Raising Students' Cultural Awareness and Developing Their Intercultural Communicative Competence: The Case of the Greek State Primary School EFL Textbooks

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the critical evaluation of the cultural content incorporated in the 5th and 6th grade English textbooks, which are taught in the Greek state primary school. Given that we are living in the era of increasing globalization, it is deemed essential that aspects of diverse cultures should be reflected in the English textbooks, thus enabling contemporary EFL learners to master the ability to use the English language efficiently in their intercultural interactions regardless of their socio-cultural background. The research findings succinctly reveal that the vast majority of state EFL teachers in Greece are fervent proponents of an intercultural approach in their teaching practices. However, they are not reliant on the prescribed textbooks under scrutiny for promoting the intercultural dimension in their educational methodology, since their cultural input is assessed as deficient and inadequate for dynamic intercultural instruction.

Keywords: language and culture, intercultural awareness, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural education, intercultural values, textbook evaluation

1. Introduction

It is an established reality that the modern world is regarded as a 'global village' (Kramsch, 1987) composed of increasingly heterogeneous societies with members featuring diverse cultural attributes, lifestyles, beliefs, values, attitudes and behavioral conventions. More specifically, the ongoing merging of cultures has radically altered the homogeneous, monolingual and monocultural societal profile into a multilingual and multicultural one, which is ascribed to the advent of globalization and the massive influx/inflow of immigrants and refugees (Gogonas, 2010). In Greece, this situation is presently mirrored in the school population, as students of diverse linguistic and national or ethnic background co-exist carrying different cultural 'baggage' that, in essence, reflects their cultural identity traits (Lytra, 2008).

In light of these developments, a shift towards an intercultural stance is discernible in the Greek EFL educational context as a derivative of the dramatic societal changes and the impact of multiculturalism delineated. In effect, the last two versions of the Greek National EFL Curriculum, namely the CTCF (Note 1) (2003−2015) and the IFLC (Note 2) (2016), ratify an intercultural outlook in ELT (Anastasiadou, 2015) and they emphatically stress the significance of raising the young learners' awareness of cultural and linguistic pluralism. In this sense, they both advocate a transnational perspective that breeds a spirit of embracement of multicultural identity and promotes global citizenship (Karras, 2021; Penderi, 2018).

Accordingly, this research seeks to establish the position of 'culture teaching' as implemented through the English language medium in the fifth and sixth grade of a six-grade system in a Greek primary school context. It is expected that light will be shed on the teachers' intercultural philosophy when it comes to creating the students' cultural awareness (CA) and cultivating their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) skills. Most

importantly, this article determines the degree to which the assigned English textbooks currently taught are conducive to meeting the aims of intercultural instruction, given that developing intercultural understanding and ICC aptitude are deemed crucial life skills in order to efficiently interact and live together with people from different cultural backgrounds in a single interconnected global system (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, & Crozet, 1999).

Securing 'culture' a rightful place or meaningfully integrating it into EFL teaching has become a primary concern for TESOL-practitioners (Nault, 2006). This assumption, however, merits further elaboration since it is not an uncommon phenomenon to neglect or ignore the cultural dimension of EFL-teaching, despite the significance attributed to it as a fundamental component of language learning. To better exemplify this claim, it should be mentioned that based on survey findings 'culture teaching' in the Greek state school remains insubstantial and sporadic (Tzotzou & Kotsiou, 2015), which indicates that its application is not systematic or structured to a satisfactory level. The same holds true in other countries as proffered by many researchers in the field of intercultural education (Mekheimer, 2011; Raigon-Rodriguez, 2018; Reimann, 2009).

Within this line of thought, it is reported that the cultural content in EFL textbooks is of limited range given that the cultural elements portrayed in the teaching materials (TM) are almost invariably of debatable amplitude and depth. In other words, 'culture' instruction is rather not purposefully implemented. Instead, it is often treated as a by-product and dealt with incidentally (Karras, 2021, p. 178), being confined to mere transmission of information (Kramsch, 1993). As a result, cultural diversity is not sufficiently emphasized nor are intercultural values promoted (Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Kailola, 2016). Being mindful of these propositions, the researcher was intrigued to scrutinize the extent to which the above illustrated status of 'culture teaching' is still valid in the contemporary Greek educational reality.

After the subsequent Literature Review, the methodological framework adopted in this study is justified and analyzed. The presentation and discussion of the research results follow so as to foreground the current situation with regard to the intercultural educational and teaching practices within the aforementioned primary school context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining 'Culture' and Its Interrelationship with Language

Admittedly, the endeavor to define the nature of 'culture' has proven a rather convoluted, notoriously difficult and obscure task to accomplish (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 2002), for 'culture' is one of the most complicated words in the English language (Williams, 1983, p. 87). In this regard, proclaiming 'culture' as a process of perceiving, interpreting and feeling the world (Robinson, 1985) or a way of coping with the world and defining it in detail (Bradbury, n.d.), it can be argued that 'culture' can make people understand each other better (Coelho, 2015).

Introduced by Tylor (1871, p. 1) the term 'culture' alludes to "that complex whole which includes knowledge, ideas, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits learned by human" as a society member. Since then, there have been a plethora of attempts to plausibly define one of the most potent and highly complicated concepts pertinent to human existence, given that 'culture' permeates all aspects of 'human' as a social being and as such it is ubiquitous in every facet of human life. In this anthropological purview, 'culture' functions as the lens through which we view the world (Davies, 2006) and 'language' forms its reflection or rudimentary ingredient. Put differently, 'language' is an expression of culture (Larzen, 2005) assuming that its use is underpinned by social and cultural values.

As Kramsch (1993, p. 177) forcefullly states "it is a truism to say that teaching a language is teaching culture", thereby meaning that FL (Note 3) instruction hardly stipulates teaching exclusively the linguistic system but it also entails teaching the cultural system. In practice, these two entities share an indivisible bond that keeps them intricately interwoven to the extent that they are considered entwined and interdependent (Alptekin, 1993; Buttjes, 1990; Robinett, 1980). Many scholars have probed into their inextricable (inter)relationship (Byram, 1988), inevitably arriving at the cliché consensus that "language is part of a 'culture' and 'culture' is part of a language" (Brown, 2000, p. 113), which arguably foregrounds the inseparability and the interpenetration of the two notions (Diaz, 2013; Zu & Kong, 2009).

In Tomalin's (2008) rationale, 'culture' is accorded the status of the 'fifth skill' in language teaching, thus adding to the four traditional ones (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening) (Damen, 1987). Yet, it should not hold the role of the expendable fifth skill tacked on the teaching of the others, as it "is always in the background" ready to pinpoint the limitations of the learners' hard-won communicative competence and challenge their ability to make sense of the world around them (Kramsch, 1993, p. 1). This language-culture nexus (Liu, 2019) is

metaphorically illustrated by comparing their bond to flesh and blood (Jiang, 2000). Summarizing, 'culture' forms part and parcel of the language learning process adding to its educational value (Byram, 1988) as they complement and enrich each other towards promoting and regulating communication.

Hence, the integration of 'culture' in EFL-teaching is regarded as apposite and necessary (Fageeh, 2011) and as such it should become the core of language classroom practices, considering that cultural awareness (CA) augments language proficiency and enhances students' overall learning experience (Vernier, Bartuzza, Giusti, & Moral, 2008). Moreover, if language is perceived as a social practice giving insight into the political, social, religious or economic domain, then language teaching devoid of cultural-aspects is regarded as a lifeless endeavor (Sellami, 2000) utterly inconceivable not to mention practically infeasible, inaccurate and incomplete (Peck, 1998).

2.2 Broad Categories of 'Culture' in the ELT-Context

Against this backdrop, aspiring to explore the "intangible, all-pervasive and highly variable force" of 'culture' (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999, p. 116) different classifications are put forward, so as to foster better comprehension of its intricate and multifarious dimensions. It should be noted, however, that only the ones operationalized in this research are mentioned.

As depicted in the widely-known iceberg image (Hall, 1976), 'culture' can be distinguished as possessing two sides. The first is the objective cultural representation pertaining to its visible, easily discernible and tangible aspects like behaviors and products, whereas the second lurking underneath is the subjective one related to the non-visible, barely observable and intangible qualities it contains such as ideas, values, and beliefs (Robinson, 1985, 1988).

With regard to the TEFL-framework (Note 4), a differentiation exists between 'culture-specific' and 'culture-general' dimension. In this respect, the 'culture-specific' paradigm is basically linked to the target cultures and societies of the UK and the USA, which belong to the inner-circle countries (Kachru, 1985). By contrast, the 'culture-general' facet espouses a multicultural perspective to language learning and is harnessed by alternative 'post EFL era' EFL teaching paradigms to be analyzed in the following section (Sifakis, 2014).

Moreover, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) classified 'culture' representation into having source (C1), target (C2) and international orientation (C3). Analytically, C1 refers to the students' native culture; C2 is associated with the countries where the target language is spoken as a first language, whereas C3 pertains to various world cultures. In addition to this tripartite classification, Aliakbari (2004) added the 'neutral' or 'a-cultural' category, which features little or no particular interest in culture.

Another noteworthy distinction pertains to the Big 'C' and small 'c' culture-topics imparted to EFL learners (Chastain, 1988; Paige, Jorstad, Paulson, Klein, & Colby, 1999), representing the static and dynamic features of 'culture' respectively. Specifically, Big 'C' culture covers general themes, namely literature, fine arts, history, politics, economy, education, social norms, geography, architecture and music, whereas small 'c' culture refers to daily routines, lifestyles, food, holidays, customs, values, beliefs, hobbies, gestures and body language (Chen, 2004; Lee, 2009). This categorization is analogous to the visible and invisible part of the iceberg mentioned earlier (Bocu & Razi, 2016).

2.3 The Challenges ELT Faces in an Increasingly Globalized World

In view of the prevalent cultural and linguistic interconnectedness, ELT methodology and pedagogy have been impelled to face the challenges posed by the omnipresent global cultural flows on the one hand (Pennycook, 2007) and the emergence of the 'World Englishes' (Kachru, 2004) pertinent to 'English' used as an international language (EIL) or lingua franca (ELF) (Lee, 2012) on the other. This hypothesis renders the focal aims of TEFL hardly responsive to the universal dimensions of the English language. In fact, English is not exclusively associated with any single nation or group anymore (Jenkins, 2003). In this sense, it cannot be limited to particular geographical boundaries or linked to a specific target culture in a fixed monolithic sense (Baker, 2012; Bouslama & Benaissi, 2018). Therefore, global cultural consciousness and intercultural citizenship are sought after as key outcomes of EFL methodology, which will eventually lead to shaping culturally and politically conscious citizens (Byram, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

Aligned with these developments, ELT should pursue a transformative goal attainable through critically-oriented pedagogy, reinforced by cultural reflection and supported by TM that "prompt learners to confront some of the taken for granted cultural beliefs about the Self and the Other" (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 189). Thereby, EFL needs to re-orient and enrich its firmly embraced methodological orientation by incorporating elements from TEIL, TELF, TEIC (Note 5) and TEMA (Note 6) paradigms, which afford the potential to accommodate cultural

and linguistic diversity by embracing a 'culture-general' approach that prioritizes cross-cultural comprehensibility (Fay, 2008). In a similar vein, the latest trends in ELF-teaching have instigated a re-conceptualisation of the EFL teaching goals and approaches so as to respond to the overwhelming global demands for intercultural communication (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

2.4 ELT and 'Culture-Teaching'

As crystallized from the above discussion, the development of linguistic competence, language proficiency and NS (Note 7) model behavior (Byram, 1997; Kachru & Smith, 2008) cannot guarantee efficient intercultural communication since misunderstandings, conflicts and even communication breakdown or failure are likely to occur among interlocutors on account of cultural diversity (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006). Similarly, the EFL speakers' grammatical or phonological errors can be tolerated unlike cultural errors that might lead to miscommunication problems (Ahmed, Quasem, & Pawar, 2019). Hence, not only should EFL-learners be acquainted with the 'culture' of the target language but also gain insight into their own culture and other cultures by means of the target language (Mayangsari, Nurkamto, & Supriyadi, 2018).

However, the incorporation of 'culture teaching' in EFL entails a plethora of parameters (in)directly related with socio-political and ideological factors. This, in turn, explains why language used to be separated from 'culture' and justifies why the focus of classroom activities excluded cultural aspects, thus condemning EFL instruction to a decontextualized method of teaching bereft of cultural scope (Chaouche, 2016). In practice, even today's actual teaching practices tend to grant prominence to the linguistic dimension at the expense of the cultural one instead of treating both of them equally (Tzotzou & Kotsiou, 2015).

2.5 Intercultural Approach to ELT

Taking Sercu's (2002) lead that language education should always also be intercultural education, espousing an intercultural approach in the EFL classroom practices merits being treated as top priority. Accordingly, as Van Ek (1986) points out, ELT has a twofold role, namely train learners in communication skills and contribute to their personal and social development. Following the same line of thought, Mendez-Garcia (2005) prudently remarks that intercultural familiarization arms EFL-speakers with world knowledge, acquaints them with culturally-conditioned behaviors, fosters mutual respect and tolerance towards different cultures, thus encouraging empathy towards people cross-culturally. As a consequence, apart from increasing the learners' CA and communicative competence, intercultural instruction is conducive to maximizing their insight into and acceptance of diverse social variables and cultural norms, which fosters their understanding of how intercultural communication takes place and stimulates their intellectual curiosity about target cultures (Tomalin & Stempleski, 2013).

Based on the contention that intercultural education is a powerful agent of change towards social welfare, solidarity, openness and respect to linguistic and cultural diversity (Tzotzou, 2013), it goes without saying that the intercultural approach to EFL-teaching contributes to broadening the learners' understanding of cultural roots. Concurrently, students are enabled to recognize, appreciate, accept and efficiently communicate across cultural differences in a variety of multicultural contexts (Al-Sofi, 2018), thus contributing to shaping respectful international citizens.

As a corollary, a prime mission undertaken by EFL-practitioners is to guide learners into displaying empathy and sympathy towards people of different cultural backgrounds and assuming a positive attitude of acceptance and tolerance towards other cultural value-systems by being aware of their own culture plus other cultures (Chao, 2013; Eken, 2015). In this way, learners develop intercultural sensitivity (IS) and they can counter negative stereotypes and prejudices (Seelye, 1993) by adopting a penetrative worldview that concurrently enhances their communicative ability.

2.6 Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Hereby, clarifying the interrelated terms cultural awareness (CA) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is deemed essential. In particular, CA encompasses the qualities of awareness of one's own and others' culturally-induced behavior along with the ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint, which entail "sensitivity to the impact of culturally-induced behavior on language use and communication" (Tomalin & Stempleski, 2013, p. 5). For Tomlinson (2001), CA signifies developing inner sense of the equality of cultures and a positive interest in how they connect or differ, whereas Byram (1997) builds on CA in his ICC-model by advancing the value of critical cultural awareness (CCA). The latter denotes the ability to critically evaluate the social and political world on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's native culture and foreign cultures (Kreisberg, 1992).

Moving a step forward, Byram (1997), introduced ICC as one of the recently added components of communicative competence that comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) along with social and socio-cultural competence, which were Van Ek's (1986) addition. Specifically, in Byram's (1997) ICC-model, the interconnection of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural competences form the overall ICC (Ahmed et al., 2019), whereas Fantini (2000) illustrates five dimensions of the ICC-construct, namely awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge and language proficiency, which encompass both linguistic and cultural qualities.

In light of the above, ICC is regarded as an essential skill for surviving in today's pluralist and globalized world (Liu, 2016; Sifakis, 2009). It relates to the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 247). This definition embodies the essence of ICC as it spotlights its integral constituents, namely intercultural communication awareness and intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 2000), not failing to stress its high significance to language learning. Understandably, the acquisition of ICC comprises one of the major goals pursued in EFL since 'intercultural speakers' lacking this quality are interculturally-incompetent or fluent fools, who speak the language but do not apprehend its social and philosophical content, consequently being unaware of the cultural risks involved (Bennett, 1993).

2.7 The Role of Textbooks in 'Culture-Teaching'

Among their presumed roles, textbooks as teaching materials (TM) are active participants in cultural transmission within the educational and societal framework (Risager, 1991) by acting as tools that aid culture-teaching (Tzotzou & Kotsiou, 2015). Hence, they are reckoned highly influential since they provide the basis for the cultural-content to be dealt with in the EFL-classroom (McKay, 2003) and strengthen culture-learning (Note 8), which practically boosts the attainment of ICC-skills (Paige et al., 1999) and enhances CA.

Admittedly, however, it is difficult for a textbook to address the multicultural milieu of EFL-classes considering that it constitutes the primary source of 'cultural-literacy' in many teaching situations, thus pointing out its principal role in shaping cultural attitudes (Hatoss, 2004). Therefore, it is the authors' onus to assume responsibility for the cultural depiction they convey through the textbooks (Wright, 1999), as the latter operate as ideology catalysts addressing multicultural audiences. For this reason, they are often blamed for promoting the value systems of NS-countries, overlooking or intentionally omitting an objective manifestation and dissemination of different cultural aspects and behaviors (Pennycook, 1994; Morgan, 1995).

Undeniably, textbooks are utterly influential in the process of formulating a cultural stance and cultivating CA, which makes it necessary to ensure that the cultural-input they include is not confined to facts-processing and tangible elements of cultural knowledge (Hatoss, 2004). That said, textbooks should not focus on mere exposure to 'culture' through superficial provision of factual information, thus offering consumer-tourist competence (Byram, 1991). Conversely, their cultural-content should incite and provide opportunities for critical reflection on deeper cultural aspects so as to furnish students with cultural awareness and experiences that enhance intercultural communication (Al-Sofi, 2018). Along the same lines, Byram (1989) distinguishes cultural representation in 'cultural information', which signifies arbitrary and de-contextualized aggregate of facts in unprincipled and minimal structure, and 'cultural knowledge' that is aligned with a consciously structured presentation of ideas, concepts, facts and information including their associations.

In a similar vein, when cultural understanding is promoted, the construction of a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1997) is fostered. In particular, this emerging 'third space' constitutes a 'new culture' created by learners themselves ensuing from the amalgamation of their own 'funds of knowledge' and the target cultures encountered (Moje, McIntosh Ciechanowski, Kramer, & Ellis, 2004). In this 'space', meanings from different cultural contexts may clash, be questioned, negotiated and problematized, while learners struggle to formulate a hybrid identity (Karras, 2018; Kramsh, 1993) and assume ownership as well as responsibility for the new meanings they communicate after challenging and re-examining long-ingrained preconceptions of the home and target society cultures (Davcheva, 2008). During this process, learners develop both an outsider's and an insider's view on their culture and the target one, which can enable them to enunciate personal meanings drawing on L1 and L2 cultures and facilitate their evolution into potent intercultural speakers and future global citizens (Thanasoulas, 2001).

2.8 The Necessity for Textbook Evaluation in Terms of Cultural Content

Given the skepticism surrounding the sovereignty of the TM and the overreliance on textbooks as the main input-source in ELT, textbook evaluation (TE) is deemed a necessary practice which enlightens the nature of materials (Cunningsworth, 1995; Dweik, 2007) by measuring their efficiency against specific criteria. Hence, the

textbooks are judged in terms of contextual appropriacy, the educational methodology they reflect, the extent to which they comply with the curricular objectives and fulfill the context-driven demands, namely the learners' idiosyncrasies, backgrounds, wants, interests, preferences and expectations (Litz, 2005; Nunan, 1991). From this perspective, a systematic appraisal of the in-use instructional materials as cultural artifacts (Gray, 2000) could lead to a more culturally-oriented EFL-teaching methodology (Zhao, 2010). Likewise, Tomalin and Stempleski (2013) encourage assessing culture through the language being taught, a process which will eventually pave the way to raising CA and promoting ICC-skills (Gomez Rodriguez, 2015).

Upon these assumptions, the selection and appropriateness of the cultural-input resonate with social, political, economic, moral and religious influences underpinning the authors' rationale, policy decisions or the educational-system goals. Ergo, the design and choice of the 'cultural items' (Duenas, 1996) portrayed in textbooks can barely be identified as neutral or merely descriptive (Davcheva, 2008), given that they are carriers of certain ideological concerns and considerations which remain implicit and, therefore, constitute the often called invisible or 'hidden curriculum' (Chao, 2011).

More specifically, texts and visual illustrations may unconsciously influence beliefs, attitudes, alongside shaping behaviors and social expectations with regard to the target cultures. Furthermore, the cultural elements contained are likely to inspire or spark stereotypical views towards 'otherness' (Abrams, 2002) and nurture cultural discrimination or prejudice (Ur, 1996). Thus, TE attempts to uncover the role of 'culture' in textbooks and the importance attributed to the cultural aspects and culture-general knowledge provided (Lee, 2009). Importantly, the evaluative-criteria compilation should be aligned with the basic intercultural values and principles, namely developing and promoting IS as well as disassociating from manifestations of inherent social and cultural bias, discriminatory attitudes and stereotyping (Ur, 1996; Risager, 1991).

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions

To appraise the appropriateness and efficaciousness of the cultural-content of the 5th and 6th grade English textbooks, this research operationalizes both quantitative and qualitative instruments, thus adopting a mixed-methods research framework (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). To this end, content analysis and a questionnaire incorporating a cultural-checklist are utilized on the quantitative side. From a qualitative perspective, EFL-teacher interviews are conducted to amplify the data-collection and ensure informed reasoning of the obtained results. The whole research was conducted during the school year 2019–2020, whereas for the research purposes the EFL-teachers were assigned an active role in the TE process by being requested to complete the cultural-checklist integrated in the questionnaire (Atai, Babaii, & Bazargani, 2017).

Hence, the study is guided by the following research questions (RQs), which act as the main pillars in the quest to provide answers to the issues raised.

RQ1: What is the breadth and type of the cultural content included in the 5th and 6th grade state primary-school English textbooks? To what extent can it raise the learners' cultural awareness and enhance their intercultural communicative competence skills?

RQ2: Is the cultural content incorporated in the targeted textbooks effective and sufficient enough to sustain and facilitate deep culture understanding, and by extension maximize effectual language learning outcomes?

RQ3: What are the Greek EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards cultural teaching practices and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the cultural representation in the specific textbooks?

3.2 Content Analysis

The research instrument employed to address RQ1 is the content analysis method, which can be conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively (Sandorova, 2014). The quantitative paradigm is adopted in this study for it uses a strict and systematic set of procedures to make valid inferences (Krippendorff, 2004), based on the rigorous examination of topics apropos of the inclusion of specific elements and concepts, the relationship between them along with verification of the contents of written data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000).

In particular, the content analysis employs Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) proposed culture categories as a compass along with the Big 'C' and small 'c' classification of cultural aspects analyzed earlier. In practice, the textbooks are numerically scrutinized and measured in terms of the cultural references made to C1, C2 and C3 so as to identify the amount of diverse cultures represented in them. This entails investigating the embedded texts, activities and projects plus the visual material integrated (Al-Sofi, 2018). In addition, the culturally-bound data

are explored in terms of the topics selected as pertinent to Big 'C' and small 'c' culture elements (Lee, 2009; Xiao, 2010) and the depth attributed to them through the textbook tasks and projects.

3.3 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was selected as a research tool due to its many advantages, namely its time-saving and cost-effective properties, efficacy and practicality in eliciting results on a wide spectrum along with the potential to guarantee anonymity, confidentiality and eliminate the fear of exposure for the respondents (Abolghasem, 2010). Furthermore, a questionnaire is useful, versatile, quick to implement and the data it generates can be analyzed quickly and easily (Coombe & Davidson, 2015).

Analytically, the questionnaire comprises four sections numbering forty-four items in total. Part I focuses on demographic facts concerning the responding EFL teachers; Part II explores their intercultural stance, whereas Part III comprises two questions pertinent to mostly employed intercultural practices and the constraints potentially hindering them. Finally, Part IV contains the cultural checklist and seeks to estimate the quality and effectiveness of the cultural content in each textbook. Importantly, certain items are mixed or rephrased to serve as reliability or internal consistency checks (Bryman, 2004).

The questionnaire partly assumes the normative approach using the five-point Likert-scale in Parts II and IV for the respondents' convenience to express negative (1=strongly disagree & 2=disagree), neutral (3=neither agree nor disagree) or positive (4=agree & 5=strongly agree) views on the items. Reportedly, the normative paradigm affords responses by numerous survey participants regardless of geographical limitations, while ensuring clarity and precision (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005).

3.4 The Cultural Checklist

In a bid to obtain a more nuanced palette of information concerning the research aims (Heyvaert, Maes, & Onghena, 2011), a checklist based on cultural indicators was regarded as essential to extract and garner the data needed. Due to their systematic, convenient and cost-efficient quality (McGrath, 2002), a plethora of checklists have been devised; however, none of them can be treated as 'sacrosanct' since each checklist is emphatically local, thus not applicable or appropriate for all teaching-contexts (Sheldon, 1988).

In this light, the designed checklist displays a combination of evaluation criteria clusters, which were compiled on the basis of several proposed checklists (Note 9) after certain modifications and adaptations. To be more explicit, the cultural checklist is composed of twenty criteria statements divided into five axes, each of which focuses on and investigates different aspects of the textbooks' cultural content with the aim to assemble the necessary data that can determine its sufficiency and appropriacy (Koroglou, 2016; Skopinskaja, 2003).

To this end, Part A assesses the textbooks' rationale and its correspondence with the pursued objectives based on two criteria; Part B comprises four criteria aiming to reveal the cultural orientation in each textbook. Part C includes nine criteria exploring the cultural content characteristics and whether/to what extent it is supported by the texts and visual illustrations, while concurrently measuring the suitability of the tasks and projects for developing CA and ICC. Part D contains two statements dealing with the intercultural issues and values promoted, whereas the three criteria in Part E potentially epitomize the overall textbook-appraisal in terms of empowering active (inter)cultural instruction.

3.5 The Interviews

The qualitative data were accrued by dint of in-depth interviews with respondents selected according to purposeful sampling methods, thus being reckoned 'information-rich cases' (Patton, 2002; Sandelowski, 2000). More analytically, the open-ended interview-questions were ordered abiding by the questionnaire structure and delve more profoundly into the issues raised in the study. Thereupon, the main objective was to elicit straight and largely unadorned answers by unveiling the EFL teachers' inner-thoughts, feelings and attitudes (Sandelowski, 2000).

The interview was organized around three thematic pillars consisting of 2−6 questions. Apart from the demographic-profile details firstly requested, the questions posed concerned the respondents' intercultural mindset and teaching rationale in the EFL classroom along with their views regarding the cultural content in the textbooks.

4. Results

4.1 The Process of Content Analysis

As explained earlier, content analysis was employed as a tool for collecting data regarding the textbooks' type and breadth of cultural-content. Accordingly, the methodological process involved examining the reading and

listening texts, plus the visual illustrations of the 5th (B1) and 6th (B2) grade textbook. The results of this quest were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 statistical package so as to ensure their validity and reliability.

4.2 Analysis of the Findings

4.2.1 Manifestation of Cultural Diversity

As demonstrated in Table 1, the Pearson Chi-square test of the data gathered indicates that there is a statistically significant difference of 'culture' distribution between the textbooks. More specifically, C1 and C3 are more frequently observed in B1 than in B2, whereas C2 and Free/Neutral culture are more common in B2. On that account, it can be claimed that the interculturality of B1 is of markedly wider range and balance compared to B2.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of culture distribution in the two textbooks with chi-square test

		Source	Target	International	Free/Neutral	Total
Textbooks	**5th grade (B1)**	31	28	25	7	91
		34.1%	30.8%	27.5%	7.7%	100.0%
	6th grade (B2)	22	28	13	20	83
		26.5%	33.7%	15.7%	24.1%	100.0%
Total		53	56	38	27	174
		30.3%	32.3%	21.6%	15.9%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square: 11.233	df: 3	p-value: 0.011				

4.2.2 The Topic-Based Analysis

In parallel, after coding and classifying the texts and activities according to the Big 'C' and small 'c' culture distinction, the Chi-square test pinpoints that there is a statistically significant difference between the two variables. As shown in Table 2, small 'c' culture elements are more frequent than Big 'C' ones in B1, whereas Big 'C' culture was more often discerned than small 'c' culture in B2, which signals a strikingly different approach towards culture treatment in each textbook.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of Big 'C' and small 'c' cultural topics in the two textbooks with chi-square test

		Big C	Small c	Total
Textbooks	**5th grade (B1)**	36	51	87
		41.4%	58.6%	100.0%
	6th grade (B2)	54	24	78
		69.2%	30.8%	100.0%
Total		90	75	165
		54.5%	45.5%	100,0%
Pearson Chi-Square: 12.867	df: 1	p-value: <0.001		

4.2.3 The Tasks Included

Finally, a Pearson Chi-square test was conducted to assess potential differences in the distribution of Big 'C' and small 'c' thematic areas in tandem with C1, C2, C3 orientation in the tasks and the suggested project-work in each textbook, not failing to consider those having non-culture or neutral focus. As illustrated in Table 3, there is a statistically significant difference between the two variables.

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of the distribution of Big 'C' compared to small 'c' cultural elements in the tasks of each unit in the two textbooks and their categorization into C1, C2 and C3 and non-culture related elements with a chi-square test

		Source 'C' culture	Source 'c' culture	Target 'C' culture	Target 'c' culture	International 'C' culture	International 'c' culture	Non-culture related	Total
Textbooks	**5th grade**	18	8	14	10	17	24	117	208
		8.65%	3.85%	6.73%	4.81%	8.17%	11.54%	56.25%	100.0%
	6th grade	27	5	15	2	11	4	221	285
		9.47%	1.75%	5.26%	0.70%	3.86%	1.40%	77.54%	100.0%
Total		45	13	29	12	28	28	338	493
		9.06%	2.80%	6.00%	2.76%	6.02%	6.47%	66.90%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square: 44.490	df: 6	p-value: <0.001							

Interestingly, as evidenced in the findings the vast majority of tasks in both textbooks are identified culturally neutral. In effect, they primarily focus on the correct implementation of grammar rules and vocabulary, thus enhancing linguistic competence and accuracy at the expense of raising CA and inculcating ICC-skills. More explicitly, greater emphasis is placed on tasks involving Big 'C' culture in the textbooks, whereas small 'c' culture-oriented tasks do not abound in either textbook with a noteworthy exception in the analogy of C3 in small 'c' related tasks in B1.

Comparatively, the tasks and projects included in B1 are distinctly more reflective of its intercultural dimension and the cultural aspects covered are indicative of the authors' attempt to meet the curricular requirements regarding the multicultural approach sought after. By contrast, B2 displays less interculturality due to exhibiting cultural incidences generally confined to Big 'C' cultural items in tasks, thus failing to provide students adequate and well-rounded exposure to cultural diversity.

4.2.4 Critical Assessment of the Content Analysis

Overall, having the content analysis findings as a precursor to the evaluation of the type and breadth of the textbooks' cultural input (Littlejohn, 2011), imbalanced attention is readily detected concerning the distribution of cultural occurrences in visual and written modalities (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2013) pertinent to the different culture categories. The same inequality is discernible considering the prevalence of the Big 'C' cultural aspects at the expense of small 'c' ones, which does not foster the development of the learners' ICC (Nguyen, 2011; Yuen, 2011). Practically, B1 is undoubtedly more culturally-loaded in terms of topic-selection and intercultural orientation. Conversely, B2 lacks equilibrium with respect to the inclusion of the three culture categories (C1, C2, C3) and range of cultural topics, whereas a substantial part of the book is identified as culture-free.

4.3 The E-Questionnaire Results

Accordingly, the analysis of the e-questionnaire data is quite elucidating as regards the EFL teachers' intercultural approach and instructional practices. In particular, Part II reveals that most of the teachers voice positive predispositions towards 'culture teaching', as they agree (47.66%) or strongly agree (34.58%) that it is as important as teaching linguistic skills and that it should be fully incorporated in ELT in multiple ways (4=48.60% & 5=45.79%). Likewise, it is strongly claimed that 'culture teaching' is motivating for EFL-learners given the percentages allotted to rates 4 (=48.60%) and 5 (=36.45%). Observably, variety of opinion is recorded when it comes to integrating 'culture teaching' into the teaching practices as 40.19% (=2) of the respondents do not find such venture difficult to achieve, whereas 28.04% (=3) feel neutral about it. Regarding the amount of time devoted to 'culture teaching' compared to 'language teaching', mixed views are expressed as 28.97% of the teachers disagree, 34.58% are neutral and 24.30% agree with spending equal time on each teaching component. As appears, the EFL-classroom is acknowledged as a safe environment to implement intercultural teaching practices taking into account that positive responses (4=42.99% & 5=37.38%) were mainly given.

Moreover, raising the learners' awareness of cultural diversity is clearly a top priority for the Greek EFL teachers (4=35.51% & 5=29.91%) and, seemingly, teaching intercultural values such as IS, tolerance of cultural differences and shaping positive attitudes towards 'otherness' is attached paramount importance (4=41.12% & 5=53.27%). Additionally, a large proportion believes that CA fosters EFL learning and maximizes the learning outcomes (4=46.73% & 5=29.91%), whereas acquiring ICC-skills is viewed as an indisputably vital asset for EFL learners (4=44.85% & 5=41.12%). Similarly, teachers almost massively agree (43.93%=4) or strongly agree (50.47%=5) that developing CA and ICC enhances successful intercultural communication and helps avoid

misunderstandings and cultural conflicts that may lead to miscommunication.

Furthermore, the respondents express disagreement towards teaching cultural aspects exclusively connected with British and American culture (1=30.84% & 2=40.19%), which denotes willingness to espouse an intercultural approach. This attitude is verified by advocating (4=38.32% & 5=54.21%) the students' need to explore and understand their own culture along with various foreign cultures they encounter as global community members. Notably, the participants adjudge the currently used teaching materials as inadequate tools to facilitate 'culture teaching' in primary schools by expressing basically negative (1= 32.71% & 2=40.19%) and neutral (3=24.30%) views. Lastly, it is emphatically ascertained and particularly comforting that EFL-teachers barely rely on the prescribed English textbooks regarding 'culture teaching' (1=45.79% & 2=35. 51%).

Last but not least, Part III exhibits the most operationalized intercultural practices implemented in the EFL classroom, namely using authentic material, encouraging learners to compare their culture with other target cultures, employing computer-mediated intercultural learning techniques and initiating whole-class discussions regarding issues of cultural diversity and IS. As for the most prevailing barriers potentially impeding or negatively impacting culture teaching, time constraints are in the highest rank, followed by lack of appropriate and reliable audiovisual equipment and adequate teaching resources.

4.4 The Cultural Checklist

As mentioned, the checklist serves as an ancillary lens into the cultural portrayal of the assigned textbooks and assesses its match with a particular purpose (Zhang, 2017) which is its contribution to the students' CA and ICC-skills, assumed to prepare them for intercultural citizenship in our globalized world (Kiss & Weninger, 2013). In attempting an in-depth appraisal that ensures systematicity, clarity and practicality, a five-point rating scale (1=not at all, 2=slightly, 3=moderately, 4=much, 5=to a great extent) is utilized to gauge the content quality from a cultural viewpoint, impart the underlying philosophy and detect potential defects and deficiencies (Karavas, 2004).

Starting off, in Part A the majority of participants feel that B1 does not effectively correspond to the needs and goals of learners as EIL speakers by predominantly selecting 2 (35.51%) or 3 (30.84%). B2 is also rated as moderately (42.06%) catering for the same variables, thereby mirroring identical opinions. Accordingly, the aims and objectives of B1 seem slightly (35.51%) or moderately (33.64%) congruent with the multicultural perspective advocated by the National EFL curriculum. B2 seems to be moving in the same direction, yet a little closer to the curricular outlook (2=32.71% & 3=34.78%).

As regards the textbooks' cultural orientation, the responses to the first item in Part B indicate that the topics chosen are not really suitable for the learners' diverse social and cultural background, since the percentages allotted to rates 2 and 3 are overwhelming for both textbooks (36.45% & 26.17%-B1 vs. 32.71 & 35.51%-B2). Furthermore, the textbooks are not believed to be oriented towards other cultures except British or American with the relevant inclination fluctuating among rates 1, 2 and 3 (25.23%, 41.12%, 22.43%-B1 vs. 24.30%, 35.51%, 30.84-B2). The presence of characters from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds is considered mostly slight (31.08%-B1 vs. 29.91%-B2) or moderate (33.64%-B1 vs. 29.91%-B2) in both textbooks, thus displaying similarity in their analogy judging from the percentages. Noticeably, cultural input is slightly or moderately provided in all units (2=36.45% & 3=33.64%-B1 vs. 2=39.25% & 3=30.84%-B2).

Part C uncovers the cultural-content characteristics by thoroughly inspecting its general aims and the degree to which the tasks and activities raise the 5th and 6th graders' CA and promote their ICC. In this sense, the cultural input in B1 is regarded as not at all (31.78%) or slightly (41.12%) challenging enough to arouse the learners' curiosity about other cultures and enrich their CA, while in B2 it is reviewed as slightly (38.32%) or moderately (28.97%) motivating. Similarly, the existing cultural aspects in B1 are not at all (28.97%) or slightly (32.71%) comprehensible and appropriate for the learners' age and linguistic level as contrasted with B2, which appears to be slightly (42.06) or moderately (27.10%) satisfying from this angle.

Furthermore, the cultural-content in both textbooks is presented as rather isolated facts or improperly contextualized (2=37.38%, 3=39.25%-B1 vs. 2=35.51%, 3=38.32%-B2), which adds to its previously implied inadequacy. This finding is corroborated by the glaring weaknesses identified in the textbooks, namely the lack of engaging texts, illustrations/images and listening material (1=40.19%, 2=41.12%-B1 vs. 1=30.84%, 2=42.99%-B2) that could facilitate in-depth understanding of diverse cultures. Understandably, the textbook activities are hardly conducive to the students' critical cultural reflection that ensues from comparing and contrasting their own culture to other cultures as depicted in the ratings (2=47.66%, 3=26.17%-B1 vs. 2=43.93%, 3=30.84%-B2).

In addition, the results revealed that the tasks are slightly (43.93%) or not at all (30.84%) perceived to be facilitative to explicating or consolidating the cultural information supplied in B1, which signifies that learners are not actively involved in observation, interpretation and discussion of the cultural aspects portrayed. Comparably, more than half participants (52.34%) consider B2 tasks slightly supportive of the cultural input incorporated. As regards the cross-cultural projects and creative activities in B1, the tendency towards rates 2 (41.12%) and 3 (26.17%) is distinct, thus indicating that they slightly or moderately foster and promote the experiential dimension of culture-learning. Almost the same applies for B2 about which opinions are divided between rates 2 (35.51%) and 3 (36.45%).

Finally, the cultural-content embedded in both B1 (1=34.58%, 2=36.45) and B2 (1=28.04%, 2= 40.19%) is defined as not at all or slightly authentic and hardly up-to-date given the analogies (B1:1=50.47%, 2=35.51% vs. B2:1=49.53%, 2=35.51%) corresponding to the last criterion in this part. Such findings endorse and ratify the previously ascertained deficiencies in the textbooks and point out their shallow and superficial culture treatment.

Part D, which scrutinizes the intercultural values and issues dealt with, indicates that in terms of stereotypical images and references to race, religion and gender, the cultural-content of B1 is assessed as rather moderately (43.93%) loaded. B2 displays interchangeable propensity, translated in 48.60% for moderate existence of such depiction. Likewise, regarding the extent to which the textbooks promote intercultural values, responses oscillate between rates 2 and 3 (2=35.51% & 3=32.71%-B1 vs. 2=32.71% & 3=34.58%-B2).

Part E serves as an epitome of all the hitherto analyzed criteria focusing on the textbooks' overall appraisal. Firstly, their cultural-content is evaluated with regard to its contribution to the construction of a 'third space', which affords learners the opportunity to function as 'international speakers'. Importantly, the broad majority of participants regards B1 as slightly (42.99%) or not at all (28.57%) conducive to the 'third space' formation, and B2 as slightly (41.12%) or moderately (28.04%) contributory to this goal. Secondly, judging from the relevant ratings (1=27.10% & 2=43.93%), B1 fails to adopt a holistic approach to understanding different cultures and communication styles of EIL; B2 is graded closer to this direction, thus swaying between slight (2=40.19%) and moderate (3=32.71%) indices. The last criterion inquires whether the textbooks can effectively suffice for potent (inter)cultural instruction without additional supplementary material. As anticipated, neither textbook is deemed sufficient given the immense percentage allocated to rate 1 (58.88%-B1 vs. 53.27%-B2).

In essence, it becomes obvious that culture representation in both textbooks is confined to tangible aspects of cultural knowledge. This equals purely transmitting cultural information based on a haphazard selection of cultural items that barely offer a balanced view of world cultures or create opportunities for authentic cultural experiences, thus failing to function as a window to learning about and exploring different cultures.

4.5 The Teacher Interviews

As noted earlier, the semi-structured interviews probe deeper into the issues of interest discussed, eliciting more accurate information and generating new verbal insights (Robson, 2007) into the EFL teachers' attitudes and practices towards 'culture' along with their predispositions regarding the textbooks' cultural content. Given that the interview questions are in keeping with the questionnaire layout, the interviewees' responses were evaluated in conjunction with the questionnaire findings and, broadly speaking, convergent views surfaced.

More explicitly, it became crystal clear that despite the fact that the EFL teachers place high importance on 'culture teaching' and transmitting intercultural values, the cultural content in the assigned textbooks was unanimously assessed as simply inadequate to enable learners to critically reflect on cultural issues at a deeper niveau (Karras, 2021). Therefore, but for the teachers' concerted efforts to create a stimulating context that embraces cultural diversity and develop the students' intercultural perspective, the latter would be superficially exposed to culture and deprived of any interculturally-rich experiences. Therefore, the interview analysis corroborates and supplements the questionnaire results, thus adding to the validity, trustworthiness and reliability of the research outcomes (Richards, 2003).

4.6 Statistics and Data Analysis

To further validate the e-questionnaire findings, reliability tests were conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) so as to measure the internal consistency of the multiple-question Likert scale survey. As regards the second part of the questionnaire exploring the EFL practitioners' perceptions of 'culture-teaching', the test showed acceptable reliability considering the value 0.718 (Note 10) calculated (Table 4). Additional exploratory factor analysis was performed to check dimensionality by assessing the reliability of responses regarding the place of 'culture' in the EFL-classroom (factor 1: items 5−7) and the impact of intercultural teaching (factor 2: items 8−11) on language learning outcomes. The relevant values (factor 1=0.715

& factor 2=0.822) also indicated acceptable and good reliability respectively (Table 5).

Table 4. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding (inter)cultural teaching in the state primary-school EFL-classroom

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's alpha
'Culture teaching' is as important as teaching linguistic skills	107	4.13	0.79	2	5	0.718
'Culture teaching' should be fully incorporated in ELT in a number of ways	107	4.39	0.63	2	5	
'Culture teaching' is motivating for the EFL students.	107	4.19	0.75	2	5	
It is difficult to integrate 'culture teaching' into my teaching practices	107	2.44	1.00	1	5	
Equal time should be devoted to 'language teaching' and 'culture teaching' respectively despite time and other constraints	107	3.16	1.00	1	5	
The EFL classroom is a safe environment to implement intercultural teaching practices	107	4.11	0.88	1	5	
Raising the students' awareness of cultural diversity is a top priority in the EFL classroom	107	3.84	0.99	1	5	
It is important to teach students intercultural values such as intercultural sensitivity, respect/tolerance of cultural differences and shaping positive attitudes towards 'otherness'	107	4.48	0.60	3	5	
Cultural awareness fosters EFL learning and maximizes the learning outcomes	107	4.05	0.77	2	5	
Acquiring intercultural communicative competence skills is an important asset for EFL learners	107	4.24	0.78	1	5	
Developing cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence enhances successful intercultural communication (e.g., helps avoid misunderstandings, cultural conflicts, miscommunication etc.)	107	4.44	0.63	2	5	
The cultural aspects taught in the EFL classroom should be exclusively connected with British or American culture (Native Speaker culture)	107	2.16	1.08	1	5	
Students need to explore and understand their own culture as well as various foreign cultures since they are members of a global community	107	4.45	0.69	2	5	
The teaching materials currently employed in state primary school (textbook, workbook, etc.) are adequate tools to facilitate culture teaching	107	1.97	0.83	1	4	
I strongly rely on the prescribed textbooks for culture teaching	107	1.81	0.93	1	4	

Table 5. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding (inter)cultural teaching in state primary-school as far as factors 1 & 2 are concerned

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's alpha
Teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding the place of 'culture-teaching' in the state primary-school EFL-classroom_factor1(Part II: items 5−7)	107	3.70	0.77	2.00	5.00	0.715
Teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding the impact of intercultural teaching on language learning outcomes _factor2 (Part II: items 8−11)	107	4.30	0.57	2.75	5.00	0.822

Additionally, the cultural checklist results pertinent to the textbooks' overall cultural-content evaluation and appropriacy indicated 'excellent' (Note 11) reliability given the high values obtained (0.937-B1 & 0.934-B2) after conducting the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Tables 6 and 7). The same acceptably correlated values are observed in the additional tests performed for each part separately (Tables 8 and 9), except for poor interrelatedness detected in the fourth part regarding the intercultural values conveyed by the textbooks (0.411-B1 vs. 0.369-B2). This can be attributed to chance or arbitrary choices made by the participants or absence of enough questions to rate the specific variable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 6. Teachers' responses in relation to their perception of the cultural representation in the 5th grade textbook

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's alpha
5th grade textbook						0.937
The textbook caters for the needs and goals of students as international English speakers.	107	2.2	0.9	1	5	
The aims/objectives of the textbook are in accordance with the multicultural perspective advocated by the National EFL curriculum.	107	2.5	1.0	1	5	
The topics chosen are suitable for the students' diverse social and cultural background.	107	2.3	1.0	1	5	
The textbook is culturally oriented towards other cultures except British/American.	107	2.2	0.9	1	4	
The textbook features characters from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.	107	2.7	1.1	1	5	
The textbook provides cultural input in all units.	107	2.4	0.9	1	4	
The cultural content in the textbook is motivating/challenging enough to arouse the learners' curiosity about other cultures and enhance their cultural awareness.	107	2.0	0.9	1	4	
The cultural aspects presented are comprehensible and appropriate for the learners' age and linguistic level.	107	2.3	1.1	1	5	
The cultural content is integrated (if it is presented in context give a score of 3, 4 or 5; if it is presented as isolated facts give 1 or 2).	107	2.4	0.9	1	5	
The textbook includes engaging texts, images/illustrations and listening material that promote in-depth understanding of different cultures.	107	1.8	0.8	1	4	
The textbook activities prompt students to reflect on, compare and contrast their own culture to other cultures.	107	2.2	0.9	1	5	
The textbook tasks/activities consolidate/further explain the cultural information provided so as to actively involve the learners into observation/identification, interpretation and discussion of the cultural aspects presented.	107	2.0	0.9	1	4	
The textbook includes cross-cultural projects and creative activities that facilitate and promote the experiential dimension of culture learning.	107	2.3	1.0	1	5	
The cultural content (reading/listening input, illustrations, etc.) included in the textbook is authentic.	107	2.0	1.0	1	5	
The cultural input embedded in the textbook is up-to-date.	107	1.7	0.8	1	4	
The cultural content of the textbook is bereft of stereotypical images/information regarding race, religion, gender, etc.	107	3.1	1.0	1	5	
The textbook promotes intercultural values such as understanding, tolerance, empathy, respectful attitudes and openness towards 'otherness', intercultural sensitivity and acceptance.	107	2.5	1.0	1	5	
The cultural content provided fosters the construction of a 'third space' (where learners can begin to function as international speakers).	107	2.0	0.8	1	4	
The textbook adopts a holistic approach to understanding diverse cultures and communication styles of English as an international language.	107	2.1	0.8	1	5	
The textbook can effectively suffice for active (inter)cultural instruction and no additional material is required to supplement it.	107	1.5	0.7	1	4	

Table 7. Teachers' responses in relation to their perception of the cultural representation in the 6th grade textbook

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's alpha
6th grade textbook						0.934
The textbook caters for the needs and goals of students as international English speakers.	107	2.44	0.94	1	5	
The aims/objectives of the textbook are in accordance with the multicultural perspective advocated by the National EFL curriculum.	107	2.62	0.97	1	5	
The topics chosen are suitable for the students' diverse social and cultural background.	107	2.52	0.96	1	5	
The textbook is culturally oriented towards other cultures except British/American.	107	2.26	0.95	1	5	
The textbook features characters from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.	107	2.62	1.06	1	5	
The textbook provides cultural input in all units.	107	2.35	0.91	1	4	
The cultural content in the textbook is motivating/challenging enough to arouse the learners' curiosity about other cultures and enhance their cultural awareness.	107	2.19	0.90	1	4	
The cultural aspects presented are comprehensible and appropriate for the learners' age and linguistic level.	107	2.38	0.99	1	5	
The cultural content is integrated (if it is presented in context give a score of 3, 4 or 5; if it is presented as isolated facts give 1 or 2).	107	2.50	0.90	1	5	
The textbook includes engaging texts, images/illustrations and listening material that promote in-depth understanding of different cultures.	107	1.97	0.79	1	4	
The textbook activities prompt students to reflect on, compare and contrast their own culture to other cultures.	107	2.27	0.89	1	5	
The textbook tasks/activities consolidate/further explain the cultural information provided so as to actively involve the learners into observation/identification, interpretation and discussion of the cultural aspects presented.	107	2.05	0.73	1	4	
The textbook includes cross-cultural projects and creative activities that facilitate and promote the experiential dimension of culture learning.	107	2.36	0.89	1	4	
The cultural content (reading/listening input, illustrations, etc) included in the textbook is authentic.	107	2.13	0.94	1	5	
The cultural input embedded in the textbook is up-to-date.	107	1.69	0.82	1	4	
The cultural content of the textbook is bereft of stereotypical images/information regarding race, religion, gender, etc.	107	3.06	0.97	1	5	
The textbook promotes intercultural values such as understanding, tolerance, empathy, respectful attitudes and openness towards 'otherness', intercultural sensitivity and acceptance.	107	2.49	0.99	1	5	
The cultural content provided fosters the construction of a 'third space' (where learners can begin to function as international speakers).	107	2.08	0.84	1	4	
The textbook adopts a holistic approach to understanding diverse cultures and communication styles of English as an international language.	107	2.09	0.82	1	5	
The textbook can effectively suffice for active (inter)cultural instruction and no additional material is required to supplement it.	107	1.55	0.68	1	3	

Table 8. Teachers' responses in relation to the cultural criteria clusters in the 5th grade textbook

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's alpha
Rationale and Objectives	107	2.38	0.88	1.00	4.50	0.812
Cultural orientation/representation	107	2.41	0.79	1.00	4.00	0.800
Cultural content characteristics (aim/objectives, activities/tasks, suitability)	107	2.09	0.67	1.00	4.11	0.892
Intercultural issues/values	107	2.78	0.79	1.00	4.50	0.411
Overall appraisal of the textbooks	107	1.86	0.67	1.00	3.67	0.815

Table 9. Teachers' responses in relation to the cultural criteria clusters in the 6th grade textbook

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's alpha
Rationale and Objectives	107	2.53	0.87	1.00	4.00	0.781
Cultural orientation/representation	107	2.44	0.77	1.00	4.00	0.794
Cultural content characteristics (aim/objectives, activities/tasks, suitability)	107	2.17	0.62	1.00	3.56	0.879
Intercultural issues/values	107	2.77	0.77	1.00	4.50	0.369
Overall appraisal of the textbooks	107	1.91	0.68	1.00	3.33	0.844

More specifically, to assess the correlation between the respondents' age and their attitudes towards 'culture-teaching', Kruskal-Wallis H test was selected to measure any statistically significant differences among the diverse age groups in relation to five factors comprising different items from the second part of the questionnaire. As shown in Table 10, the age variable does not influence the teachers' intercultural approaches given that the estimated p-value is ≥0.05. Similarly, another parameter investigated is whether the respondents' attendance of intercultural training seminars affects their predispositions to 'culture teaching'. In this case the Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the medians between the interculturally trained and untrained EFL teachers (Klotz, 2006). As Table 11 encapsulates (p-value ≥0.05) the EFL-educators' manifest positive approach to 'culture teaching' is not dependent on intercultural seminar attendance.

Table 10. Results of Kruskal-Wallis H test measuring the correlation between the participants' intercultural stance and their age

	Age	N	Median	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis H	p-value
Factor 1 (items 1–4)	31–40	41	3.75	52.65	0.148	0.929
	41–50	48	3.75	55.15		
	51+	18	3.88	54.03		
Factor 2 (items 5–7)	31–40	41	3.67	51.68	2.670	0.263
	41–50	48	3.67	51.93		
	51+	18	4.00	64.81		
Factor 3 (items 8–11)	31–40	41	4.25	51.24	0.550	0.760
	41–50	48	4.38	55.96		
	51+	18	4.38	55.06		
Factor 4 (items 12–13)	31–40	41	3.00	49.15	2.216	0.330
	41–50	48	3.00	55.71		
	51+	18	3.50	60.5		
Factor 5 (items 14–15)	31–40	41	2.00	53.12	0.070	0.965
	41–50	48	2.00	54.28		
	51+	18	1.75	55.25		

Table 11. Results of Mann-Whitney U test correlating the teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding (inter)cultural teaching and their potential intercultural training

	Have you attended any seminars/training courses on intercultural education during your professional career?	N	Median	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value
Factor 1 (items 1–4)	*No*	77	3.75	51.71	978.50	0.214
	Yes	30	4.00	59.88		
Factor 1 (items 5–7)	*No*	77	3.67	50.91	917.00	0.096
	Yes	30	4.00	61.93		
Factor 1 (items 8–11)	*No*	77	4.25	50.82	910.00	0.085
	Yes	30	4.62	62.17		
Factor 1 (items 12–13)	*No*	77	3.00	53.38	1107.50	0.725
	Yes	30	3.00	55.58		
Factor 1 (items 14–15)	*No*	77	2.00	52.33	1026.50	0.358
	Yes	30	2.00	58.28		

Lastly, the Spearman correlation coefficient (r_s) was employed to measure the strength and direction of association between paired data. Particularly, the overall perception of the cultural representation in the textbooks depicts the respondents' convergence of opinion according to the retrieved values in all the examined variables (Table 12). Their interpretation is that the closer they are to ±1, the stronger the monotonic relationship is calculated, thus confirming their strongly negative proclivity towards both textbooks' cultural-content.

Table 12. Spearman correlation coefficient measuring the teachers' perceptions of the 'cultural representation' in the 5th and 6th grade state-school English textbooks

		5th grade				
		Rationale and Objectives	*Cultural orientation/representation*	*Cultural content characteristics (aim/objectives, activities/tasks, suitability)*	*Intercultural issues/values*	*Overall appraisal of the textbooks*
6th grade	*Rationale and Objectives*	0.855[*]	0.585[*]	0.554[*]	0.381[*]	0.517[*]
	Cultural orientation/representation	0.687[*]	0.865[*]	0.644[*]	0.507[*]	0.622[*]
	Cultural content characteristics (aim/objectives, activities/tasks, suitability)	0.711[*]	0.683[*]	0.865[*]	0.489[*]	0.725[*]
	Intercultural issues/values	0.410[*]	0.456[*]	0.489[*]	0.941[*]	0.353[*]
	Overall appraisal of the textbooks	0.570[*]	0.532[*]	0.657[*]	0.324[*]	0.912[*]

5. Discussion

5.1 Reflecting on RQ 1

As already stressed, the acquisition of ICC-skills entails giving more prominence to the small 'c' dimension in order to fully appreciate the socio-linguistic and socio-cultural implications of language (CEFR, 2001). Moreover, this paradigm is deemed as pedagogically more appropriate for enabling learners to communicate in everyday situations and become interculturally-competent speakers (Wintergerst & Meveigh, 2010). Nevertheless, as documented, the cultural content in the textbooks was found of rather limited small 'c' range, thus rendering the importance accorded to small 'c' culture manifestation either inadequate and hard to exploit as in B1 or negligible as in B2.

Accordingly, the cultural input is of primarily knowledge-oriented nature owing to the outperforming Big 'C' culture-themes, which together with the noticeable inconsistency regarding the distribution of the three culture categories can be held accountable for insufficiency or even inappropriacy to promote the learners' CA and flourish their ICC (Ashrafi & Ajideh, 2018). This fact reveals that the cultural content selection did not receive

due attention when the textbooks were designed and structurally organized (Wu, 2010). Consequently, the cultural portrayal in both textbooks cannot actively engage learners in critical cultural reflection (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011) on the differences between their own culture and other target cultures, thereby failing to instill global cultural consciousness and intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2011).

5.2 Reflecting on RQ 2

By the same token, scant attention to cultural aspects is observable throughout the textbooks especially in view of C3 references, thus not providing students with opportunities for deep (inter)cultural understanding, cross-cultural comparison and awareness (Ashrafi & Ajideh, 2018). Based on the content analysis findings B1 appears more interculturally-balanced in terms of topics, given the higher small 'c' culture frequency and coverage of cultural diversity compared to B2. Yet, according to the e-questionnaire data and the interviews this advantage can hardly be capitalized considering its fiercely articulated defects.

Generally speaking, the cultural input in both textbooks focuses on sterile provision of cultural facts to memorize (Lee, 2009), instead of featuring a variety of cultures and developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that can pave the way to ICC and optimize the language learning outcomes (Gomez-Rodriguez, 2015; Sercu, 2010). In this regard, it cannot serve as a springboard for the learners to explore the cultural mélange or to prompt a transformative experience that surfaces their insider understandings and facilitates their departure from the cultural border-zone/territory (Byram, 1989; Shaules, 2007). This implies that learners are confined to the role of a passive observer, outsider and passive recipient of information instead of being empowered to interpret cultural phenomena at the level of 'deep culture' (Davcheva, 2008) and express personal meanings by means of making connections and associations with their own culture (Kramsch, 1993).

More simply stated, both textbooks offer 'consumer-tourist competence' (Byram, 1991), showcasing 'culture' from a congratulatory or tourist viewpoint rather than getting under its skin by modifying the learners' existing schemata to accommodate new schemata, experiences and perceptions (Prodromou & Mishan, 2008). In practice, they incorporate tourism-oriented situations lacking problematic (Skopinskaja, 2003) since anecdotal facts-processing takes precedence over the inculcation of the ICC-constructs.

5.3 Reflecting on RQ 3

Regarding RQ3, despite their admittedly positive predisposition and struggling efforts towards implementing (inter)cultural teaching, the survey-respondents vigorously expressed their concerns about the time allocated for 'culture teaching' as well as the palpable lack of engaging, up-to-date and authentic cultural-content in the prescribed textbooks. Basically, the vast majority of EFL practitioners participating in this study resort to other resources (internet, digital material, etc.), modify tasks and projects or devise their own supplementary materials in a strenuous effort to integrate 'culture' meaningfully into their teaching practices and equip learners with intercultural knowledge and skills.

Bearing in mind that the targeted textbooks are not identified as culturally-responsive to the challenges they are supposed to meet, 'culture teaching' is contingent upon the EFL teachers' discretion and social responsibility (Byram, 2011) to make sound pedagogical decisions and choices so as to ameliorate and reinforce intercultural instruction. This assumption verifies the claim that cultural meanings are not locked into the materials; instead, "they are created through an interaction between the materials, the learners and the teachers" (Kiss & Weninger, 2017, pp. 193−194), which explains why the EFL-teachers cannot remain neutral on cultural issues (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkeym, 2002). In this strand, they are supposed to act as facilitators creating the conditions for the learners' meaningful cultural explorations, whereby the latter have a capacity for change, are alert to alternatives, sensitive to difference and open to experiment (Clarke & Collins, 2007).

Distinctly, EFL teachers, perceived as culture intermediaries (Shirvan & Taherian, 2015), cannot rely on the textbooks under evaluation for 'culture teaching'. This proposition justifies their expressed desire for the textbooks' total replacement or re-writing so as to incorporate a well-structured and principled thematic organization along with up-to-date, innovative, authentic and purposeful cultural input suitable for accomplishing the intercultural goals.

6. Concluding Remarks

As proclaimed, the study aimed at enlightening the extent to which the EFL textbooks employed in the 5th and 6th grade of the Greek primary school strengthen and upgrade the quality of 'culture teaching' by raising the students' CA and developing their ICC. To this end, the EFL teachers using the particular textbooks were actively involved in almost every phase of the TE process. As it became evident, the research results emphatically depict the teachers' perceptions on the issues explored and provide an insightful picture of the

'cultural' deficiencies existent in both textbooks, thus practically pinpointing their conspicuous inappropriacy to facilitate and foster dynamic intercultural instruction.

Accordingly, taking for granted the state EFL teachers' strongly substantiated contribution to intercultural education, the need for them to receive formal input in the form of intercultural pre-service and in-service training on how to teach 'culture' is certainly accentuated (Tzotzou & Kotsiou, 2015). In this way, their professional confidence and empowerment will be boosted as they can become more interculturally-responsive and competent themselves as well as adequately educated to effectively raise the learners' CA and build their own ICC by employing a variety of methods and techniques (Dai, 2011; Karras, 2021). Most importantly, they will be calibrated to meet the challenges involved in embracing an intercultural orientation and enabled to compensate for any shortcomings the existing curricula, syllabi or course books may have. Arguably, it would be pedagogically advisable and constructive that the teachers' opinions and recommendations be recorded, analyzed and seriously taken into consideration by policy makers and courseware authors.

As a corollary, if/when new EFL-textbooks are designed, a primary aim should be to promote CA and encompass the main ICC components in order to accommodate the global purposes of English as EIL (Weber, Aitken, Lupart, & Scott, 2009). Undoubtedly, this is a challenge that merits proper attention considering the overwhelming changes taking place worldwide and it certainly entails a responsibility towards the young generation of prospective global citizens.

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Notes

Note 1. Cross-curricular/Cross-Thematic curriculum Framework.

Note 2. Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum.

Note 3. Foreign Language.

Note 4. TEFL promotes the target language and culture (Fay, 2008).

Note 5. Teaching English for Intercultural Communication Paradigm.

Note 6. Teaching English for Multicultural Awareness Paradigm.

Note 7. Native speaking.

Note 8. 'Culture learning' is the process of acquiring culture-specific and culture general (intercultural) knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective communication (Paige et al., 1999, p. 50).

Note 9. Bahrami (2015), Chen (2012), Jiang (2016), Sercu (1998), Masuhara and Tomlinson (2013), Moran (2001) and Widdowson (2005).

Note 10. The alpha coefficient (a) of 0.70 or higher suggests that the items have relatively high internal consistency, thus it is considered "acceptable" in most social science research situations.

Note 11. 0.5>a indicates unacceptable internal consistency, 0.6>a≥0.5 poor, 0.7>a ≥0.6 questionable, 0.8>a≥0.7 acceptable, 0.9>a≥0.8 good and a≥0.9 excellent internal consistency.