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A Systematic Review on the Investigation of Culture Representation in English Textbooks

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Abstract

In the present era, cultural representation in foreign/second language textbooks has become a crucial issue in language research. This study examined previous studies' research designs, cultural categories and elements embedded in the EFL/ESL textbooks from 2011 to 2021. It also examined the source culture representation in Pakistani ESL textbooks. For this purpose, the study analytically searched all relevant publications in four accessible databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. A total number of 18 relevant studies were collected and analyzed. The findings also showed that qualitative studies outweighed the quantitative and mixed-method research designs. Content analysis (CA) was found to be the most frequently used research method to analyze the content of EFL/ESL language textbooks. Regarding culture representations, some major themes emerged: the dominance of the target culture, the paucity of source culture, multicultural disparities, and the imbalanced proportion of the world cultures. This study contributes to the literature by providing a detailed review of cultural representation in EFL/ESL textbooks and identifying the research gaps. In conclusion, the study proposes recommendations for future research to study cultural representation in textbooks.

Keywords: Systematic review of cultural representation, EFL/ESL textbooks, categories of culture

I. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture have reciprocal relations, complementary to each other. Undoubtedly, language is the medium and the carrier of a culture, while culture provides a base for language (Shu & Zhuang, 2008). Therefore, culture is essential in language education to empower L2 cultural meaning appropriately (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015) and develop the communicative competence of L2 learners (Bewley, 2018). Researchers (e.g., Arshad et al., 2020; Deswila et al., 2021) have also acknowledged the crucial role of culture in English Language Teaching (ELT), especially the cultural knowledge pertinent to the language. Thus, we can say that learning a foreign language has become a kind of acculturation, where one acquires new knowledge and perspective corresponding to L2 culture and its speakers (Alptekin, 2002) and, in this way, enhances intercultural communicative competence (Yuen, 2011).

Besides, textbooks play a critical role in language education. They can provide information about the language, exposure to the language in use, promote language use, and assist “learners to make discoveries about language use” (Pan & Chen, 2020, p. 1628). Hence, they have been examined due to their contents and discourses (Arshad et al., 2020; Meihami & Khanlarzadeh, 2015). In this regard, Ndura (2004) affirms that the textbook's content considerably influences L2 students' outlook toward other communities, members, and even themselves. Therefore, ELT textbooks are anticipated to address various cultural perspectives and voices that facilitate the learners to understand the cultural perspectives and ideological values (Shin et al. 2011). A textbook is considered "a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, and an ideology" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, p. 201) and "the visible heart of any program" (Sheldon, 1988, p. 327). Also, Rajabi and Ketabi (2012) uphold that "the textbook can be a major source of cultural elements besides providing linguistic and topical contents which necessarily reflect the ideology inherent in the EFL context of a particular circle" (p.708). Nonetheless, they are not the simple reflection of the incorporated contents, but the hidden agenda inculcated in terms of values, beliefs, convictions, and norms into students' minds (García, 2005). Thus, the hidden curriculum emphasizes a particular culture's voices and values that drive L2 learners to a particular set of beliefs and values (Arshad et al., 2020).

Regarding the representation of cultural content in ELT textbooks, Canale (2016) asserts that textbooks as curriculum artefacts are one of the realms of discourse embroiled in the portrayal of culture in teaching and learning practices. It shows a dire need to inquire about the types of cultural content and the suitability of the design of the cultural elements in English textbooks. Therefore, several studies (Almujaiwel, 2018; Liu et al., 2021; Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2018) have attempted to examine the culture in ELT textbooks from various perspectives and across different instructional settings, employing different instruments such as questionnaires, checklists, and documents. The cultural contents incorporated in ELT textbooks are categorized into the target, international and source cultures. Here, target culture refers to the native English speakers' cultures; international culture signifies the cultures of countries other than the native English speaking and the L2 learners' countries. Finally, source culture can be termed the L2 learners' own culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

Concerning the primacy of target culture in ELT textbooks, Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2012) argue that a textbook can provide a significant source of cultural elements and foster "learners' knowledge of the target language" (p.93). However, it is accentuated that cultural awareness is beyond target culture awareness since it requires awareness of one's own culture (Baker, 2012). Thus, it is indispensable to "include target and global culture to facilitate learners' intercultural competence" (Shin et al., 2011, p. 256). However, most EFL/ESL textbooks concentrate on

English-speaking countries such as the UK, USA, Australia, etc. Consequently, the learners' cultures (source cultures) are underrepresented, probably alienating L2 learners from the source culture. Such imbalanced representations of cultural contents in ESL/EFL textbooks might affect learners' intercultural communication (Yuen, 2011). To avoid being exposed to a single culture, a balanced inclusion of source, target and international cultures in the textbooks is emphasized (Choudhury, 2013).

Several scholars (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2012; Keles & Yazan, 2020; Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020) examine culture, emphasizing the teaching culture and nurturing of cultural competence in ESL/EFL textbooks. These studies record researchers' contributions to literature and silhouette learners' understanding of cultural representation in textbooks. Nonetheless, few studies have identified research designs, focus gaps, and culture types embedded in Pakistani ESL textbooks. Thus, a thorough systematic review of the current state of the literature in cultural representation in textbooks is required (Shen, 2019) to visualize the prevailing status and research focus and design. Such a review study is also required to show readers the latest developments and further research directions in this field of research.

Therefore, the present paper aims to examine the studies of cultural representations in EFL/ESL textbooks from 2012 to 2023. The present paper uses the term culture for the beliefs, customs, skills, values, norms, folkways, arts & music, and outfits signifying a specific community (Brown, 2000). The cultural representation signifies the different cultures (e.g., target, international and source culture) in the textbooks. Newmark (1988) identified five cultural domains such as ecosystem (flora, fauna), material context (food, clothes, house, transport), social context (work or leisure), social organizations (political and administrative, religious, artistic), and gestures and habits. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What are research designs used to analyze the cultural elements in EFL/ESL textbooks?
2. How is culture portrayed in the ESL textbooks used in Pakistan?
3. What aspects of source culture are typically examined in studies of EFL/ESL textbooks?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current review study presents a systematic review of the research design (methodological trends), the cultural elements (research focus), and the types of culture represented in ESL textbooks used in Pakistan within the period of ten years (2012-2023). For this purpose, the study adopted the PRISMA framework.

A. Identification of Relevant Literature

We searched the relevant literature by utilizing the key terms (i.e. culture in/and English textbooks, culture representations in/and textbooks, cultural elements/themes in textbooks, and cultural contents in ESL textbooks used in Pakistan) to identify and choose the relevant studies. The primary relevance of each study was determined by the title. By identifying the content relevance of the title, we acquired its complete reference, comprising the author, year, title, and abstract for further assessment.

Additionally, we selected and searched the electronic databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar (See Figure 1), for they are the most frequently searched databases across several fields and enriched with the studies on cultural representation in ESL/EFL textbooks. The former is considered the most comprehensive database because it covers all peer-reviewed journals in Social Sciences (Steinhardt et al. 2017) and Humanities. However, many relevant journals are not indexed in WoS; thus, Scopus and Google Scholar were selected to meet the deficiency. This study employed an advanced search strategy in these databases to retrieve the relevant studies. While searching these databases utilizing keywords mentioned earlier, we identified three hundred and thirteen (313) studies, including three duplicates that were later excluded.

B. Screening of the Identified Data

During this phase of the selection process, the three hundred and thirteen studies' abstracts were thoroughly read to decide their relevance to the research topic in question. For this purpose, parallel independent assessments of the studies were performed, and the discrepancies between their findings were discussed and resolved. Consequently, two hundred and thirteen studies were found irrelevant and excluded. Finally, ninety-seven studies were found most relevant, and the full-text article was obtained for eligibility and quality assessment.

C. Eligibility Criteria

To assess the quality and eligibility of the studies, we skimmed through the full-text articles. We considered articles published by trustworthy journals as high-quality research and counted them in the present review study. Most of the technical reports, conference proceedings, books and book sections and non-empirical studies were excluded from the review (For eligibility criteria, see Table 1). We also excluded those studies whose full text was not accessible or available. Generally, seventy-nine (79) studies that could not meet the eligibility criteria were excluded. Finally, eighteen (18) studies were chosen and included for the thorough full-text analysis (Figure 1).

Table 1: Eligibility Criteria For Studies' Selection Papers

Criteria	Specifications
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies relevant to cultural representation in ESL/EFL textbooks • Empirical studies • Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar-indexed Journal Papers. • Journal papers
Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraneous studies • Non-empirical studies • Conference papers and proceedings, and Systematic Literature Reviews • Books, book sections and thesis • The papers that are not fully available online • Studies that do not reflect cultural representation in ESL/EFL textbooks

Figure 1 illustrates the four steps taken during the studies selection process. In the first step, we identified the studies by searching various digital databases: Google Scholar, WoS and Scopus and excluded the duplicates. We screened and excluded the irrelevant studies in step 2; assessed the full-text studies to include the relevant studies as per the eligibility criterion. In step 4, we reviewed the most relevant studies and finalized them for final inclusion, as shown in Figure 1.

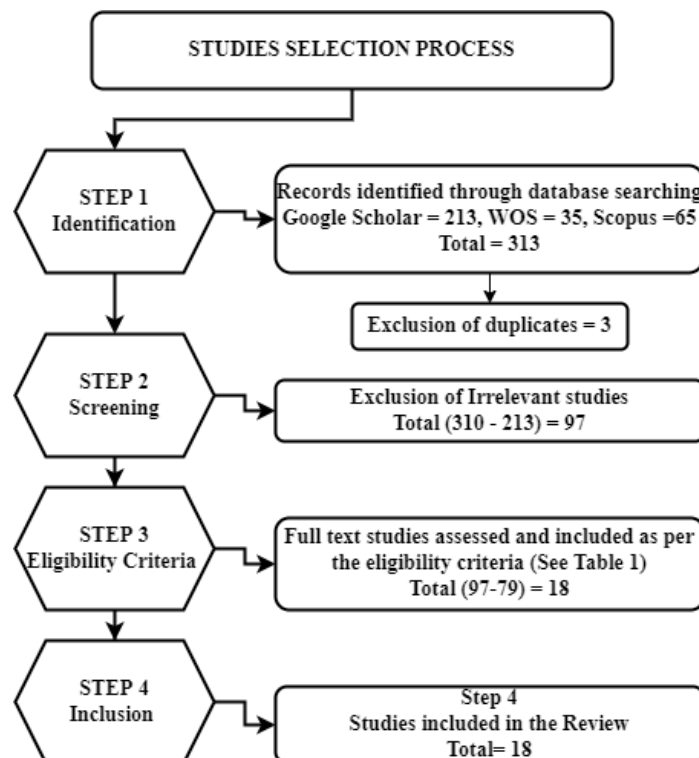


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

Figure 1 is adopted from PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009), and it highlights the four steps such as identification, screening, eligibility criteria and inclusion.

D. Inter-rater Reliability

After searching Web of Science (WoS), Scopus and Google scholar databases, two reviewers (academic researchers) independently looked at the selected set of studies (by title, abstract, key terms, and, if essential, by full text) to exclude those studies which did not fulfil the eligibility criteria (Table 1). For this purpose, Cohen's Kappa was utilized to test the inter-rater reliability between the choices made by these reviewers in selecting studies. The inter-rater reliability value of K was equal to 0.89, indicating a good agreement between the two reviewers (Landis & Koch, 1977).

III. DATA ANALYSIS

We imported the 18 collected studies into ATLAS.ti (9th version) software helps us code by simply pulling codes on the data to connect them meaningfully. After that, we reviewed, examined, and coded each study in ATLAS.ti according to the three items (see Table 2) that provide information to answer the research questions and conduct the synthesis.

We started the research design analysis by examining the title, abstract and methodology relating to research methods, sample selection, data collection, theoretical/conceptual frameworks, and analysis methods. Drawing upon a categorization procedure adopted by Yue et al., (2020), we categorized the eighteen collected studies into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed/blended research studies. A qualitative study is an inductive study that drives meaning from the data (Creswell, 2003) through systematic data collection and analysis procedures, such as text analysis and narrative accounts (Roller, 2019). A quantitative study describes the study's findings through statistical and numerical data analysis (Rashid & Sipahi, 2021), and a mixed method unites quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study to understand the phenomenon under study (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). After categorizing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies, we extracted and analyzed these studies' sample selection, data collection, theoretical/conceptual frameworks and analysis methods.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the research designs employed in 18 collected studies to determine the representation of culture and the cultural elements in the EFL/ESL textbooks, as highlighted in Table 2.

TABLE 2: ITEMS UTILIZED FOR ANALYZING THE COLLECTED STUDIES

Items	Description
Research design	Description of the collected studies' research designs, including research methods, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis methods
Research focus	Description of the categories of culture such as target, source and international cultures, cultural aspects and elements in EFL/ESL textbooks
Cultural representation	Description of cultures embedded in ESL/EFL textbooks selected for the collected studies

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the 18 collected studies between 2012-2021 highlighting that cultural representation in textbooks is an issue with a constant concern in EFL/ESL education. The findings of research design, focus, and Pakistani source culture representation are presented in the following sections.

A. Research Designs

This section of the study includes the analysis of (1) instructional settings, (2) research methods, (3) sample selection, (4) data collection, (5) theoretical/conceptual frameworks, and (6) data analysis.

1. Research Method

Concerning the research methods of the selected studies (N=18), there are three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Most of them are qualitative studies (N=10), tailed by mixed studies (N=5) and quantitative studies (N=3). The qualitative studies scrutinize how the culture is presented and inspect whether and how much culture is esteemed. Additionally, mixed/blended studies research the perspectives or attitudes of instructors or/and students towards the cultural portrayals in textbooks. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the three kinds of studies from 2012 to 2021.

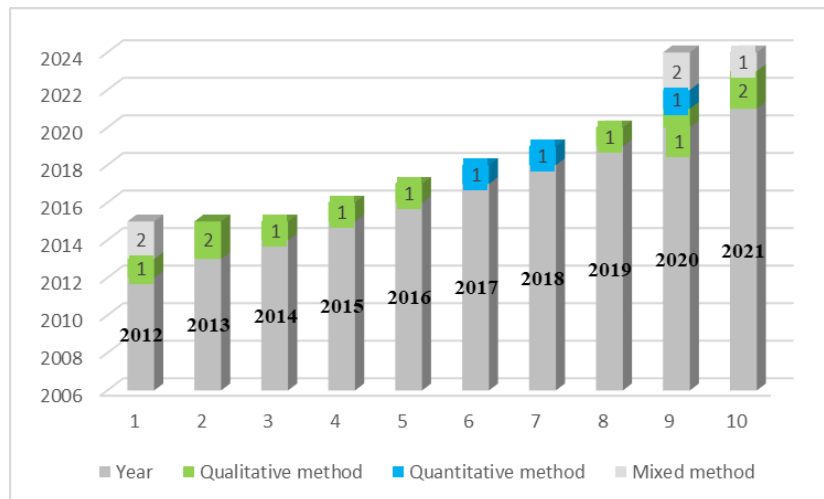


Figure 2: Distribution of Research Methods of Previous Studies

2. Sample Selection

This review study also examined sample selection considering the portrayal of sampled textbooks in selected studies that cover the nations/regions where the sampled textbooks originated and the levels of sampled textbooks (Tables 3 and 4).

TABLE 3: COUNTRY-WISE SAMPLED TEXTBOOKS IN COLLECTED STUDIES

Types of Research	Countries	Number of Studies	Frequencies
Qualitative study	Pakistan	3	10
	China	2	
	Korea	1	
	UK + India + Iran	1	
	Iran	1	
	Mainland China + Hong Kong	1	
	Indonesia	1	
Quantitative study	Iran	1	3
	Saudi Arab	1	
	USA	1	
Mixed/blended study	USA + Taiwan	1	5
	Pakistan	2	
	Iran	1	
	Russia	1	
Total			18

Table 3 illustrates that most selected studies that examined cultural portrayal in the textbooks were from specific regimes/countries. The most frequently inspected textbooks were from Pakistan, trailed by Iran, China, the USA, England, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Russia, and India. In this manner, investigating cultural representation in the textbooks from Pakistan and other countries is

helpful to understand the cultural portrayals across the world, specifically in ESL textbooks used in Pakistan.

Table 4 highlights the levels of sampled textbooks in the studies reviewed to see the most frequently investigated levels of textbooks for cultural representation.

TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF LEVELS OF SAMPLED TEXTBOOKS IN COLLECTED STUDIES

Categories	Levels	Number of studies	Frequencies
Qualitative study	Elementary	1	10
	Middle	3	
	Intermediate	1	
	Secondary	4	
	University	1	
Quantitative study	Elementary	2	3
	Intermediate + Advanced learners	1	
Mixed method study	Elementary	2	5
	Middle	1	
	Intermediate	1	
	Indefinite	1	
Total		18	18

Note: Indefinite refers to the study that does not accurately account for the sampled textbooks' level.

Table 4 shows that the selected studies primarily emphasize the textbooks authored for the elementary and middle levels ESL/EFL students, trailed by the secondary, intermediate, university and advanced levels. However, one of them examined cultural representation in more than one level of textbooks (see Table 4). The findings reveal that elementary, middle, secondary, intermediate, university, and advanced English language textbooks can affix cultural knowledge to develop students' intercultural communicative competence (Heggernes, 2021). Therefore, a complete examination of textbooks at various levels might contribute to understanding the representation of culture in textbooks.

3. Data Collection Instruments

This study also illustrates the data collection instruments employed in the collected studies (Table 5). 14 out of 18 studies employed documents (N=13) for analyzing culture in the textbooks, and two studies utilized texts and questionnaires for ESL teachers and students. Also, two studies employed documents and a checklist for investigating the cultural contents in the textbooks. Finally, a study by Deswila et al., (2021) examined texts, dialogues and images embedded in the textbook series. Thus, using multiple sources for data gathering provides an opportunity to study cultural representation comprehensively in language textbooks.

TABLE 5: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT OF COLLECTED STUDIES

Data collection tools	Number of studies
Texts/documents	13
Texts/Documents + Questionnaire (T) + Questionnaire (S)	2
Documents +Checklists	1
Texts + Dialogues + Images	1
Total	18

4. Theoretical/conceptual Frameworks

The study also examined the theoretical or conceptual frameworks adopted in the collected studies for cultural representation in the selected data. Notably, 16 studies such as Deswila et al., (2021), Lee and Li (2020) and others adopted more than one frameworks; a few studies, e.g., Shah et al. (2014), included a single framework. Table 6 exhibits that the most frequently used conceptual frameworks were Cortazzi's & Jin's (1999) classification of cultural content (N = 4), followed by Adaskou's et al., (1990) types of cultural information (N = 3) and Kachru's (1985) three-circle model of English varieties (N = 3). For further details, see the following Table 6.

TABLE 6: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS ADOPTED IN THE COLLECTED STUDIES

Theoretical & Conceptual Frameworks	Frequencies
Murayama's (2000) approach	1
Kachru's (1985) three-circle model of English varieties	3
Holsti's (1969) and Stemler's (2001) systematic content categories	1
Dary's, Campo's, & Zuluaga's (1999) proposed checklists.	1
The categorisation of cultural content (Byram& Morgan, 1994)	4
Cortazzi's and Jin's (1999) framework of cultural content classification	2
Chen's (2004) checklist for cultural themes	1
Lee's (2009) concepts on cultural themes	3
Ramirez's and Hall's (1999) model of cultural references and categories	1
Adaskou's, Britten's and Fashi's (1990) types of cultural information	1
Moran's (2011) coding scheme regarding the cultural dimensions	1
Yuen's (2011) elements of culture	1
Tajeddin's and Teimournezhad's (2014) culture categorisations	1
Merrouch's (2006) questionnaires	2
Kilgarriff's, Rychly's, Smrz's & Tugwell's (2004) words sketch engine.	1
Sharoff, 2014 evaluating terms extraction.	1

Moran's (2001) 4P framework	1
Yuen's (2011) 4 Ps' model of culture	1
Kachru's (1986) Concentric Circles model	1
Pfister and Borzelli's (1977) categorisation of language	
Kachru's (1990) concentric circles of World Englishes	
Widodo's 2018 critical micro-analysis of values	
Bryman's (2016) framework of content analysis	
Kachru's (1992) concept of three Circles of English	
McArthur's (1998) 'Circle of World Englishes	

5. Data Analysis Method

The current study discovers that the most frequently used analysis method in the collected studies was the content analysis to make “replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 24). Besides, discourse analysis, comparative analysis and multimodal analysis were employed to examine culture representation in ESL/EFL textbooks.

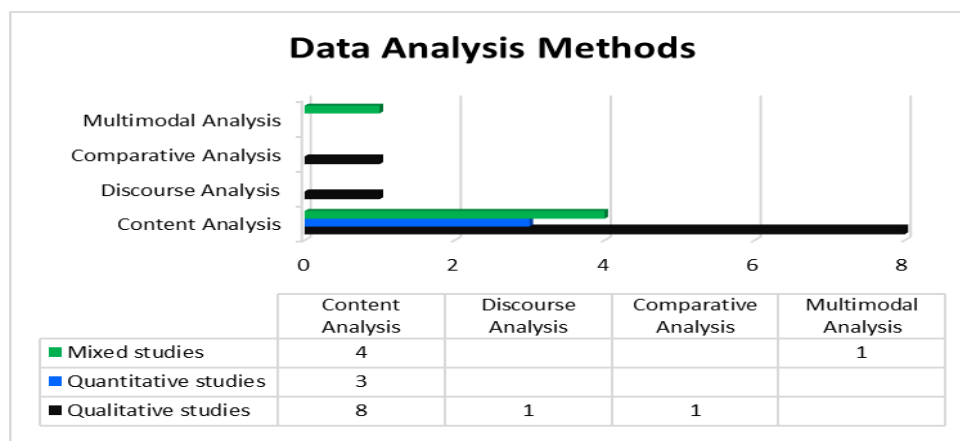


Figure 3: Data Analysis Methods used in the Collected Studies

Figure 3 shows the employed data analysis methods in the collected studies. Most of the studies have used content analysis (N=15), followed by discourse analysis (N=1), comparative analysis (N=1) and multimodal analysis (N=1).

The result is similar to Weninger's and Kiss's (2015) study analyzing culture in foreign/second language textbooks. A comparative analysis compares cultural representation in textbooks from different countries/regions (e.g., Rashidi & Meihami, 2016) and learners' and teachers' perspectives regarding the cultural themes embedded in the textbooks (e.g., Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2017). The results highlight that content analysis was commonly utilized to examine cultural knowledge in the topics, words and illustrations incorporated in textbooks (Arshad et al., 2020; Lee & Li, 2020). It has also been used to outline the national identity's aspects assimilated into the textbooks (Wang, 2016). Besides, discourse analysis is employed to analyze culture's underlying dialogues in

textbooks (Liu et al., 2021). Finally, multimodal analysis is employed to decrypt the ways cultural values are portrayed in visual images in textbooks (Kozlova & Ryabichenko, 2021). Content, discourse, and multimodal analysis advocate complementary methods (Weninger, 2018) for searching for pictorial and linguistic representations of cultural meanings in textbooks.

As methodological trends reveal, qualitative studies have dominated the collected studies of cultural representation in ESL/EFL textbooks, followed by mixed and quantitative methods. These methods are employed to examine cultural representations, which indeed subsidize understanding the central role of teaching culture in ELT education. However, this study also identifies methodological gaps based on the reviewed literature. Firstly, concerning research methods, most quantitative studies included units containing the piece of readings connected with culture (Shen, 2019), while numerous other units, e.g. visual pictures, music, and listening materials, seemed ignored. Thus, a thorough and holistic analysis of every segment of the textbooks is indispensable for scrutinizing cultural knowledge. Besides, a few studies used discourse analysis while ignoring critical discourse analysis to critically examine cultural contents in English language textbooks.

Secondly, in terms of sample selection, the sampled textbooks are mainly imported textbooks, whose authors and composers are probably alien to the cultures where the textbooks are used. The learners face cultural gaps while learning English through imported textbooks. Consequently, the learning process and the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of L2 learners are hindered.

Thirdly, although some studies collected data through questionnaires, checklists, and images, most of the collected studies used documents and texts for data collection. Hence, the issue of completeness and comprehensiveness of the studies might make the studies partial in studying cultural representation in textbooks. Additionally, some studies commonly did not provide details of the applied methods; for example, missing details of data collection, analysis methods and the validity and reliability of the study might make their findings unreliable to a certain extent. Therefore, more rigorous and in-depth techniques, multiple data sources, and complementary analysis methods are substantial for discovering cultural representation in textbooks' discourses (Lin et al., 2021).

B. Culture Representation in Textbooks

The collected studies on cultural representation in ESL/EFL textbooks mainly focus on cultural categories, cultural elements, cultural aspects, the dominance of the inner-circle countries' culture (target culture), the scarcity of outer and expanding circles countries' cultures (source and international cultures). They are discussed in the following sections.

1. Plethora of Target culture in Textbooks

This review specified the primacy of target culture which is also called the cultures of inner circle countries, in EFL textbooks regarding cultural representation in the collected studies. In 11 out of 18 collected studies, the prevalence of inner circle or target culture elements was explicitly reported. In this regard, Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2012) informed that most of the references in the textbook utilized in a Chinese secondary school were related to the inner circle/target culture, for instance, chronicled places in England, British royalties, and cruising in Canada). Additionally, Ashrafi and Ajideh (2018) expressed many cases of the target culture (e.g., geographic districts in England, English names) in advanced level textbooks utilized in a language center. Also, Tahir and Iqbal (2012) detailed that the inner circle or target culture products, practices perspectives (for example, love, music, wine and so forth) were heavily consolidated in the OUP English textbooks used in Pakistan. Likewise, Shah and Ahmed (2014) detailed that the selected textbooks are heavily imbued with Western culture, views, values, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings – usually from the United States or the United Kingdom. In addition, Al sofi (2018) noted that the texts and passages based on themes such as foods, music, movies, fashion, etc., largely depended on the target culture in the imported textbooks. Baleghizadeh and Shayesteh (2020) affirmed that a lack of balance was evident concerning the scope of foreign cultures manifested in imported textbooks. It reveals that the cultures of English-speaking countries (target culture) occupy a larger space in these textbooks and hence, have left little room for the source and international cultures in selected textbooks.

2. Paucity of Source culture in Textbooks

The study results highlight the scarcity of source culture (also called the cultures of the Outer Circle countries) representation in imported language textbooks. Regarding this, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015), while examining culture representation in dialogues and reading exercises, advocated that representation of source culture was underrepresented. For example, the passage that refers to an earthquake in Iran did not represent students' source cultural aspects. Assessing an imported textbook, Al-Sofi (2018) also mentioned that the learners' source culture's references (e.g., Arabic culture) were inadequate in number. Evaluating cultural contents in English language teaching materials through textbook evaluation, Arshad et al. (2020) maintained that the frequency of texts in OPE (Oxford Progressive English) textbook used in Pakistan is highly imparted with the target culture, followed by the international culture, and least by learners' source culture. Furthermore, they viewed the concealed agenda of the curriculum in terms of the representation of religious beliefs, values and norms of inner circle countries' cultures may be obstructing the intellectual capacity of the Pakistani L2 learners. Based on the present study's findings, it is

proposed that English be learnt through locally developed English textbooks, whose authors are local and share the learners' culture to bridge the cultural gap between them.

As stated earlier, the result highlights only a few studies that provide information on cultural representation in locally developed English textbooks. It seems that teaching culture in EFL education is equal to teaching target culture through imported textbooks. This phenomenon can be a research gap for investigating cultural categories and elements in English textbooks that are locally developed in the outer or expanding circle countries by the authors sharing common cultural values and beliefs with the L2 learners.

3. Multicultural Disparities

Liability on the under-representation of world cultures, the studies on the analysis of foreign language textbooks and the scarcity of multicultural comparisons were noticed as common subjects that create disparities. We found that the cultural discrepancies between learners' and target cultures are not effectively described in the selected textbooks. Evaluating culture in imported English textbooks used in Pakistan, Tahir and Iqbal (2012) asserted that multicultural disparities between source and target cultural values are evident in textbooks. The cultural references that are considered pride in the target culture countries are taboos in Pakistan. For instance, going “*into town for tea and afterwards to the cinema*”, “*they (the young white men) were drinking*”, “*a favorite place for lovers*” and “*their long whisperings on summer nights*” create a much more romantic world in the context of the West but in Pakistan, drinking and dating openly and publically are established taboos (p. 56). Thus, the representation of such cultural disparities causes psychological, cultural, moral, and social ambiguities among L2 learners despite developing their intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

4. Portrayal of World Cultures in Textbooks

The findings of the collected studies revealed the imbalanced representation of the world cultures in the selected studies. While investigating the representation of Inner, Outer, and Expanding circled varieties and cultures in global ELT textbooks, Tajeddin and Pakzadian (2020) concluded that all the three textbook series are mainly occupied with the culture of Inner-Circle countries, and the cultures of the outer and expanding circle countries were comparatively less evident. Similarly, Keles and Yazan (2020) claimed that the focus of the selected imported textbooks was on the culture of English-speaking communities. They argued that such an imbalanced representation of world cultures might hinder raising the global cultural consciousness of English learners, as evident in the minor engagements with the multicultural outlook of English language varieties.

Also, Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2012) noticed the underrepresentation of the cultures of non-English speaking western and Eastern countries in a textbook used in Chinese high school. In sum, the L2 imported textbooks failed to provide equal representation opportunities for the World cultures (Outer and Expanding circle countries' cultures). Investigating cultural contents in Oxford Progressive English Textbook (OPE), Arshad et al. (2020) affirmed the predominant representation of target culture in the textbook that may cause hindrance to strengthen the ICC (intercultural communicative competence) of L2 learners and to presenting language in a real-life context. They observed the inclusion of the hidden agenda of the curriculum in the form of religious beliefs, norms and values of the target culture that may impede the understanding of the Pakistani students.

V. CONCLUSION

This systematic review aims to review previous studies of cultural representation in L2 ESL/EFL textbooks from 2012 to 2023 to concern research designs, the focus of the research and the representation of the culture. Qualitative, mixed methods and quantitative research designs are employed in the selected studies. Moreover, sampled textbooks in the selected works encompass ESL/EFL textbooks of different levels and from various countries. Most of them are elementary textbooks from Pakistan. Also, the collected studies collected the data from various sources, i.e., documents, checklists, and questionnaires, mainly from the documents. For data analysis, four methods are commonly employed in previous studies: content analysis, discourse analysis, comparative analysis, and multimodal analysis.

Regarding the research focus, most of the collected studies focused on examining cultural elements in ESL/EFL textbooks. The result indicated that the primary representation of culture in ESL/EFL textbook discourses is commonly connected with the target culture, indicating the underrepresentation of the source/local and international cultures (Arshad et al., 2020). Also, multicultural disparities were reported in the sampled textbooks of the previous works. The present study proposes the following suggestions for future research based on the findings.

Future researchers can expand their research samples to cover different levels of locally developed textbooks from different outer and expanding circle countries to understand better the cultural representation in ESL/EFL textbooks. Further, to discover cultural representation, more rigorous research studies need to be conducted, examining all sections of ESL/EFL textbooks, collecting data systematically and profoundly from multiple sources, and employing additional data analysis methods (Lin et al., 2021). In the interim, a comprehensive analytical framework is needed for future research to analyze cultural contents in textbooks. Besides, the issue of cultural

representation shall also be examined via critical discourse analysis. The representations of target sources and international cultures are worth considering in the analysis.

Additionally, most of the previous research studies highlighted the underrepresentation of the source culture of Pakistan; how it is represented in textbooks is not entirely covered. Thus, future studies shall examine the limited or biased representations of culture in the textbooks and discover the criteria for balanced representation. Future research may also bridge the gaps by investigating the learners' and teachers' perceptions of textbooks' cultural representations and hidden ideologies.

The significant contribution of this review study is the thorough examination and cataloguing of relevant publications on cultural representation in ESL/EFL textbooks in which standard research designs, research focus, and representation of Pakistani culture are observed, and gaps are identified. However, the current systematic review is limited to WoS, Scopus and Google Scholar collected studies. Therefore, the analysis and interpretation of the study may be compromised due to such limitations. Therefore, other valuable sources of information (i.e., blogs and videos made by dominant scholars) can also be part of future research studies. Likewise, the review study reports the diversified topics and subtopics with archetype studies due to the diversity of topics and subtopics covered in the collected data and the space limitation.

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