of times Cultural References (III) occurred in *Vision I*:

Table 5.
The Frequency and the Percentage of Cultural References in Vision I

	III. Cultural References	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Vision I	1. Texts with culture specific reference (TCSR)	47	4.7%
	2. Texts with culture free reference (TCFR)	260	26%
	3. Texts with culture general reference (TCGR)	59	5.9%
	4. Texts with English culture reference (TECR)	0	0
	5. Texts with foreign (non-English) culture reference (TFCR)	39	3.9%

The numbers show that the highest frequency belongs to category III, culture-free reference (TCFR), with a frequency of 260. The lowest (zero) frequency instances belong to categories of historical background (2c), comparisons between cultures (3a), intercultural situations (3b), images, stereotypes (3c), and English culture reference (TECR). These are categories that emphasize culture the most among other categories since they are directly connected to manifestations of culture, yet there were no identified instances as such in *Vision I*. However, the highest frequency belongs to the category of the material environment (1c) with 75 times of occurrence. It means that there were almost 75 references to the material environment, including the environment like trees, rivers, and mountains other than people.

As the other high-frequency instances, cultural general reference (TCGR) stands out with 59 occurrences; this item is about instances all through the textbook that can potentially be loaded with culture but are not; instances such as teacher, man, and worker. The next frequent item is foreign culture reference (TFCR), with a frequency of 39. This is where the textbook has

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referred to foreign names, countries, famous places, etc. The category known as characters (1b) also has the same frequency, which refers to the characters or the people in the textbooks; meaning that in the whole textbook, there are 39 characters (of any kind), including famous people, persons participating in dialogue especially in the conversation sections of the textbook, etc. The next decreasing frequency belongs to cultures and countries addressed (1a) with the frequency of 37 proposing that there are references to different cultures and countries, including Iran itself, allocates nearly 10 out of these 37 instances. As the table shows, there were 20 times that the textbook addressed broad social facts about contemporary society (2a), and 18 times that it addressed situations of interaction (1d) which means situations like school, library, mosque, office, etc. where some people could be found interacting. The lowest frequencies are related to interaction and subjectivity of characters (1e) with five times being repeated and the category of broad socio-political problems (2b) with the frequency of 2. Category 1e shows feelings, ideas, or reflections being expressed, and category 2b shows that *Vision I* has touched upon wide-scope or macro issues only limitedly and no instance about international and intercultural issues (II/3/a,b,c).

Hello I

Table 6 summarizes the instances of Cultural Dimensions in *Hello I*.

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Table 6.

The Frequency and the Percentage of Cultural Dimensions in Hello I

	II. Cultural Dimensions		Frequency	Percentage
Hello I	**1. Micro level**	a. Cultures and courtiers addressed	60	6%
		b. Characters (age, gender, background)	110	11%
		c. Material environment	60	6%
		d. Situations of interaction	43	4.3
		e. Interaction and subjectivity of characters (feelings, attitude, values, perceived problems)	0	0
	2. Macro level	a. Broad social facts about contemporary society (geographic, economic, political, etc.)	28	2.8%
		b. Broad sociopolitical problems	5	0.5%
		c. Historical background	11	1.1%
	3. International and intercultural issues	a. Comparisons between cultures	0	0
		b. Intercultural situations	3	0.3%
		c. Images, stereotypes etc.	0	0

Table 7 presents the Cultural References in the same textbook:

Table 7.

The Frequency of Cultural References in Hello I I

	III. Cultural References	Frequency	Percentage
Hello I	1. Texts with culture specific reference (TCSR)	44	4.4%
	2. Texts with culture free reference (TCFR)	444	44.4%
	3. Texts with culture general reference (TCGR)	166	16.6%
	4. Texts with English culture reference (TECR)	93	9.3%
	5. Texts with foreign (non-English) culture reference (TFCR)	67	6.7%

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The highest frequency belongs to culture-free reference (TCFR), much like in *Vision I*, in *Hello I* being 444 times repeated. This is normal because TCFR reference accounts for all objects that alone cannot be potential carriers of culture (such as board, sun, earth, and pen. However, the main functions they may have in relation to culture are that they act as word-capacitors facilitators and provide the words for talking about different issues and topics, one of which could be culture. So, these might be considered as some sort of background-providing. To clarify our point, consider the word "cricket" in unit 2, which we have considered as TCFR. This word is among other TCFR words that help the whole text idea to be formed. In much the same way, words like city, country, and traffic could be used in texts that talk about the very tokens, including the exact names of cities and some information about them. Or the status of traffic in different countries or the severe rules associated with it. Thus, it is reckoned that these words, though labeled culture-free, could also assist in developing ideas about culture. Thus, TCFR instances could be considered providers; they provide enough vocabulary to talk about different topics, including cultural ones.

The next highest frequency is general culture reference (TCGR), with 166 times of occurrence. The least frequency of this category is in units 3, 12, and 18. Through the frequency of TCGR, the subject about which the unit is developing could be speculated to large extents since there is no general reference to jobs nor to people, it could be understood that these units are talking about more objective and scientific subjects or about the very personal lives of the characters. In this case, unit 3 is about the brain, unit 12 is about two characters talking about their jobs, and unit 18 is about light pollution. Among the high-frequency TCGR are units 1, 4, 7, 15, for instance, with frequencies of 13, 16, 17, and 14, respectively. Unit one is about a famous

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Egyptian scientist; Unit four is about national consensus, which is a social topic; Unit 7 is about online surveys and different characters' comments on their experiences; and finally, unit 15 is about people's (personal) fears of phobias. These all represent how and why instances of TCGR are identified.

One hundred and ten (110) is the third-highest frequency representing the category of characters (1b); many foreign, English, and Arabic names appear in this textbook. This is surprising since *Vision I* partially refers to foreign and English names and characters.

The fourth high-frequent instance (93) is allocated to TECR, representing the number of times English culture (names, literature, places, etc.) has been referred to. In contrast to *Vision I,* which has no cases of TECR, *Hello I* shows many instances of this type of cultural information. Students are exposed to English writers and their famous works all through *Hello I*. They get to know different concepts, places, characters, and many other points through these units, which are enough to get them familiar with a target language culture mainly through their literature. This is what is missing completely in *Vision I*. This way, Iranian students miss a considerable amount of knowledge about the target language culture. A concept near TECR but not the same is TFCR which refers to instances where foreign culture (other countries' cultures except English culture) is referred to. This is the next frequent item in this table (67) which refers to names and countries (other than the ones related to English and British country and culture) such as America, Qatar, and Germany.

The other category covers cultures and countries addressed (la) and in this case, except for referring to its own country three or four times, *Hello I* mentions other countries and places like West of England, London, Calcatta,

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New York, France, Africa, etc. All in all, *Hello I* represents more varied instances of culture than what was observed in *Vision I*.

Based on the above results, more obvious instances of culture are present in *Hello I* than in *Vision I*; the main difference between the use of ICC and cultural instances could best be recognized in the third category of Cultural Dimensions (II), which is about international and intercultural issues. While there are zero instances of this category in Vision I, three instances were identified in *Hello I*. Talking about intercultural situations or comparing different cultures could give students ideas about cultural differences and widen their perspective while engaging in learning a language. This is missed in *Vision I*. Moreover, while there were zero instances for TECR in *Vision I*, 93 instances could be identified in *Hello I*. With respect to TCSR though, the frequency for *Vision I* is 47 and in *Hello I* 44. This is the only frequency where *Vision I* goes higher than *Hello I* (though not very much higher). TCSRs are instances of specific culture referring to Iran and/or all of its related concepts which were 47 times in *Vision I*. This number is high for *Hello I* as well and in this textbook, too, there were references to Egypt and Egyptian culture, traditions, names, etc. But the debatable point here is that while other instances in *Vision I* are low compared to *Hello I*, this very instance is higher. It could be inferred how *Vision I* insists on presenting the specific culture of Iran, among other factors.

Discussion

This study aimed to compare English school textbooks of Iran and Egypt as two middle-eastern countries from the point of view of culture to see how cultural instances are hired within these textbooks and how much focus is exerted on cultures of other countries. It is affirmed throughout the literature

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to get students to know other countries' cultures since it is important to cater to their intercultural competence and intercultural communication skills, leading them to adopt an intercultural identity (Sercu, 2010).

There are many studies in this respect that focus on textbooks and analyze them from a pedagogic point of view because it has been made clear that textbooks present other cultures and values to students both implicitly and explicitly (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011).

Concerning cultural topics, the results revealed that the topics used in *Vision I* were approximately twice less than the ones used in *Hello I*. This limited incorporation of topics has made *Vision I* feebler compared to *Hello I* as far as cultural issues, and their representation in textbooks are concerned. The range and the variety of the topics used in textbooks is deemed a factor in increasing the cultural value of textbooks, which in turn benefits the students in increasing their intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is made up of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills. If equipped with the three aforementioned, students will be able to communicate more efficiently with other individuals who have a different culture (Byram, 2008). One of the consequences of refraining from using enough or more cultural instances as well as holding a biased point of view and emphasizing one's own culture, be it through topics, cultural dimensions, or cultural references, yields students who are biased and tend to think in a one-sidedly. This would cause these students to become individuals who prefer specific groups, genders, nationalities, religions, etc., over other more international ones. This might gradually make them deserted since they lack the ability and the skills to understand cross-cultural diversities (Kobia, 2009)

There were some references to foreign cultures, countries, places, and names in the present analysis. In the case of *Hello I*, the manifestation of other

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countries' cultures was done through more instances than in *Vision I*, such as the selected stories from famous English or foreign writers. The highest frequency in *Vision I* concerning TFCR was in lesson four, in which the representation of culture was achieved by mentioning the names of countries or suggesting some famous and beautiful places around the world. However, this could be done more broadly by engaging students with literary works from other countries, including photos of foreigners, their ways of dressing, traditions, food, or other information, and not just *citing* some countries. Each time a country is cited might be considered a frequency, but this is all about quantity; what seems to be interculturally lacking in *Vision I* is when the names related to other cultures are merely cited with no further details. This finding is similar to Shin, Eslami, and Chen's (2011) in that the textbooks were filled with inner-circle cultural information with cultural information remaining at the surface knowledge providing level rather than evoking learners' participation and engagement.

In *Hello I*, though there are repeated references to Egyptian culture, there are references to other cultures (TFCR/TECR). For instance, there are references to foreign athletes, scientists, and writers. This may not be enough but when we come to compare *Hello I* with *Vision I*, the difference could be realized. However, there is a key point presented by Yuen (2011), who claims that teaching materials need to present different cultures and not necessarily English-speaking countries' cultures. Concerning *Vision I*, this criterion was more considered than in *Hello I,* with references it made to other cultures such as Spain, China, India, Africa, Brazil, European countries, and Chile. *On the other hand, Hello I* does not mention this range of countries except for India, Qatar, and Germany. However, the difference between these two textbooks rests at the level of quality, meaning that *Vision I* has just cited these country

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names, and there is no more related information or photos regarding these countries. *Hello I*, presents more stories from English-speaking writers. This is once more in line with Yuen's (2011) finding which shows an overrepresentation of culture of English-speaking countries while showing an underrepresentation of culture of Asian or African countries.

Kilickaya (2004) asserts that intercultural competence not only augments students' knowledge of other cultures but also raises their awareness of their own culture. Hence, it could be argued that a monocultural approach is not fixed within the horizons of intercultural communicative competence, be it the native speakers' culture or the local culture of the students (Kachru, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2006). From the point of view of the textbooks, it needs to be said that except for *Hello I,* which hired the target language culture to some extent, *Vision I* did not fully hire cultural concepts as done in *Hello I*. Some instances refer to names and places of foreign countries, though those were not being elaborated on to give more details about these cultures. In *Hello I,* too, among many foreign cultures, the emphasis is mostly on American and British cultures as there are stories in some of the units from authors of these two countries. Based on Kachru and Seidlhofer thus, a milder monocultural approach could be expected in *Hello I*, yet a more intense one could be observed in *Vision I*. This type of monocultural approach cannot fulfill the demands of current language teaching requirements. Therefore, curriculum developers need to take into careful consideration the point that mere reliance on native speaker models or local culture is no longer applicable to the intercultural contexts of the present time.

Dervin (2010) puts intercultural competence as "the expected outcome of the insertion of interculturality in language learning and teaching" (p. 158), which is not really adequately manifested in *Vision I* compared to *Hello I*.

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For Fatemi, Ghahremani Ghajar, and Bakhtiari (2018), the inclusion of other cultures in English textbooks has been deemed a monopoly of western ideas and methodologies. Their study stresses the benefits of the Islamization of English textbooks. It further clarifies that it would be much more suitable if Islamic-oriented English textbooks were designed in order to suit specific societies. Their study is contrary to the whole idea of the present study which is rooted in the belief that people of any religion and culture need to get to know each other, communicate, and develop an awareness of each other's cultures, values, traditions, mindsets, and many other instances that could be found in the textbooks. The main idea of the present study is, therefore, not in line with Fatemi et al.'s (2018) wish for "a reunion and return to our true selves in education in general and in language education, in particular" (p. 83).

Mahboudi and Javdani (2012) also put forward views on the importance of the inclusion of foreign cultures. In their study, two voices could be heard: one voice is telling its readers about the importance of other culture recognition, which is because of the world turning into one whole with the communications being so vast among individuals. And another voice is a more cautious one, asserting that our own Iranian culture and values might be endangered if special measures are not taken before presenting students with other cultures through school materials. This hesitation and distrust do not go parallel with the present study's goals. What is worth considering is that every country needs to include other cultures' instances to yield more intercultural students who are to be, in the future, more intercultural interactive individuals in the world. Meanwhile, the danger of losing one's real identity and culture which was recurrently stressed by Mahboudi and Javdani (2012) above, might need to be resolved in earlier stages of the students' education by educational system, different organizations, families, etc. via boosting and valorizing

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"own" culture (which is another debate and cannot be fully covered in this paper).

Al Rabai (2014) has shown the overall status of English in Arab countries. He explains that there has been an anti-English tendency held by new fundamental leaders and Obsessive Muslim leaders toward considering English in the school curriculum, the ones who "try their best to suppress English" (p. 126). Throughout his paper, he explains that different Arab countries such as the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries consider foreign languages as symbols that aim at destroying or dominating their cultural and political views and when the author rejects such a thing, his views are considered to go in line with what was so far the aim and the focus of the present study. However, a subtle point needs to be noted. While Al Rabai discusses the state of English culture only, the present study focuses on including English and other cultures.

A rather lively debate occurred where Al Rabai (2014) cites Karmany (2005). Karmany (2005) juxtaposes Islam and English as being two big issues quoting Harris (1992), who believes that English and Islam "are names of two very big battalions when it comes to the current international power struggle for control of the Middle East" (p. 90). Karmany, explains Al Rabai (2014), expresses the need to shift the focus of teaching English from a language or tool to English as a way of life. He continues that we as language teachers and the students should maintain the kind of educational policies and methods to make it possible to link the process of language learning to the more realistic aim of language, which is communicating in English.

Overall, the findings reveal a lack of adequate cultural instances in *Vision I* compared to *Hello I*. The reasons for the lack of intercultural notions and concepts within textbooks might be due to a number of reasons. Hamiloğlu

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and Mendi (2010) posit a number of such reasons and explain that this might be related to more external rather than internal factors like the views and awareness of textbook developers/writers, political limitations concerning publishing textbooks, or the policies associated with the local culture. These would pose a paradox as far as the educational needs of the students are concerned since it is insisted throughout the literature that for a communicative language ability to be acquired, there need to be some representations of the target or international culture (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014).

Conclusions

The necessity of intercultural competence is emphasized as one of the critical competencies every student needs to be equipped with. The reason why this competence is important is due to the point that it will prepare students to be more communicative in international and intercultural situations. Thus, all through the literature (sections 1 and 2), it is suggested that students need to be more exposed to the kind of content which provides them with a balanced view of different cultures since that would, in turn, develop their intercultural communicative competence and render them to individuals who can better handle situations where there are people from different cultural backgrounds and different mindsets; that is why being able to successfully manage interactions as such is worthy. One of the ways by which intercultural instances could be presented to students is through their school textbooks.

This study shows that cultural content in *Vision I* (and to lesser degrees in *Hello I*) needs to consider wider and more in-depth aspects of other countries cultures. The under-representation of different groups of people and cultures, lack of in-depth material, lack of enough examples (II2), and no

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instances of international and intercultural issues (II3) may pose challenges for students who need to be interculturally aware. This is true for teachers who are required to teach such textbooks and who may not be able in any possible way to develop effective additional cultural materials. The analyses showed that *Vision I* has references to foreign names and countries though this is sporadically done. To be clearer, the references to countries which were like listing the names of countries are included in a lesson which was about 'traveling the world'. There were no details about the listed countries in this lesson, neither were there examples of other instances of culture all through *Vision I,* which could be included to make students more familiar with cultures other than their own. However, what is protruded is the repeated emphasis on Iran, its beautiful sights and cities, its holidays, its icons, etc. Another finding reveals the few cases of intercultural exchanges. There were one or two such exchanges (between an Iranian student and another from a foreign country); the point which is critical here is that the topics of these conversations are narrow and basic, none of which raises instances of culture. Interestingly, in the case of Iranian school textbooks, there were zero references to English culture (England and America). Based on the present study, *Vision I* remains more on the surface as far as cultural points are concerned since there were no deep explanations and descriptions of other countries' cultures.

Hello I went through the same analyses as *Vision I* did. The two textbooks have similar orientations in that they both emphasize their *own* countries and cultures. This emphasis makes the inner-culture content dominant in the textbooks. In *Hello I*, there is a section about Egyptian culture, history, and tradition at the end of each lesson; however, there are many references to other cultures along with examples and descriptions. To compare the two textbooks, it should be highlighted that in *Hello I*, references to culture as well as the depth and the scope of cultural information outweighs *Vision I*. The positive point about *Hello I* was the inclusion of parts of stories from foreign and

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English countries' literature to introduce the literary works along with their writers' names and pictures. This was done for sports, too, by introducing some turning points in the professional lives of some English or foreign athletes. There are more such instances in *Hello I* than in *Vision I,* which lets students know interesting points about different countries, their famous people, literature, and other aspects. Although both Iran and Egypt show preference to their own cultures and show it all through the book, especially for Egypt, which provides a section at the end of each lesson about Egypt's history and traditions, *Hello I* is more open to foreign as well as specifically English cultures than *Vision I*.

The findings of this study have implications for syllabus designers, textbook publishers, teachers, as well as the ELT community who aim to include in the textbooks content with cultural references and to consider the point that cultural information needs to be rich both in quantity and quality, i.e., there should be enough cases as well as enough explanations, clarifications, and details about each cultural case.

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Appendix

Table 8.

A Modified Model of Cultural Instances

I. Cultural Topics (Information)		II. Cultural Dimensions	III. Cultural References
1. leisure 2. geography 3. transportation 4. commerce/ economy 5. education 6. occupation/ profession 7. history 8.food and drinks 9. media/ communication 10. fashion 11. society/social life 12. house/home 13. environment 14. foreign language 15. law 16. national symbols 17.feasts/ceremonies 18. politics (political system/war & peace) 19. mentality 20. family 21. language 22. (im)migration 23. international relation 24. science	25. animal 26. religion 27. sports 28. travel 29. current events 30. arts 31. health 32. safety 33. possessions 34. disease 35. architecture 36. competitions 37. technology 38. achievement 39. discoveries 40. wonders of the world 41. famous people 42. learning 43. tourism 44. natural disasters 45. nationality 46. personality 47. energy resources 48. friendship	**1. Micro level** a. Cultures and courtiers addressed b. Characters (age, gender, background) c. Material environment d. Situations of interaction e. Interaction and subjectivity of characters (feelings, attitude, values, perceived problems) **2. Macro level** a. Broad social facts about contemporary society (geographic, economic, political, etc.) b. Broad sociopolitical problems c. Historical background **3. International and intercultural issues** a. Comparisons between cultures b. Intercultural situations c. Images, stereotypes etc.	1. Texts with culture specific reference (TCSR) 2. Texts with culture free reference (TCFR) 3. Texts with culture general reference (TCGR) 4. Texts with English culture reference (TECR) 5. Texts with foreign (non-English) culture reference (T/VFCR)