

## **The Cultural Impact of EFL Books On Iranian Language Learners**

**Dr. Somayeh Ahangaran**

*Professor of Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran*

---

**Abstract:** Culture is defined as the norms and rules that govern the behavior of a group of individuals. This behavior is unique to a group of people and therefore different groups of individuals enjoy different cultures. Culture is reflected in the language spoken by a society of community. When one group of individuals strives to learn a foreign language they are also exposed to foreign culture. The question that arises at this point is whether the learners of a foreign language do acquire foreign culture as well. To answer this question, this research compared two groups of learners learning English in Iran. One group was those learners who learned English through books designed by native speakers of English (Headway) and the other group was those who studied books designed by the Ministry of Education (Prospect). The former books were laden with the foreign culture whereas the latter was not. These two groups were compared using a questionnaire and found to be statistically similar. The cultural system held by these two groups was similar and cultural impact had not taken place. This shows that books do not transmit cultural values of the foreign language by themselves. The results show that the culture of people that are formed through time and as an outcome of their needs is not easily changed.

**Keywords:** culture; cultural impact; language learning; foreign language learning; FL books.

---

### **1. Introduction**

Culture is the patterns of behavior and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share (Nuan1999). People's culture includes their beliefs, rules of behavior, language, rituals, art, technology, style of dress, ways of producing and cooking, religion, and political and economic systems (Burke et al.,2000). Each society has its own culture and there is a difference between these cultures (Encarta Encyclopedia 2002). The culture of people, their attitudes, patterns of behavior and their ways of life are reflected in the language they speak. Therefore, the culture of people is intermingled with the language they speak. (Deckle, 2001).

According to sociologists, culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective. Culture also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society. Brown (1994) asserted that a language is a part of a culture and culture is a part of a language. The acquisition of a second language is also the acquisition of a second culture. According to Brown's assertion, when language is learned, the culture of that language is learned alongside it. The learner of the language also learns the values of the second or foreign culture. This can be true for foreign language learners of English, in Iran.

These learners learn English through two different sets of books, those designed by native speakers of the foreign language and those designed by Iranians. The former carry with them the culture of the foreign language (Top-notch series) whereas the latter are designed to teach language within the culture residing in Iran School Books (prospects) published by (the Ministry of Education). The first series of books are taught in institutes and will be called 'institute books' and the second group of books is taught in schools and will be called 'school books' is this research. These foreign language learners are learning English. And, along with English. They are exposed to the values of English Culture. However, the question that remains to be asked is if these students acquire this culture and do this culture becomes part of their value system. If so, then a phenomenon called cultural impact has taken place. However, if they remain immune to the culture of the foreign language and do not accept it as their value, then the culture of the foreign language has not entered their cultural system (all cultural values, which an individual believes in and practices) and they have preserved their own culture. This research strives to find out whether cultural impact does take place in Iran or not.

### **2. Literature Review**

This part explores various authors' works about cultures and languages. It is possible to track significant features in the relationship between language and culture which can aid understanding and which point to how such understanding might be realized and promoted within a foreign-language classroom context. Given, then, that language occurs within and forms part of a cultural context and that the lexical items and cognitive structures informing those items are all culturally bound, it is clear that in order to understand language we need to understand the culture that produced it and to which it refers (Cain, 2000, p. 5). It is clear that in order to understand language we need to understand the culture that produced it and to

which it refers. Zolyan argues that “the language through culture and culture through the language” provides us with new prospects of understanding of modern social processes, the awareness of the role of common values of human civilization, as well as national and regional cultures (Zolyan, 2011, p. 11). “We cannot deny the importance of culture and language in learning. Through language we always understood different cultures” (Louie, 1998, p. 8). Liddicoat supports the above authors by stating: Understanding the nature of the relationship between language and culture is central to the process of learning another language. In actual language use, it is not the case that it is only the forms of language that convey meaning. It is language in its cultural context that creates meaning: creating and interpreting meaning is done within a cultural framework. In language learning classrooms, learners need to engage with the ways in which context affects what is communicated and how (Liddicoat, 2009, p. 18). It is obvious that language is not just combined of a matter of syntax, phonemes, and morphemes to be learned in a matter of a few months. It is through language that culture is transmitted. No one can teach languages without teaching culture. There is a big relation between culture and language. According to Ethno linguistic there are two big approaches to the relation between culture and language, which are mutually exclusive: language depends on culture; language organizes culture (Jourdan, 2006, p. 5). Another author also argues that, what a child learns in learning about language it is united together with the other things the child learns about cultures (Bruner, 2001, p. 66).

### **3. Participants**

Two groups of learners participated in this study. One group of learners as those who were learning English in high schools. This group comprised of 247 participants. The second group was those learners who were learning English in institutes. These 254 advanced learners of English were studying English in Novin Institute.

### **4. Instruments**

A questionnaire was designed to capture the cultural impact of values inherent in Institute Books on students. This questionnaire that was designed by the researcher comprised 20 questions.

### **5. Procedure**

The questionnaire was designed for the learners of English based on the analysis of cultural values existing in the books that were put into the questionnaire. The headway series were analyzed and found to have specific values built into them. The cultural values applied in the questionnaire were; 'hegemony of English, 'planning', 'health', 'fashion'; 'perseverance'; 'respect for elders', 'responsibility', 'problem solving', and 'chauvinism'. These values were presented in the form of questions that the learners were supposed to answer. This was done to see if these cultural values had entered the cultural system of the learners or not. If these cultural values had become part of the cultural system that the learners held then the phenomenon of cultural impact had taken place. The purpose of the questionnaire was to find if the phenomenon of cultural impact had occurred or not. To do so, after the questionnaire was ready, its content validity confirmed and a pilot study carried out, it was given to the two groups of subjects to complete. Two groups were used to carry out a comparative study. One group was those learners who had used schoolbooks and the other groups were those learners who had used Institute Books to learn English. This comparison was done to observe if held different cultural values or not.

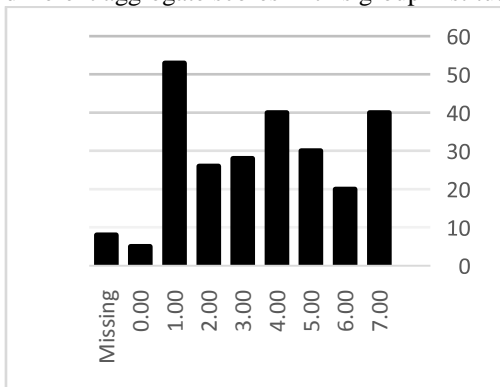
The completed questionnaires were also collected and analyzed. Each of the questionnaires was read and based upon the answers given it was decided whether the cultural system of the student or not, i.e. Had cultural impact in this instance taken place the question would be given a nominal score of 1 and if it had not taken place it would be given a 0.

Two different analyses were done to answer the research question about learners and cultural values. In the first analysis the nominal score assigned to each participant was added up to each participant were added up to make an aggregate score. Naturally, those with higher scores displayed more of the phenomenon of a cultural impact than those with lower aggregate scores. Therefore, this aggregate score was taken as an ordinal score (where higher scores showed more of something but the distance between them was not consistent or was not known at all). These two groups, i.e. the school students and the institute students were compared through the Mann-Whitney test which is a test for independent samples carrying ordinal value. In the second analysis cultural value were grouped. For example, the cultural value 'hegemony of English' was considered independently of other values. The frequency counts of those believing in the 'Hegemony of English' was taken along with those who do not believe in this. This count compared between the two groups to see if a significant difference existed about this cultural value. This analysis was done for 'Planning', 'Health', 'Fashion', and 'Perseverance' as well.

### 6. Results

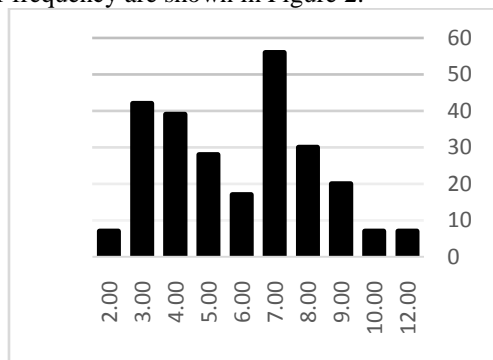
The questionnaires of the students studying in the Institute were analyzed and their aggregate scores computed.

Figure 1 shows the frequency of different aggregate scores in this group Institute Students.



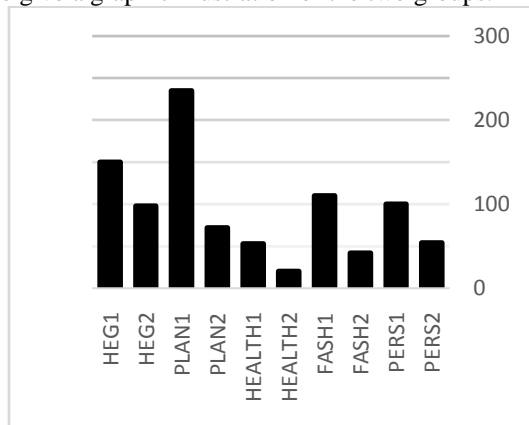
**Figure1.** Cultural Impact in Institute Students

The questionnaires of students studying in schools were analyzed as well. The results of these aggregate scores along with their frequency are shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Cultural Impact in School Students

These are the results of the analysis concerning cultural impact. These values are ordinal. One who has a 7 is higher in the ranking than one who has a 5. It is seen that in the first group, for those who study language in institutes the mean is higher than the ones who study in schools. For institutes the mean is 5.94, whereas for the schools it is 3.75. The means of these two groups seem different. In the above analysis to obtain results, the aggregate score was compared between the two groups and the numerical values for each group were given independently. To give a comparative picture of the data, the frequency of five variables was calculated and is shown in the following graph to give a graphic illustration of the two groups.



1= student learning English in Institutes  
 2= Students learning English in Schools

**Figure 3.** Frequency of cultural values seen in each

To ascertain whether the difference between the two groups was significant or not a statistical analysis was carried out. Since, the variables were ordinal in nature a test for comparing two sets of independent ordinal scores were run. The results are as follows:

**Table 1.** Comparing of Institute students with School students

|                 | Value    |
|-----------------|----------|
| Mann- Whitney U | 648.000  |
| Wilcoxon W      | 1026.000 |
| Degree of Sig   | .573     |

The results of the Mann- Whitney test with a U value of 648.000 at a degree of significance of .573 show that these two groups do not differ significantly. Even though the learners study different books they have the same cultural systems. Therefore, the difference between these two groups, the school learners of English and the Institute learner of English is not statistically significant. These results show us that the values of the learners of English are not changed or influenced by the books they study. These two groups study two widely different books, but their value system as measured in this research is not statistically different. This result shows that one textbook does not shape the value system of students. All these books may go hand in hand to take part in shaping part of the learners' value system, however, only one of them does not do so. Those studying schools, study more than one textbook. They go to a book. In each of these books many cultural values are embedded. In such a system the cultural values are in harmony and the system attempts to teach a specific set of cultural values to the students and they are influenced by all the books they study and not just one of them. Those learners who are studying in institutes have also undergone an education similar to the school students. All of them have gone to school and studied many textbooks that have a specific set of cultural values. These cultural values have become a part of their cultural system and one book alone cannot influence what has been done over the years.

Another point to be taken into account is that both these groups of learners live in the same society. This society holds a set of cultural values that are stable if you are studying English through Headway or the books designed by the Ministry of Education. This society like any other has a culture and strengthens its cultural values and not the cultural values held in other countries or the country of the target language of the language learner.

Thorndike (1960) claimed that modeling of behavior happens when a behavior is responded to and reinforced. For example, if a child sees his/her elder sister saying "Hello" to its elders and the child copies this behavior, if s/he is given positive reinforcement, this behavior is learned and repeated if not the behavior will be forgotten.

This can be generalized to the cultural values depicted in English books. Those books, which are designed and written by the Ministry of Education, encompass cultural values held in Iran; however, the Headway series is designed and written by people who hold another set of cultural values. It may be that those cultural values that are portrayed in these books and applauded in Iran are learned, but, those that are not accepted do not become a part of the cultural system. This can be a good reason to show why the values depicted in Headway books are not learned and do not become part of the cultural system of the students. These cultural values are not encouraged by Iranian culture, the native culture. The same is true for learning a foreign language and it may be otherwise in a second language situation where the culture of the society is the same as the culture depicted in EFL books.

The above analysis was carried out based on the aggregate scores of the participants. In the next analysis independent cultural values will be compared between the two groups.

The cultural value to be compared individually is "Hegemony of English". The impact of this value is compared between the two groups and the results are as follows:

**Table 2.** Results of the comparison of the learner. Hegemony between the two groups

|                      | value  | sig  |
|----------------------|--------|------|
| Parsons's chi square | 2.000  | .157 |
| Phi                  | -1.000 | .157 |
| Cramer's V           | 1.000  | .157 |
| Degree of freedom    | 1      |      |

The comparison with a Phi value of -1.000 and a significance of .157 are the result of the independent comparison of the value "hegemony of English" between the two groups. This analysis shows that these two

groups are not statistically significant. The same consumptions have been carried out for the value 'planning', 'health', 'fashion', 'perseverance'. The results were similar to that 'hegemony of English' and confirmed that there was no significant difference between the two groups. These analyses show that not only are the groups statistically similar in the impact of the collective cultural values in the study, but they are similar in the impact of cultural values if they are analyzed independently.

## 7. Conclusion

These results show that the cultural values, which are implemented in books, do not influence the learners and not enter their cultural systems. In this chapter it is statistically shown that books alone do not power to override the dominant culture in a community, in this case, ours.

## 8. References

- [1]. Brown, H.D. (1994). Principles of Language Learning and Teaching. New Vistas (USA).
- [2]. Burke, L., Crawley.T. and Girvin. A. (2000). the Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader. London and New York Routledge.
- [3]. Deckle, M. (2001). Language and Culture. Online. [<http://cops.uwf.edu/Ikurds/disc84/0000005d.htm>]
- [4]. Encarta Encyclopedia. (2002). Microsoft Corporation.
- [5]. Hall, E. (1959). The Silent Language. New York. Doubleday and Co.
- [6]. Hatch, E. & Lazaraton. A. (1991). The Research Manual. New York. Newbury House Publishers.
- [7]. Nunan, D.(1999). Second Language Teaching and Learning. Boston, Massachusetts. Heinle&Heinle Publishers.
- [8]. OECD. (2017). PISA 2015 results (Volume III): Students' well-being. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- [9]. Piwowar, V., Thiel, F., & Ophardt, D. (2013). Training in- service teachers' competencies in classroom management. A quasi-experimental study with teachers of secondary schools. Teaching and Teacher Education, 30, 1-12.
- [10]. Queller, D. (1997). Why do females care more than males? Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 264(1388), 1555–1557.
- [11]. Read J. C. & Fine, K. (2005, September 13th). Using survey methods for design and evaluation in child computer interaction. Paper presented on Child Computer Interaction: Methodological Research at Interact, Rome, Italy.
- [12]. Sanchal, A., & Sharma, S. (2017). Students' attitudes towards learning Mathematics: impact of Teaching in sporting context. Teachers and Curriculum, 17(1), 89-99.
- [13]. SCPTT (The Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers). (2016). Document of professional standards. Muscat: The Ministry of Education.
- [14]. Skinner, E. A., & Belmont, M. J. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behaviour and student engagement across the school year. Journal of Educational Psychology, 85(4), 571–581.
- [15]. Smith, G. (2014). An innovative model of professional development to enhance the teaching and learning of primary science in Irish Schools. Professional Development in Education, 40(3), 467–487.
- [16]. Tenenbaum, S. (1944). Attitudes of elementary school children to school, teachers and classmates. Journal of Applied Psychology, 28(2), 134-141.
- [17]. Thomas, M. (1998). Conducting educational research: A comparative view. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- [18]. Thurlings, M. & den Brok, P. (2017). Learning outcomes of teacher professional development activities: A meta-study. Educational Review, 69(5), 554–576.
- [19]. Tinklin, T. (2003). Gender differences and high attainment. British Educational Research Journal, 29(3), 307–325.
- [20]. The University of Cambridge. (2010). Review and recommendations. Muscat: The Ministry of Education.
- [21]. Verkuyten, M., & Thijs, J. (2002). School satisfaction of elementary school children: The role of performance, peer relations, ethnicity, and gender. Social Indicators Research, 59, 203–228.