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Intercultural Competence and Linguistic Imperialism in an English Textbook: A Decolonial Perspective from Uzbekistan

Abstract

This study critically evaluates the 10th-grade English language textbook currently used in Uzbekistan's public high schools from a decolonial perspective. Drawing upon the frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence, Linguistic Imperialism, Hidden Curriculum, and Critical Discourse Analysis, the research investigates the extent to which the textbook reflects cultural inclusivity and fosters intercultural competence. The findings reveal that while the textbook incorporates surface-level references to global cultural practices, it predominantly centers Anglo-American narratives, excludes local Uzbek culture, and perpetuates implicit linguistic hierarchies. Evidence of linguistic imperialism is observed through the exclusive promotion of native-speaker English norms and the absence of acknowledgment of Uzbekistan's multilingual realities. Furthermore, analysis of the hidden curriculum and discourse structures demonstrates how the textbook subtly reinforces global power asymmetries, positioning Western lifestyles as modern and aspirational while sidelining non-Western traditions. These results highlight the urgent need for curriculum reform that genuinely embraces cultural diversity and supports additive multilingualism. The study concludes by recommending that future educational materials center local identities alongside global perspectives and that teacher training programs emphasize critical pedagogical approaches. By addressing the cultural and linguistic imbalances in language education resources, Uzbekistan can better equip learners to navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world.

Keywords: *intercultural competence, decoloniality, linguistic imperialism, hidden curriculum, textbook analysis, Uzbekistan, English language education*

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İngilis dili dərsliyində mədəniyyətlərarası səriştə və linqvistik imperializm: Özbəkistandan dekolonial perspektiv

Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat, hazırda Özbəkistanın dövlət orta məktəblərində istifadə olunan 10-cu sinif ingilis dili dərsliyini dekolonial perspektivdən tənqidi şəkildə təhlil edir. Tədqiqatda Mədəniyyətlərarası Kommunikativ Kompetensiya, Dil İmperializmi, Gizli Kurikulum və Tənqidi Diskurs Analizi çərçivələrindən istifadə olunaraq dərsliyin mədəni müxtəlifliyi əks etdirib-etdirmədiyi və mədəniyyətlərarası kompetensiyanı təşviq edib-etmədiyi araşdırılır. Nəticələr göstərir ki, dərslik qlobal mədəni praktikaları səthi şəkildə təqdim etsə də, əsasən Anqlo-Amerika hekayələrini ön plana çəkir, yerli özbək mədəniyyətini kənarlaşdırır və gizli dil iyerarxiyalarını möhkəmləndirir. Dil imperializminin sübutları isə yalnız ana dili ingilis olanların normalarının təşviqi və Özbəkistanın

çoxdilli reallığının nəzərə alınmaması ilə müşahidə olunur. Bundan əlavə, gizli kurikulum və diskurs strukturlarının analizi dərsliyin qlobal güc asimmetriyalarını necə incə şəkildə yenidən istehsal etdiyini göstərir, Qərb həyat tərzini müasir və arzuedilən kimi təqdim edərək qeyri-Qərb ənənələrini kölgədə qoyur. Bu nəticələr tədris proqramlarında həqiqi mədəni müxtəlifliyi əks etdirən və əlavə çoxdilliliyi dəstəkləyən islahatların zəruriliyini vurğulayır. Tədqiqat gələcək təhsil materiallarının yerli kimlikləri qlobal perspektivlərlə yanaşı mərkəzə qoymasını və müəllim hazırlığı proqramlarında tənqidi pedaqoji yanaşmaların vurğulanmasını tövsiyə edir. Dil tədrisi resurslarında mövcud olan mədəni və dil balanssızlıqlarını aradan qaldırmaqla, Özbəkistan öyrənənləri getdikcə daha da birləşən və çoxmədəniyyətli dünyada uğurla iştirak etməyə daha yaxşı hazırlaya bilər.

Açar sözlər: *mədəniyyətlərarası kompetensiya, dekoloniallıq, dil imperializmi, gizli kurikulum, dərslik analizi, Özbəkistan, ingilis dili təhsili*

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In recent decades, language education policies across the globe have been deeply influenced by processes of globalization, internationalization, and multilingualism. Uzbekistan, as one of the Central Asian republics, has not been an exception to these global educational trends. The country, since gaining independence in 1991, has undergone significant educational reforms aimed at developing communicative competence among learners and integrating global perspectives into the local education system. Specifically, the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan has made notable strides in restructuring its language education policies and practices, aligning them with international standards while simultaneously trying to sustain local educational values (Ministry of Public Education, 2021).

A critical step in this direction was the introduction of a new generation of English language textbooks for public school learners, collaboratively developed by the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan and international stakeholders such as the USAID-Uzbekistan Education for Excellence Program, and published by renowned international publisher Cambridge University Press. These textbooks, which have been systematically implemented nationwide over the past two years, are part of an ambitious project aimed at significantly enhancing English language proficiency across all school levels—from 1st to 11th grades. This strategic move was motivated by the necessity of equipping Uzbek learners with the linguistic skills essential for meaningful participation in the global economy, science, and culture, while concurrently preserving the nation's rich multicultural heritage.

Research

According to the Uzbek State Education Standards (2021), the primary objective of teaching English in the country's educational institutions is explicitly defined as fostering communicative competence. This goal encompasses not only linguistic proficiency in English but also intercultural awareness, enabling students to interact effectively in increasingly multicultural and multilingual global contexts. In other words, the official educational policy recognizes the crucial role language education plays in developing global citizens who can confidently navigate diverse cultural landscapes.

However, given the international collaboration involved in the production of these textbooks, there arises a pertinent question concerning the balance between global influences and local cultural integrity within the curricular materials themselves. While global collaboration in textbook development brings advantages in terms of quality, authenticity, and linguistic accuracy, there remains a latent risk of inadvertently propagating a dominant culture—often Western-centric—that might overshadow local perspectives and indigenous knowledge systems (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

1.2 Problem Statement

The content of English language textbooks constitutes a fundamental element influencing learners' perceptions, attitudes, and competence in intercultural communication. Textbooks not only transmit language skills but also construct cultural norms and national identities (Kubota, 1999). Despite the explicit aims of fostering intercultural understanding outlined in Uzbekistan's educational standards, preliminary observations suggest that the current English textbooks predominantly reflect Anglo-centric cultural norms and values. These textbooks largely depict narratives, examples, and

cultural scenarios that resonate primarily with British and American socio-cultural contexts, potentially neglecting the diverse cultural realities that exist both locally in Uzbekistan and globally (Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020).

Given Uzbekistan's distinct cultural identity, rich heritage, and strategic geopolitical position at the crossroads of multiple cultures—historically bridging Turkic, Persian, Arabic, and Russian influences—the educational materials used in schools have critical implications for shaping learners' identities, worldviews, and their respect for cultural diversity. If textbook content remains largely monocultural, learners may inadvertently perceive their own cultural heritage as subordinate, less relevant, or even irrelevant to global discourse. This phenomenon aligns with broader critiques in applied linguistics and education research, which highlight how linguistic imperialism and cultural hegemony can subtly operate through educational resources, reinforcing colonial legacies (Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999).

Thus, the core problem addressed by this study is the potential presence of cultural bias and linguistic imperialism within the recently adopted EFL textbooks in Uzbekistan's public high schools. Specifically, this paper examines whether these textbooks genuinely reflect an intercultural approach—integrating local and global cultures equitably—or whether they unintentionally perpetuate neo-colonial tendencies through a dominant focus on English-speaking (particularly Anglo-American) cultures.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

In addressing the outlined problem, this research aims to undertake a critical evaluation of the 10th-grade EFL textbook used in Uzbekistan's public high schools from a decolonial perspective. Specifically, the study is guided by the following primary objectives:

To identify and critically examine the extent to which the textbook's content incorporates interculturality, cultural diversity, and indigenous perspectives alongside dominant English-speaking cultural narratives.

To analyze and illustrate specific examples of how textbook content either supports or contradicts the principles of intercultural competence and cultural inclusivity, particularly concerning the representation of Uzbek local culture.

To propose practical, evidence-based recommendations for curriculum developers, textbook authors, and educators aimed at integrating a more balanced intercultural and decolonial perspective into language education resources.

To critically reflect on teacher agency, highlighting the role of educators as transformative agents capable of addressing curricular biases and promoting intercultural sensitivity through pedagogical practices and supplemental materials.

Through the pursuit of these objectives, the study intends not merely to critique the textbook content but also to foster constructive dialogue among stakeholders involved in language curriculum design, encouraging future materials to become more reflective of Uzbekistan's multicultural reality and global cultural diversity.

1.4 Research Question

In alignment with the stated objectives, this study is guided by the following overarching research question:

To what extent does the 10th-grade English textbook in Uzbekistan reflect intercultural competence from a decolonial perspective, and how can it better integrate local and global cultural narratives?

This research question serves as the foundation for a critical examination of the textbook's content, with particular attention to the representation of cultural identities, the balance between local and global perspectives, and the potential perpetuation of linguistic imperialism. By focusing on the intersections of intercultural competence and decolonial theory, the study seeks to uncover the implicit cultural hierarchies embedded within the materials and to assess their implications for learners' cultural identity development and global citizenship skills.

Furthermore, the investigation aims not only to identify possible limitations within the current textbook but also to explore viable strategies for improvement. These include curricular enhancements, textbook revisions, and teacher-led interventions that can bridge existing gaps in cultural representation. Through this dual focus on critical evaluation and practical recommendations,

the study aspires to contribute substantively to scholarly discussions on language education reform in post-colonial contexts.

In doing so, the research highlights the broader significance of culturally inclusive language education for fostering equitable learning environments, promoting respect for diverse cultural heritages, and challenging enduring forms of epistemic inequality. The findings of this study are expected to offer valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, textbook authors, and policymakers committed to creating more culturally responsive and socially just educational practices in Uzbekistan and comparable contexts worldwide.

Rationale and Significance of the Study (brief subsection within Introduction)

Addressing cultural inclusivity within language education is not merely an academic exercise but a social imperative, particularly within countries navigating post-colonial realities and global integration processes like Uzbekistan. The significance of this study lies in its direct relevance to ongoing curricular reforms aimed at balancing global standards with local cultural representation. By illuminating the implicit cultural hierarchies within educational materials, this research highlights a crucial yet often overlooked dimension of educational equity.

Furthermore, by taking a critical stance on linguistic imperialism and cultural representation, the findings of this study will offer educators, policymakers, and textbook authors concrete insights for fostering a more equitable and inclusive approach to language education. Given the scarcity of existing research on textbook analysis from a decolonial lens within Central Asia, this study contributes original and valuable knowledge, informing broader discussions on language policy, curriculum development, and educational justice.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in critical theory and postcolonial thought, aiming to explore the ideological underpinnings of a 10th-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook used in Uzbekistan's public high schools. Specifically, the research design is framed as a critical qualitative content analysis, which seeks to identify latent meanings and socio-political messages embedded in the educational text. Qualitative content analysis is particularly suitable for educational materials because it facilitates an interpretive reading of both the overt and covert content, allowing the researcher to uncover cultural assumptions, power dynamics, and ideological constructs. The central aim of this study is to explore how far the selected EFL textbook aligns with decolonial educational goals, especially concerning the representation of culture, language ideologies, and identity in the Uzbek context. The research design is framed within critical theory, recognizing how global ELT practices often carry Western ideological assumptions (Holliday, 2005).

This methodological approach is further informed by a decolonial theoretical stance, as articulated by Tuhiwai Smith (2012), which critiques the legacy of colonial epistemologies in educational systems. By interrogating how the textbook might reproduce dominant worldviews, particularly those of the Anglosphere, the study situates itself within broader academic discussions on knowledge production, cultural hegemony, and epistemic justice. This is complemented by the analytical lens of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), which examines how language and textual structures contribute to social inequalities and ideologies. In combining these frameworks, the research design enables a multifaceted investigation of the textbook, not only at the level of content but also in relation to form, structure, and pedagogical assumptions.

2.2 Context and Material Description

The material under analysis is the English coursebook designed for 10th-grade students, which forms part of a series of textbooks jointly developed by the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the USAID-supported Uzbekistan Education for Excellence Program. The textbook series, published by Cambridge University Press, spans all levels of general secondary education and has been in official use in all public schools across the country since its nationwide implementation in 2021. As a central element of Uzbekistan's language education reform, the series is promoted as aligning with international standards in communicative language teaching (CLT), with the stated objective of developing communicative competence in English for use in academic, professional, and everyday contexts.

The selected coursebook consists of twenty thematic units, which alternate between two major topical areas: culture and life skills. Each unit includes sections on vocabulary, reading, grammar, listening, speaking, and writing. The activities are designed to be task-based and communicative, with an apparent emphasis on real-world language use. Visual elements such as photographs, illustrations, and video links accompany most units, ostensibly to support multimodal learning and learner engagement. The coursebook was selected for analysis not only because of its official status but also because it was directly used by the researcher in a teaching context at a rural secondary school in the Fergana region. This first-hand classroom engagement provides both pedagogical insight and contextual relevance to the study.

2.3 Analytical Framework

The methodological foundation of this study is constructed upon four interrelated yet distinct frameworks: Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997), Linguistic Imperialism (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2007), Hidden Curriculum (Apple, 2019), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995). The integration of these frameworks allows for a holistic interrogation of the textbook's cultural narratives, language ideologies, pedagogical intentions, and the implicit power relations encoded in its structure and discourse.

The first framework, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), as conceptualized by Byram (1997), emphasizes the importance of learners not only acquiring language skills but also developing critical cultural awareness, openness, and respect for diverse worldviews. ICC is particularly relevant in multilingual societies such as Uzbekistan, where students must navigate both local and global cultural identities. The analysis focuses on how the textbook fosters—or fails to foster—attitudinal dispositions and interpretive skills that allow learners to mediate between cultures, challenge stereotypes, and engage in intercultural dialogue. The analysis considers intercultural competence not as static knowledge but as dynamic intercultural mediation (Byram, 1997; Risager, 2007).

The second framework, Linguistic Imperialism, draws upon Phillipson's (1992) and Pennycook's (2007) critiques of English language teaching (ELT) as a mechanism through which Western ideologies, particularly those of English-speaking nations, are normalized and privileged. This analytical dimension assesses whether the textbook promotes a singular, monolithic view of English as a symbol of modernity and success, often to the detriment of local languages and cultural references. It also considers the portrayal of linguistic norms: whether they favor native-speaker models and whether they represent English as an inclusive, global lingua franca or as an exclusive cultural asset.

The third framework, the concept of the Hidden Curriculum, is drawn from the work of Apple (2019), who argues that educational materials often convey implicit messages about social norms, values, hierarchies, and power relations. In the context of textbook analysis, this means looking beyond the overt learning objectives to examine how the selection of topics, sequencing of content, and types of cultural references may implicitly shape learners' worldviews and reinforce particular ideological positions. For instance, the frequent inclusion of British or American cultural scenarios, without parallel examples from Uzbek or other non-Western cultures, may implicitly convey a hierarchy of cultures.

The fourth and final framework, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), provides the methodological tools for examining the linguistic and discursive features of the textbook. CDA views language as a social practice and seeks to uncover how texts construct social identities, represent social relationships, and maintain or challenge existing power structures. In applying CDA to the textbook, the analysis investigates how texts represent people and cultures, how agency is distributed across texts, and how meaning is constructed through lexical choices, grammar, modality, and visual design.

These four frameworks are not applied in isolation but are viewed as mutually reinforcing. Together, they form a robust critical apparatus for uncovering the ideological currents that shape the content and pedagogical intent of the textbook. They also provide a foundation for articulating a decolonial critique—one that not only identifies problems but also points towards possibilities for transformation and inclusivity in language education.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data collection process began with a thorough review of the entire textbook, including all twenty units and their accompanying activities, visuals, and media links. Each unit was read and annotated multiple times to identify recurring themes, cultural representations, and pedagogical patterns. Particular attention was paid to the reading and listening texts, as these are often the most ideologically loaded components of language textbooks, embedding cultural norms and assumptions within seemingly neutral linguistic exercises.

Following this familiarization process, the content was subjected to a multi-layered analytical procedure. First, instances of cultural references, visual symbolism, lexical fields, and grammatical focus were cataloged and categorized using a qualitative coding system. This initial coding aimed to identify elements aligned with the four analytical frameworks, such as representations of local culture, reliance on native-speaker models, or implicit assumptions about gender, race, or social status.

Next, each coded element was interpreted through the theoretical lenses outlined above. For example, a reading passage about British holidays was analyzed not only for its lexical content but also for its potential implications regarding cultural hierarchy and inclusivity. Similarly, the absence of content related to Uzbek traditions or indigenous knowledge was treated as analytically significant, highlighting the operation of the hidden curriculum and the marginalization of local identities.

Patterns and themes were then synthesized into larger analytical categories. These included, but were not limited to, dominance of Western cultural narratives, marginalization of local voices, essentialist portrayals of cultural difference, and lack of critical reflection on social issues. These themes formed the basis for the findings presented in the Results section, which integrates textual evidence with critical interpretation to support its claims.

2.5 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As a researcher with firsthand experience teaching from the selected textbook in a rural Uzbek school, my positionality is inherently embedded in the research process. This insider status provides unique insights into how the textbook is interpreted by learners and implemented in classroom practice. At the same time, it necessitates a high degree of reflexivity to ensure that personal experiences and assumptions do not unduly influence the analytical process.

To address this, I engaged in regular reflective journaling during the data analysis phase and cross-checked emerging interpretations against established theoretical constructs and previous literature. Moreover, by grounding my critique in the four established analytical frameworks, I aim to mitigate subjectivity and anchor my findings in broader scholarly discourses on decolonization, interculturality, and critical pedagogy.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

As this study involves the analysis of publicly available curricular material and does not involve human subjects, it did not require formal ethical approval. Nonetheless, the research was conducted in adherence to ethical standards concerning academic integrity, transparency, and respect for institutional authorship. All sources have been properly acknowledged, and the critique is presented in a constructive spirit, aiming not to discredit individuals or organizations but to contribute to the ongoing improvement of educational practices in Uzbekistan and beyond.

2.7 Limitations

While this study offers a comprehensive critical analysis of the selected textbook, it is not without its limitations. The analysis focuses on a single grade level, which may not fully capture the ideological trends present across the entire series of EFL textbooks. Additionally, as a qualitative study, the findings are interpretive rather than generalizable. The conclusions drawn are specific to the selected textbook and may not necessarily apply to all educational materials used in the Uzbek context. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the cultural politics of language education and contributes to the broader discourse on decolonizing curricula in post-Soviet educational systems.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed a systematic qualitative content analysis of the Grade 10 English language coursebook currently in use across public high schools in Uzbekistan. The analysis focused on the textbook's cultural representations, linguistic ideologies, and the socio-political messages conveyed both explicitly and implicitly through its textual and visual content. The process of data collection

and analysis was guided by the theoretical frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997), Linguistic Imperialism (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2007), Hidden Curriculum (Apple, 2019), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995).

The textbook was selected as the primary source of data for several reasons. Firstly, it is the officially endorsed material by the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan and is used uniformly across the nation, giving it substantial influence on students' linguistic and cultural development. Secondly, the researcher's direct classroom experience with the textbook in a rural school in the Fergana region enabled a grounded and contextualized perspective for the analysis. Lastly, the textbook forms part of an internationally co-developed series, making it a compelling object of analysis from a decolonial perspective, particularly in terms of cross-border educational partnerships and their cultural implications.

The data corpus included all twenty thematic units of the textbook, including their texts, vocabulary sections, visual illustrations, grammar and skills tasks, project activities, and any digital or audio supplements referenced within the book. Each unit was closely read and annotated in a multi-cycle process of coding, thematization, and interpretation. The first reading cycle focused on familiarization with the content, identifying recurrent themes, topic sequences, and pedagogical design patterns. Preliminary notes were taken regarding how culture, language, identity, and power were represented in texts and visuals.

In the second reading cycle, **open coding** was used to identify segments of the text that aligned with or deviated from the four analytical frameworks. Codes included categories such as *native speaker norms*, *representation of local culture*, *Western cultural dominance*, *intercultural scenarios*, *inclusive/exclusive language*, *agency in texts*, *stereotypical portrayal*, *absence of local references*, and *Eurocentric success narratives*. These codes were applied consistently across the entire textbook and allowed for the identification of patterns that informed the subsequent thematic analysis.

After the coding process, data were grouped and refined into **four core thematic categories**, each corresponding to the frameworks guiding the study: (1) representations of intercultural competence, (2) manifestations of linguistic imperialism, (3) implicit messages of the hidden curriculum, and (4) discursive constructions analyzed through critical discourse analysis. For each theme, representative examples were extracted, interpreted, and critically evaluated in light of relevant theoretical literature. This triangulated method ensured that each claim made about the textbook's content was supported by both empirical observation and scholarly context.

The analysis was intentionally both **textual and contextual**. Textual analysis involved close reading of the language used in reading and listening passages, as well as the instructions and rubrics accompanying activities. Visual content such as illustrations and photographs was also scrutinized for the kinds of identities and scenarios they portrayed. Contextual analysis, on the other hand, considered how these materials might be received by learners in a multilingual, post-Soviet, and culturally rich society like Uzbekistan. Particular attention was given to identifying the silences, omissions, and absences in the textbook—that is, the aspects of Uzbek identity, history, and experience that were not represented, and the possible implications of those omissions.

By integrating these methods and interpretive lenses, the analysis was able to move beyond surface-level evaluation and uncover deeper ideological orientations within the textbook. These findings, detailed in the following section, are presented as thematic insights supported by illustrative examples and framed within the broader discourse on decolonizing language education.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the critical content analysis conducted on the 10th-grade English language textbook currently used in Uzbekistan's public high schools. The analysis was carried out using four analytical frameworks: Intercultural Communicative Competence, Linguistic Imperialism, Hidden Curriculum, and Critical Discourse Analysis. These frameworks provided a multidimensional perspective on the textbook's content, examining its cultural inclusivity, language ideology, and socio-political implications. The findings are grouped thematically and illustrated with representative examples from the textbook.

4.1 Intercultural Competence: Surface Diversity, Deep Imbalance

The textbook demonstrates a surface-level commitment to interculturality through its inclusion of themes related to global culture. Several units introduce learners to cultural practices, holidays, or

social norms from various English-speaking countries. For example, one unit discusses traditional British clothing, another explores American fast food culture, while another covers famous Western celebrities. At a glance, such content may appear to foster intercultural awareness.

However, a deeper analysis reveals a significant imbalance. The overwhelming focus on Anglo-American cultural contexts results in a lack of meaningful representation of Uzbekistan's own rich cultural heritage or of cultures beyond the English-speaking West. For instance, the unit *In Fashion* explores British traditional dress but does not include parallel examples of Uzbek national attire, such as *chapan*, *atlas*, or *doppi*. Likewise, a unit devoted to food features British cuisine but makes no reference to local Uzbek dishes such as *plov* or *lagman*. The absence of these cultural elements sends an implicit message that Uzbek culture is peripheral or irrelevant in global discourse.

This imbalance limits the development of intercultural competence as conceptualized by Byram (1997), which requires learners to critically compare, interpret, and mediate between multiple cultural systems—including their own. Without local references, students are positioned solely as consumers of other cultures rather than as contributors to global dialogue. Furthermore, opportunities for cross-cultural comparisons are largely absent, and activities that would encourage critical reflection on cultural similarities and differences are minimal.

4.2 Linguistic Imperialism: English as the Exclusive Gateway

The analysis also uncovered clear signs of linguistic imperialism in the way English and English-speaking countries are positioned within the textbook. English is presented not merely as a tool for communication but as a symbol of modernity, opportunity, and intellectual superiority. This is achieved through both content and framing.

Most reading passages and listening texts are set in Western contexts and center on native English speakers as protagonists. For instance, a listening activity might feature an American teenager discussing their hobbies or a British scientist explaining an invention. These characters are portrayed as active, knowledgeable, and aspirational. In contrast, there are no characters from Uzbekistan or Central Asia, and no texts set in local contexts. The textbook adheres strictly to native-speaker norms, disregarding the legitimacy of World Englishes (Kachru, 1992). This absence contributes to the perception that English operates in isolation from the learners' social realities and that local identities are irrelevant in the global order shaped by English.

In addition, the textbook adheres rigidly to native-speaker models of English, both in pronunciation exercises and in the cultural behaviors expected of students. There is no mention of World Englishes or the legitimacy of non-native English varieties. This linguistic purism aligns with what Phillipson (1992) identifies as the ideological core of linguistic imperialism—the belief that only certain norms of English are valid, and that these are linked to specific, often colonial, cultural histories.

The textbook's silence on multilingualism is particularly striking given Uzbekistan's diverse linguistic landscape. Students who speak Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, or Karakalpak as their first language are given no linguistic validation or encouragement. The absence of recognition for Uzbekistan's multilingual realities reflects broader concerns about linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

4.3 Hidden Curriculum: Implicit Cultural Hierarchies

Beyond explicit content, the textbook also conveys powerful implicit messages about cultural value and social hierarchy—what Apple (2019) terms the "hidden curriculum." This is visible in the recurring privileging of Western lifestyles, norms, and values over those of the learners' own context.

Visuals, for instance, predominantly feature white, Western-looking individuals dressed in modern clothing and situated in clean, urban environments. They are often depicted using technology, participating in structured sports, or engaging in civic duties. These images stand in stark contrast to the lived realities of many Uzbek students, particularly those in rural areas. By consistently representing success, modernity, and social cohesion through a Western lens, the textbook risks fostering cultural alienation.

Furthermore, the activities included in each unit subtly reinforce these hierarchies. In one unit on innovation, students are asked to write about famous inventors, but all the examples provided are from the United States or the United Kingdom. In another unit on health and nutrition, dietary recommendations follow Western models, with no reference to traditional Uzbek health practices or

foods. In both cases, the curriculum normalizes a selective, Western-centric knowledge base while sidelining local knowledge and practices.

This hidden curriculum operates through both inclusion and exclusion: by what the textbook chooses to highlight and, more importantly, by what it chooses to omit. The textbook's promotion of Western lifestyles aligns with global consumerist patterns identified in ELT materials (Gray, 2010). The consistent absence of regional cultural content constructs a curriculum that is not neutral but ideologically charged. It positions some forms of knowledge as universal and others as marginal, thus perpetuating global epistemic inequality.

4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis: Power, Agency, and Representation

A critical discourse analysis of the textbook's language and narrative structure reveals patterns that reinforce global power asymmetries. Agency, for example, is consistently assigned to Western actors. Characters from English-speaking countries are depicted as initiating actions, solving problems, and leading change. They are teachers, inventors, artists, and leaders. The grammar used to describe them is active and assertive: *"She launched a campaign," "He developed an app," "They created a solution."*

In contrast, when people from non-Western backgrounds are mentioned—which is rare—they are often the passive recipients of aid or admiration. For example, *"Volunteers helped a village in Asia"* or *"Tourists visited a traditional community in Africa."* These constructions reflect what Fairclough (1995) describes as discursive asymmetry: the use of grammatical choices to reinforce unequal power relations.

Moreover, the textbook employs a consistent binary between tradition and modernity, where Western lifestyles represent the latter. Words associated with the West include *"innovation," "progress," "choice,"* and *"freedom,"* whereas non-Western traditions are described with terms like *"ritual," "exotic,"* or *"colorful."* This lexical dichotomy not only reinforces stereotypes but also subtly delegitimizes non-Western ways of life. Representations within the textbook mirror colonial discourses of cultural superiority and modernity (Said, 1993).

Even the textbook's visual layout contributes to this asymmetry. Units with Western topics are often accompanied by high-resolution photographs and modern graphic design, whereas culturally neutral or general life-skill units are more text-heavy and visually plain. This contrast creates a hierarchy of topics, associating aesthetic quality and engagement with specific cultural content.

This study critically examined the 10th-grade English language textbook currently used in Uzbekistan's public high schools through the frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence, Linguistic Imperialism, Hidden Curriculum, and Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings reveal a complex and layered picture: while there are visible efforts to introduce learners to global cultural practices, these attempts often remain superficial and are dominated by Anglo-American perspectives. Beneath the surface, the textbook largely reproduces dominant cultural narratives that prioritize Western lifestyles, values, and identities, while marginalizing local Uzbek culture and the wider diversity of global traditions.

The analysis of intercultural competence within the textbook showed that although some global cultural themes are incorporated, the representations lack depth, critical comparison, and meaningful engagement with students' own cultural backgrounds. By presenting interculturality as the mere exposure to Anglo-American holidays, foods, and clothing, the textbook misses opportunities to foster true intercultural understanding as theorized by Byram (1997), where learners not only learn about others but also critically reflect upon their own cultural identity. The absence of Uzbek cultural references such as national attire, traditional dishes, or historical figures diminishes learners' ability to see themselves as active participants in global conversations.

The findings related to linguistic imperialism are particularly significant. English is portrayed not simply as a useful international language but as the exclusive gateway to modernity, innovation, and social mobility. Native-speaker norms are rigidly upheld, with no acknowledgement of the legitimacy of World Englishes or local varieties. Furthermore, Uzbekistan's rich multilingual reality, including languages such as Russian, Tajik, and Karakalpak, is completely absent from the textbook discourse. This silence marginalizes students' existing linguistic repertoires and reflects broader patterns of linguistic hierarchization historically associated with colonial models of education (Phillipson, 1992).

Through the lens of hidden curriculum theory, the textbook further communicates implicit cultural hierarchies. Western norms are consistently portrayed as universal models of success, modernity, and civility, while other ways of life are either exoticized or rendered invisible. The choice of visual imagery, examples of inventors and innovators, and health advice subtly but powerfully reinforce the idea that progress and development are inseparable from Westernization. Such implicit messaging has profound implications for the formation of students' cultural identities and self-esteem. It suggests that in order to participate meaningfully in the global order, one must align with Western norms and disassociate from local traditions—a deeply problematic and unsustainable proposition in a multicultural world.

Critical discourse analysis of the textbook's language structures reinforced these findings by uncovering how power and agency are distributed across texts. Western characters are portrayed as active agents of change, while non-Western characters, when present, are often passive recipients of assistance or admiration. This discursive asymmetry mirrors and perpetuates real-world global inequalities and subtly instructs learners to internalize particular roles within global hierarchies.

Collectively, these findings highlight the urgent need for a more culturally responsive and decolonial approach to English language education in Uzbekistan. Language education must recognize the role of identity negotiation in language learning (Norton, 2013). Textbooks, as powerful vehicles of ideology and identity construction, must be reimagined to truly reflect the multicultural and multilingual realities of learners. Multilingual learners' identities are shaped by both global English discourses and local cultural attachments (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). Future English textbooks should not only include references to global cultures but must also center local identities, values, histories, and practices as integral components of global citizenship education. Language teaching materials must promote additive multilingualism, recognizing and celebrating the linguistic assets students bring to the classroom.

Curriculum developers, textbook authors, and policymakers must collaborate to move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward substantive integration of diverse cultural perspectives. Incorporating critical pedagogical approaches empowers students to question dominant cultural narratives (McLaren, 2009). Teacher training is another critical area requiring attention; educators should be equipped with critical pedagogical skills that allow them to recognize, interrogate, and supplement biases within educational resources. Teachers must act as critical agents who mediate between global materials and local contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Teachers play a crucial role as agents of change, capable of mediating curricular limitations through reflective teaching practices, inclusive classroom discussions, and locally relevant supplemental materials.

Furthermore, the findings of this study open several avenues for future research. Expanding the analysis across different grade levels, comparing textbooks from other subject areas, or conducting classroom-based ethnographic studies could provide a fuller picture of the cultural politics of education in Uzbekistan. Cross-national comparisons with other post-Soviet or post-colonial educational contexts would also enrich the understanding of how global English education intersects with national identity formation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores that addressing cultural representation in language education is not simply about fairness or inclusion; it is about educational quality, learner empowerment, and building an equitable global future. By critically engaging with the hidden cultural narratives embedded in textbooks, stakeholders can contribute to the creation of educational environments that truly prepare learners to navigate and contribute to a diverse and interconnected world. Such efforts are essential if Uzbekistan's educational reforms are to fulfill their promise of producing globally competent citizens who remain firmly rooted in their rich local cultural heritage.

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