Critical Analysis of Cultural Values and Traditions Represented in North Star English Course Book

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Abstract

This study reports the findings of a mixed method critical study of non-native university English language teachers' perceptions about cultural values and traditions represented in North Star English course book (advanced level), published by Pearson. The sample consisted of 35 male teachers who had experienced teaching the course book under investigation used at an English language institute in one of a Saudi Arabian university. In this study, a combined dataset questionnaire was used to collect data. Findings revealed that the participants had a negative perception towards the cultural models and traditions represented in the course book. More specifically, they were not adequately designed to suit the Saudi cultural background, local cultural norms and traditions. Moreover, the participants indicated that the course book failed to embody the international cultures of English speakers. The study recommends adopting new cultural policies which consider incorporating both the local as well as international cultures and traditions of speakers of English.

Keywords: local culture, international cultures, North Star course book, Critical Applied Linguistics

1. Introduction

This is a small-scale study that intends to explore the non-native English teachers' perspectives of the cultural norms and traditions depicted in the North Star English course book (advanced level) used in an English language institute in a Saudi Arabian university. The present study focused on investigating the represented cultural values and traditions. Researcher attempted to identify the non-native English teachers' perceptions about different issues related to the cultural norms and customs as depicted in the examined course book and their implications for the learners. Moreover, researcher tried to explore the participants' views regarding the improvement of the cultural contents of the investigated course book.

As a Saudi researcher, who is interested in investigating issues related to the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), I investigated this topic to identify how appropriate the cultural content in North Star English course book for the Saudi local context and the extent to which it represents the use of English as an international language of the world today.

The motive behind conducting such study is to raise non-native EFL teachers' awareness about some cultural dimensions and traditions represented in International English course books designed by the western publishers. These issues need to be considered and reflected adequately in these course books. More specifically, I would like to draw the non-native EFL teachers' attention to the need for recognizing the cultural identity of speakers of English from local and international contexts and adopting the required changes in addressing the cultural components in the content of the English course books. Furthermore, I hope this study will encourage non-native EFL teachers to be more critical in dealing with the cultural aspects so that they can recognize any hidden cultural agendas which could result in negative consequences on both teaching and learning in their context. Researcher believes that the cultural models and norms adopted in many English course books, especially international ones need to reflect both local and international cultures appropriately. Therefore, there is a dire need to take a critical stance in this study.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study explores the non-native EFL teachers' perceptions of the represented cultural norms in North Star English course book from a critical stance. Therefore, it uses aspects of Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL)

guided by the critical research paradigm. According to Pennycook (2011), CAL is a mixture of critical interrelated aspects that addresses different fields. One of them is the socio-cultural issues in relation to learners and teachers in ELT (Pennycook, 2001). One of the main features of CAL is practicing constant scepticism through asking questions that are based on the common assumptions, beliefs, or practices of applied linguistics. More specifically, it problematizes the givens that are related to various topics in TESOL (Pennycook, 2001). Therefore, critical researchers are invited to reflect upon these beliefs through educational research which seem a fertile area for implementing their standpoints, in TESOL particularly. The purpose of critical educational research is mainly practical (Cohen et al., 2017). For example, critical domains in education address issues related to mainstream TESOL activity such as areas of curriculum design, materials development, second language education (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and language learning contexts as vital aspects of the critical work in education (Pennycook, 1999). Furthermore, CAL questions the aims of some of the ELT practices in the centre (Pennycook, 1994) as well as the social and cultural ideologies. In other words, it critiques and transforms any sorts of social or cultural values (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), to introduce the desirable changes (Pennycook, 1999). The nature of the current research requires adopting these ideas which reflect some of the main CAL principles. I consider these notions essential guidelines which can help me to answer the research questions deeply and critically. For example, CAL helped me to question whether there is any sort of cultural bias in repressing certain cultural values or traditions of certain groups in the examined course book or marginalization of others. In addition, it helped me problematize the long-term implications of such strategies on the learning context. Moreover, it guided me to question the adequacy of the included cultural traditions and norms for the local context and how relevant they are for the intended learners. These questions have led me to problematize the consequences of reflecting only one cultural form as model for English native speakers in the examined course book designed by the western publishers in the inner-circle countries (e.g., Britain and US). Furthermore, it guided me to investigate the implications of the global spread of English as an international language on the classroom contexts and texts in relation to social and cultural aspects. Furthermore, CAL has widened my insight to establish a significant relationship between the investigated aspects and how they can affect the learners' language learning in their own context. For this study, the research questions seek to identify critical responses and views from non-native EFL teachers about the investigated cultural areas in the English course book under investigation.

1.2 The Context of the Study

English is taught as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. Saudi universities have adopted a new educational policy in most tertiary departments, which made English the medium of instruction for all scientific departments. This has led establishing a Foundation Year Programme (FYP) in the concerned English language institutes in these universities, including the site of this study. Its aim was to prepare university students to cope with their academic requirements in various majors. The English language institute (ELI) is responsible for offering intensive EFL courses in one academic year. To provide the required academic support for students, the institute had to take new academic trends and challenges. For example, a new English course book, North Star (advanced level), was introduced in the concerned institute in Saudi Arabia. It was designed and published by Pearson & Longman. The action was taken to help students achieve the intended learning outcomes of the FYP. The teaching staff at the institute embodies native, non-native teachers and local Saudi teachers who teach the intensive English language courses. This scenario has motivated me to investigate the non-native EFL teachers' views about the reflected cultural values and traditions in North Star English course book and to explore the extent to which its cultural aspects were suitable for the local context. Furthermore, I would like to discover the extent to which it reflects the international use of English today. However, through discussions with many experienced non-native EFL teachers, I noticed their dissatisfaction and negative attitudes towards the cultural components content of the course book. This dilemma is a commonly discussed issue among some researchers who consider such problems still exist in many English course books (Llurda 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Baker, 2009).

1.3 The Study

The study attempted to address the following research questions:

1) What critical perceptions do non-native EFL teachers have about the presented cultural values and traditions in North Star English course book?

2) What are the non-native EFL English teachers' views regarding the improvement of the cultural content in North Star English course book?

2. Methodological Approach

This study is informed by the critical research paradigm. It is a small case study which adopts mixed method. A mixed method research is an approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms in a study (Creswell, 2018). A combined dataset questionnaire was used to collect data which was divided into two parts: close -ended questions which required quantitative analysis and open- ended questions that required qualitative analysis. Such an approach aims to improve the enquiry to get more reliable data and minimize the chances of bias findings (Grix, 2018; Bryman, 2015; Creswell, 2018).

2.1 Participants

The rationale behind choosing the participants of this study has been guided by Creswell's assertion that the quality of research is not restricted on the adequacy of methodology and instrument, but it also depends on the adopted sampling strategy by the research (2017). The researcher chose the non- probability sampling with a special focus on purposive sampling (Bryman, 2015). This method involves choosing the sample based on their characteristics to meet the specific purpose of the study (Wellington, 2000; Cohen et al., 2017). Participants were selected according to two criteria: purposiveness and accessibility (Silverman, 2001). The participants were 35 non-native male English language teachers, working for a Saudi Arabian university, at the English language institute in Saudi Arabia. The selected participants were teaching English for the FYP students, and they have taught the North Star course book (advanced level) at the time the study was being conducted at the institute. These teachers come from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordon, India, Pakistan and South Africa, along with local Saudi EFL teachers.

2.2 The Research Instrument

In terms of data collection, the study used a combined dataset questionnaire. This is one of the most frequent instruments for data collection in educational research (Oppenheim, 1992), useful for establishing opinions and is effective in getting truthful insights on the participants' views (Cohen et al., 2017). The first part includes four close-ended questions to which the participants were asked to indicate the reflected cultural norms and traditions in the examined course book. In addition, Brown (2001) highlights that close ended questions are marked by providing uniformity across questions with reference to the types and specify the obtained data; are easier to be answered and less likely to be skipped by respondents and are relatively objective. The close-ended items used in the current study were in the form of multiple choice that required respondents to circle or underline one of five responses in a Likert scale that best suits their views. On the other hand, the open-ended questions were designed with the purpose of yielding qualitative data through the text responses written in the respondents' own words (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Moreover, these open-ended items can offer illustrative quotes and can also lead to the identification of some issues not previously expected (Dornyei, 2003).

To guarantee the quality of my empirical research study, I reviewed the literature pertinent to the investigated topic and then designed and developed it to meet the purpose of this study. The questionnaire of the current study incorporates the most important categories that many researchers advocate in addressing the cultural aspects thoroughly in ELT materials: namely, course books. These areas were chosen because they represent the main concerns of this study that needed to be investigated.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative data in this study. In reference to the quantitative data, it was analysed statistically (Creswell, 2017; Bryman, 2015; Creswell, 2018). SPSS was used to analyse the obtained results of the close–ended items of the questionnaire using descriptive statistics. I used it because it was comparatively easy to conduct and analyse as asserted by Cohen et al. (2017). With respect to the qualitative data analysis, it depends on interpreting and describing the obtained data subjectively (Creswell, 2019; Dornyei, 2007; Cohen et al., 2017). The data analysis process was not linear, but it was more complex. It was an iterative process where the researcher read and reread the data several times to come up with themes and sub-themes that were later summarized and classified in tables. The themes emerged from the data inductively. In other words, the researcher allowed themes to emerge from the obtained data (Radnor, 2001). Some quotes were included to support data analysis.

3. Literature Review

This section contains the definition of culture, culture and language, and cultural elements in English course books.

3.1 Definition of Culture

Culture in second or foreign language teaching has gained many researchers' interests for a long time (Byram et al., 1994; Travares & Cavalcanti, 1996; Baker, 2009). This has led to competing definitions of culture in the literature. For example, Kramsch (1993: p. 205) provides a concise vision of culture "a social construct, the product of self and others' perceptions". However, Fay's definition goes further to address the influence of culture on people as he considers culture as "a complex set of shared beliefs, values, and concepts which enables a group to make sense of its life and which provides it with directions for how to live" (1996, cited in Holiday et al., 2004, p. 60). Both definitions suggest that culture is created by both individuals and society, and it has a hidden power which determines the social behaviour of people's lives in their society as implied by the second definition. According to some researchers (Fahsi, 1990; Allen & Harley, 1992 cited in Bayyurt, 2006; Tomalin & Stemleski, 1993), culture has some main categories, such as value systems, beliefs, personal relationships and family nature, literature, folklore, music, customs, dress and leisure and cultural norms. These cultural aspects tend to be reflected in many ELT materials as a way of exposing EFL/ESL learners to the cultural dimensions of the target language.

3.2 Culture and Language

There are two main perspectives that address the relationship between culture and language in ESL/EFL classrooms. Some researchers believe that language and culture are two related entities (Kramsch et al., 1996). This notion has led some researchers to contend that language is bound by its culture at different levels, and they are undividable units. In other words, no language can be acquired without understanding the target language culture (Valdes, 1986; Valdes, 1990; Byram et al., 1991; Kramsch, 1993; Kramsch, 1998; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Matsuda, 2012; Weninger & Kiss, 2013; Cardona et al., 2015; Canale, 2016). On the other hand, other researchers have a contradicting view that teaching a foreign language could be independent from its original speakers (Alptekin, 1984; Kachru, 1986; Llurda, 2004; Baker, 2009). The target language can be acquired without digesting or understanding its cultural patterns, norms, and values. The main purpose of this standpoint is to protect the cultural identity of the non –native speakers of foreign language learners (Bayyurt, 2006). Both stances have influenced ELT practices widely: namely, the represented cultural norms and traditions in ELT materials, especially the international English course books that are used in outer and expanding circles. Their impacts and perceptions depend on the cultural features of each learning context.

3.3 Cultural Elements in English Course Books

Teaching English has been associated with socio-cultural norms and values of speakers of English as their first language from the inner-circle countries (e.g. Britain, North America, Australia), to develop bilingual and bicultural learners (Alptekin, 1984; Prodromou, 1988; Rizer, 1996; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In practice, ELT adopted this strategy for a long time as represented in many English course books that focus widely on American and British cultural contents. More specifically, their content shows a wide representation or domination of British or Anglo- American cultures (Prodromou, 1988; Matsuda, 2002; Matsuda, 2006). As a result, they incorporate cultural models and values which seem inappropriate, unacceptable, and unfamiliar for the intended learners, who belong to different cultures in many contexts (George, 1984; Alptekin, 1984; Prodromou, 1988; Rizer, 1996; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This phenomenon supports Cook's view that these course books lack reality because the native speakers' cultural model represents only "a part of the much larger group of the language" (1990, p. 67). This resulted in the failure of many course books in achieving the learners' intended learning outcomes which made the language learning process more difficult for both teachers and learners (Cook, 1983). However, changing the status of English into English as an international Language (EIL), no doubt, has brought some changes in language teaching profession, trying to adapt to the new EIL contexts demand (Mackay, 2002; Mackay, 2003; Llurda, 2004). This has encouraged some researchers to support the need to resist and move away from the cultural hegemony of the western culture such as Anglo- Americanization and Socio-cultural domination to make EFL instruction more effective in the periphery classrooms (George, 1981; Llurda, 2004; Nault, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Matsuda, 2006). This requires implementing certain strategies at the practical level. For example, Cortazzi and Jin (1993) along with other researchers propose three dimensions that need to be considered in teaching English as an international language. The first one calls for addressing the target language culture of the speakers of English as their first language. The second one advocates reflecting learners' own cultural content. The final one is concerned with depicting international

cultures of English-speaking nations and non-English speaking nations in the world. Consequently, it would give students the chance to reflect and express their own culture and values (Alptekin, 1984; George, 1981; Llurda, 2004; Nault, 2006; Mackay, 2002; Mackay, 2003; McKay, 2012). Furthermore, this may help them recognize that no culture is inherently better than others. Therefore, all cultures deserve equal respect and understanding. Most importantly, exposing students to different cultural features can familiarize them with the cultural aspects of any future contacts with individuals who belong to these cultures (Matsuda, 2006; Kumaravadivelu; 2012; McKay, 2012; Matsuda, 2017; Phan, 2020). These notions have encouraged some researchers from both the centre and periphery contexts to express their views and justify their stances regarding the implementations of the above suggestions and how sound or practical they are for ESL/EFL teaching/learning contexts and other cultural issues in some ELT journals.

In the literature, much research has been devoted to addressing the problem of cultural dimension in ELT materials, namely course books in many empirical studies. Based on my review of the literature, I realized that investigating the cultural content in ELT course books is gaining increased interest from many researchers in different teaching/learning environments. That could be because of the essential roles that English language plays in many ESL/EFL contexts and due to its international status today. For example, Young (2009) conducted a recent quantitative study to evaluate the cultural items in 11 English courses used in high school in Korea. Young (2009) focused only on analysing the cultural elements of teenagers' conversations activities in these course books. Young (2009) concluded that there was an intensive representation for the Anglo-American culture in the examined course books. Furthermore, other researchers conducted many studies that tackled the cultural elements in English course books from different dimensions. For example, Masuda's study (2002) investigated the representation of English users and uses in seven EFL course books used in Japan and the extent to which they promote for international understanding among international speakers of English in the world. The study examined some aspects among them the cultural components. The study revealed that the cultural norms in the evaluated course books focused almost exclusively on the American culture. However, the cultural aspects of users of English from outer and expending circles rarely existed.

In the Saudi context, some researchers investigated the represented cultural issues in English course books. For example, Afifi (1990) evaluated the third-grade intermediate course book. His study focused on the content in terms of the presented culture, and other language aspects of the course book. The results showed that the Islamic and Arabic cultures were inadequately presented in the course book. Furthermore, AL-Hijailan (1999) evaluated the third-grade secondary school course book. The study investigated to what extent the objectives set out by the Ministry of Education are met in the course book. Also, it examined the representation of the local culture. The results revealed that the textbook did not help the students achieve the objectives of the Ministry of Education. Moreover, the local culture was not represented enough in the textbook. To sum up, the current study is similar to other previous empirical studies that investigated the same topic. It advocates for more emphasis on introducing new cultural policies in English course books designed for EFL/ESL contexts. More specifically, it promotes for the inclusion of the local and international cultures of English users.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the current study: quantitatively and qualitatively. It also discusses the main factors behind these findings in relation to the context of the present study and the literature review. The first research question of the current study addresses the teacher's critical perceptions about the presented cultural values and traditions in North Star English course book. The participants' responses to the questionnaires' questions generated rich data which was addressed and categorized under major interesting themes. The theme that emerged from the quantitative data, namely the close ended questions was sources of the cultural models.

4.1 Sources of the Cultural Models

The participants' views regarding sources of the represented cultural models and traditions in North Star course book are summarized in Table 1 below in 5-point Likert scale.

Table 1. The sources of cultural content in the course book

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The course book emphasizes the cultures, norms and lifestyle of the native speaking countries of English (e.g., Britain, US. and Australia).	53%	44%	3%	0%	0%
The course book shows the local cultural norms and lifestyles of the Saudi society.	0%	0%	0%	29%	71%
The course book reflects the cultural diversity of the Middle Eastern contexts (e.g., Egypt, Morocco, Syria and Gulf State Countries)	0%	0%	0%	14%	86%
The course book illustrates cultural models of speakers of English as international language (e.g., Nigeria, India, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, and Caribbean Countries).	0%	0%	3%	39%	58%

From table 1 above, it is noticeable that nearly all the participants disagree that North Star course book reflects the cultural norms and lifestyles of the three contexts, namely the local, regional, and international environments. However, most participants (97%) agree that the course book emphasizes only the cultural aspects of English speakers from inner-circle countries (e.g., Britain, US. and Australia).

The overall responses of the participants' revealed that only the cultural aspects and values of inner-circle English speaking countries are broadly embodied in the examined course book. Reflecting only cultures of inner –circle countries in EFL course books, implying that students learn English culture because they would only meet and interact with only speakers of English either from UK or the US. Such an assumption is unreal in many English-speaking environments. This is in line with Matsuda's (2002) assertion that sticking to native speakers' cultures does not hold true anymore. Today, English is used globally by speakers from different cultural backgrounds in many countries, whom EFL students would meet and interact with either in their contexts or aboard. Consequently, students need to be aware of other international cultures of English speakers from outer and expanding countries, because each context has its unique cultural aspects which reflect it societal identity. Practically, this could make English learners be aware of the cultural backgrounds of their current or future interlocutors, to have interactive communication with them (Mackay, 2002; Mackay, 2003; Mackay, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; McKay, 2012; Matsuda, 2017). The obtained result is like Bahrami's (2015) study which revealed that the western culture dominated the content of Total English course book series, mainly presented western cultural values, norms, and traditions. Additionally, Al-Sofi (2018) reported similar findings of a study conducted in Saudi Arabia. Al-Sofi (2018) found that the target culture (western culture) was the predominate one in Well Read course book (level one) taught in English department in two Saudi public universities. Also, the obtained finding is similar to Aliakbari & Jamalvandi (2013) study, which found that that the target culture in New Senior English course books is represented more than students' own culture and other cultures. In the same vein, Chao's (2011) study revealed that cultural content in New American Inside Out promoted different cultural aspects with a clear bias in favour for more reflection for the cultural elements of the target culture, with rare portrayal of the students' own culture and international cultures. The reported results of the above studies are in line with Alshammari's assertion (2015), a Saudi researcher who is familiar with the local context, the English language teaching materials used in Saudi Arabia mainly portraying Anglo-American cultural and linguistic norms and values.

Relating to the obtained result to the context of the study, it implies that students in Saudi Arabia only meet, interact, and communicate with speakers of English from Britain or the U.S. in their own context. In reality, many of the English speakers that many students meet or interact with are not British or Americans. In other words, this result contradicts students' academic, social, and personal realities, where they need to interact, communicate and deal personally or publicly with their lectures in English at the university or with other English speakers, like nurses, doctors in hospitals or IT specialists in different places. They come from countries, like India, Pakistan, South Africa, and other different countries which have diverse cultures and ways of living from the inner-circle English speaking countries that need to be represented in the course book used in the teaching contexts, such as North Star course book. This can make its cultural content more realistic for students. In other

words, they need to be exposed to these diverse cultural norms and lifestyles of their actual and local interaction partners in the Saudi Arabian society or regional ones in neighbouring Gulf countries and cities, such as Qatar, Bahrain, or Dubai.

With respect to the local cultures and traditions, the result indicated their absence from the course book content. The obtained findings were reported in a similar study conducted in Saudi Arabia by Alghamdi (2018) and found that the examined course books did not reflect the students' local culture. This result confirms Shehadeh's (2010) statement that English course books being used in Arab countries rarely represent the learners' own cultures. I contend that their representation seems essential and have many advantages. For example, it gives students the chance to learn more about their own culture through discussing and explaining it to others, especially for their teachers, especially those who have different cultures (Mackay, 2002; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2013). Based on my own teaching experience, it is a good way of enhancing students to speak about things that are related to their own lives. Consequently, this could improve students' English competence, in particular accuracy and fluency. This is in line with Alshammari's (2015) assertion that Saudi students need the chance to express, discuss and communicate their own views about their own cultural background in English to others. I believe it can help non-Arab EFL teachers to understand more their Saudi students' cultural identity, which can enhance mutual cultural understanding between them.

In brief, my argument for including both the local and international cultures and traditions of English speakers does not mean the total exclusion of the target language (e.g., inner-circle countries). However, I believe that having a balanced mixture of the three cultures and traditions can benefit English learners more and help them acquire knowledge about multicultural perspectives. In harmony with Kirkgöz & Agcam (2011) views, "a reasonably good balance between local, target and international target cultural elements in teaching materials is needed" (p. 157).

The qualitative data reported the participants' answers to open-ended questions which generated more useful feedbacks and were organized under three major themes:

- ❖ cultural contents reflected in the course book.
- ❖ adequacy of content for the teaching context.
- ❖ Participants' attitudes towards the exposure to one cultural model.

4.2 Cultural Contents Reflected in the Course Book

As the data revealed, the overall participants' answers indicated that North Star course book contextualizes mainly the American Culture. Their comments conveyed three main themes, namely social, socio-cultural and entertainment aspects. The participants provided some examples that represented sorts of cultural content depicted in the examined course book. For example, one of the participants said "...... it represents the American families' interests, cultural values and the changes in the American families" (T3). Another one addressed the American way of entertainment by stating that "...Music related topics, Rap music and American rappers' personal life" (T6). The last one said, "it focuses mainly on American products, characters and sightseeing" (T15). According to the participants' views, these aspects were part of the cultural content of the course book. This result confirms Alghamdi's (2018) view that the wide use of EFL course book designed by western publishers in all FYP in Saudi Arabia, involves consistence transfer of considerable amount of the Anglo-American cultural aspects to the Saudi context. This statement is in line with views of Alptekin (1984) and George (1981) that the Anglo-American socio-cultural domination is clearly noticed in many English course books. I believe that one of the purposes behind reflecting such cultural items trend in North Star course book is to create positive attitudes among the learners about the American culture and influence them to adopt the American way of lifestyle, as some researchers describe such situation as the Americanization or westernization process (e.g., Rizer 1996; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Later, many of these learners may imitate the American way of living, consumptions and get familiar with American products. Also, representing the American cultural aspects widely is an effective way of enlarging the tourism industry by attracting students to visit and experience the American culture. Consequently, this will bring financial benefits for the American economy, in particular the American corporations. My interpretation is supported by Kumaravadivelu's (2006) statement that cultural dimension in ELT is associated with the economical one. For example, promoting for the western culture (American or British) is done deliberately to create jobs and add wealth to the economy of the English-speaking countries globally through ELT industry. The reported result is similar to Young's (2009) findings which indicated that there was an intensive representation for the Anglo-American culture, namely socio-cultural values, norms, beliefs, social customs, arts, shopping and dress of American society in the content of 11 EFL textbooks, used in high school in Korea.

4.3 Adequacy of Content for the Teaching Context

Analysis of the data revealed that the overall responses of the participants indicated that they had a sense of negative attitude towards the included cultural items in North Star course book. Their comments indicated that they were inappropriate culturally and religiously for their learners. The following extracts revealed a tone of dissatisfaction and concerns, "...from my experience, some of the contents are socially and religiously hazardous" (T7), because they portray "...the negative western culture" as stated by (T4). Another one stated his example "... Rap music and its related topics are against the Islamic culture" (T7). T3 addressed the cultural issue by stating that "... I do not like some of their family practices, such as having one child per family because this contradicts our family culture". Participant (T12) justified his disapproval as he stated that "they do not match with the Islamic culture". I regard the above assertions as a reflection of the domination of cultural values and lifestyles of the western countries in the course book as the result of question (1) showed. My view is supported by Prodromou's (1988) claim that some contents of EFL course books are inappropriate culturally for students in many contexts, due to overreliance on British and North American cultures. Also, such results indicate that the cultural contents in North Star course book have not been addressed properly to consider the cultural specificity of the learning context, because it was designed for the international markets and to serve many ELT contexts. In my view, including inappropriate western cultural norms which are socially or religiously unacceptable in EFL course books would cause negative attitudes for students and decrease their desire and enthusiasm for learning English. This is in line with Shah et al.'s (2013) perspectives that EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia faces three essential factors, which can hinder learning process, namely social, cultural, and religious sensitivities. This is very true in Saudi Arabia where the religious beliefs and the local cultural models and customs have strong influence and effects on students as they can determine their interaction or acceptance for any depicted cultural traditions or practice with which they deal in classrooms. Their reaction can go further to consider them as a threat for their national identity or disrespectful for their religious beliefs. As a result, the classrooms would turn into inactive environments which make the teachers' tasks more difficult and frustrating. For example, I personally struggled many times with some of my students whenever I asked them to participate in some activities which show inappropriate scene of sociocultural practice. They preferred to keep quiet and pretend to be busy reading the activity instruction. I regard their response as sort of passive resistance for undesirable content. This shows how powerful the role of religion or cultural believes in shaping people's reactions and behaviours in different fields of education and TESOL is not an exceptional case. Therefore, I advocate conducting a thorough investigation for the cultural content of any course book (pre–use evaluation) to identify whether it respects, matches the potential learning context or not. At this point, the role of experienced local TESOL professionals seems essential for consultations, if the ELT materials are designed by western publishers. This is because they know their learners' cultural boundaries which should be avoided in course books cultural content. Implementing this procedure in the context of this study earlier could have helped in revealing the emerged responses mentioned earlier, which might have guided the institution to act upon probably. I believe that there is a need to involve the local TESOL professionals along with other experienced non-local teachers from other ESL/EFL contexts who have had enough teaching experience in the same context in taking decisions regarding the taught ELT materials in their teaching context. Adopting such strategies can give publishers good experience and prepare them to design and produce local ELT materials in the future. In the long run, this may encourage some neighbouring contexts or other ESL/EFL contexts in the periphery who depend on using internationally designed ELT materials. To follow their steps and share their experiences or to establish joint projects for designing and producing ELT materials that considers their needs and cultural considerations. Most importantly, they are required to avoid causing any offence for other cultures, in particular the local minorities ones. Though, such policy can affect the huge profits that western publishers make from ELT international markets. The obtained result is similar to Elyas's (2011) study which found that Interactions 1 course book used in a Saudi university for 1st-year English department students, contained many cultural contents that were theoretically against the students' fundamental Islamic values and principles, specifically, those ones that addressed home and family issues. Similar results were also reported in Momany's (1998) study which showed that certain cultural contents were not appropriate for the Jordanian society, mainly from religious perspective in Cutting Edge English Series. Additionally, the same findings were reported in Bahrami's (2015) findings which revealed that the cultural elements of Total English book series, used in Kish Language Institute in Iran, were mostly contradicting the Iranian students' local culture.

4.4 Participants' Attitudes Towards the Exposure to One Cultural Model

The data analysis illustrated that the participants' answers conveyed strong resistance for adopting only one cultural form as the standard model for English language native speakers in English course books. One of the

participants indicated his clear rejection by saying that it is "…..forcing cultural models on students.." (T19). Another one associated his refusal with a suggestion saying that "….as another form of imperialism …. and local cultural symbols or norms should be introduced in the textbook" (T2). One more suggestion was provided by (T32) saying "...as students progress, they should be exposed to more varieties of cultural forms". In the same vein, (T4) justified the need for learning English as follows: "...those who study English as a foreign or second language need it to communicate with people all over the world". In my view, the emerging notion from the above quotes indicates that the participants were not pleased with the domination of one cultural form; namely, the western culture that is embodied in the North Star course book, which they teach in their context, as the results showed. The results showed that only one cultural dimension is addressed and embodied in the examined course book which reflects Clarke and Clarke assertion that that there is only one side, idealized and narrow view of culture showed in many teaching materials (1990 cited in Matsuda, 2006). Such stance is interpreted as a form of linguistic imperialism or an attempt to marginalized non-western cultures according to Phillipson (1992). I believe adopting such strategy can lead to a misunderstanding for English learners and give them unrealistic views about the culture of English speakers. This has led to establishing a new dimensional relationship with its culture. For example, learners of an international language do not need to adopt the cultural forms of native speakers of the target language (inner- circle) because English does not represent their customs only, but it represents the cultures of the international speakers as well (Mackay, 2006; McKay, 2012; Matsuda, 2017). In other words, no nation or group of people owns an international language (Widdowson, 1994; Mackay, 2002).

The second research question of the current study addresses the teachers' views regarding the improvement of the cultural content in North Star English course book. The major theme that emerged from the data was suggestions for cultural models.

4.5 Suggestions for Cultural Models

As the data revealed, the participants' responses suggested limited cultural models of the English speakers that need to be represented in the course book as a way of improving its cultural content and some of the participants stated their reasons. For example (T9) suggested a general view to be considered such as "…multiple cultural models...". More straightforward suggestion came from the data "…some different kinds of jobs, sports, and hobbies" as suggested by (T8). Another participant justified that as follows: "...English is no longer the language of the English speakers, but it belongs more to the international users of the language" as justified by (T10). On the other hand, the overall participants' answers took the question to a different direction which showed their main interests and priority that the sources of the cultural models need to be from the learners' local and international contexts. This result indicated that suggesting examples of certain cultural models had a low attention from the participants. However, the reason stated by one of the participants for representing new cultural models is a clear indication for the growing awareness among TESOL professionals for the need of introducing vital changes in dealing with the cultural elements in the ELT materials due to the international state of English today. The participants suggested a few examples which might be attributed to the lack of clarity or the difficulty of suggesting appropriate cultural models that meet the interests of all teaching contexts and reflect the current state of English. This dilemma has been raised by Baker (2009) that cultural forms and practices that represent English as lingua franca (ELF) seems to perceive low priority in the literature. Moreover, it appears that the reason behind having such difficulty, that each context has its own cultural features and its cultural taboos (Baker, 2009). Therefore, it will be difficult to call for certain cultural types that can meet the cultural desires of every context. However, it is the role of each learning environment professionals to follow clear guidelines that could help in designing or presenting any cultural norms or traditions that suit their learning context. Additionally, they must think carefully about cultural sensitivity or cultural taboo topics or issues for local or international contexts during the designing process. Mackay (2002) and Prodromou (1988) have raised this issue believing that learners' teaching/ learning cultural background contexts and the goals of teaching language need to be considered in ELT materials. Consequently, this may help in preparing learners to interact with global and local speakers of English and to feel comfortable in addressing national and international cultures (Kramach and Sullivan, 1996).

To sum up, the findings of this study cannot be generalized on all English course books designed by western publishers. Also, other researchers in different contexts might get different results for the same evaluated course book in this study.

5. Conclusion

The nature of this study allowed me to investigate the represented cultural values and traditions in North Star English course book through using the data obtained from questionnaires. However, the study yielded some

shortcomings in relations to the cultural items. It revealed failure to respect the local culture through including inappropriate cultural items for the intended learners. Furthermore, the local cultural norms and traditions were not represented at all. Most importantly, it revealed that North Star course book cultural content does not reflect the cultures of speakers of English as an international language. I believe that the emerging deficiencies are clear indication for the increased need towards relocating ELT course books designing policies and practices, for ESL/EFL learning environments. For example, it is essential to consider the learners' local cultural backgrounds and the multicultural perspectives of international speakers of English in the world. With respect to the participants, on the other hand, their responses showed that they had some awareness regarding the new required cultural policies that need to be addressed and represented in the cultural components in different ELT textbooks and materials. In my view, involving non-native English teachers in answering critical research may encourage them to adopt a critical position in evaluating cultural aspects in English course books used in their teaching contexts. Consequently, this can spread awareness among non-native teachers as an initial step to introduce change in their institution. However, it must be transparent and transformative as advocated by Pennycook (2001).

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