

English language textbooks for improving the cultural competence of EFL learners in Korea



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 December 2021

Received in revised form

26 February 2022

Accepted 4 March 2022

Keywords:

Language policy

Globalization

Textbook analysis

Cultural competence

Cultural contents

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to understand how English textbooks in Korea reflect English education policies for improving Korean EFL learners' cultural competence. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, this research adopted the method of analyzing English textbooks because English textbook is an important tool that most specifically reflects the English education policy of a country. This study analyzed 15 English textbooks currently used in S. Korea. This research analyzed nouns/pronouns related to a culture presented in the reading passages and cultural sections included in each lesson, and investigated cultural diversity and national identity included in English language textbooks. As a result, this study could find that South Korea included cultural diversity through English language textbooks so that Korean EFL learners can cultivate cultural competence and promote their cultural pride in western culture in order to realize the goal of strengthening global capabilities.

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1. Introduction

The Education agenda in the 21st century is "Globalization". With the beginning of the 21st century, an important educational agenda for many countries, including South Korea, is how to respond to the challenges posed by globalization. One of the essential features of globalization is to interact with each other in all aspects of society. So cultural competence is very important for all global citizens to understand the diverse cultures that are not familiar with them (Sungwon, 2007; Chang, 2018).

In the 21st century, the government's educational policy emphasized two missions: improving English skills and cultivating cultural competence. South Korea has recently made great efforts to educate people on the ways in which its Korean young learners can propagate Korean culture into the world, assimilating themselves into the various cultures and respecting other cultures. The challenge is to train Korean students to be able to play a leading role in international business in response to the challenges of the globalized world. To achieve this goal, the main task is to educate Korean students

who are proficient in English skills and understand others' cultures different from their own (Chang, 2020; Chang and Owada, 2021). At the same time, it is important for the students to recognize Korea's national identity. This is because Korean students must have the ability to introduce Korean traditions and ethnic homogeneity to the world in English. The main components of cultural competence consist of two parts; one is to introduce a variety of world cultures to Korea and the other is to introduce Korean values and traditions to the world while improving national self-esteem (Chang, 2021).

2. Theoretical background

The recent studies emphasized the language policy in the global age and the cultural identity of the nation (Song, 2013). The importance of language policy in the field of education has been emphasized that multilingualism is a trend now and that language policy plays an important role in controlling social and political conflicts and that language policy and ideology have important links to each other (Tollefson, 2002). The English policy reflected in Chinese elementary school English textbooks was analyzed through analyzing the linguistic materials in which various Chinese cultures are expressed (Ping, 2015). The process of globalization has been accompanied, facilitated, and accelerated by the global spread of the English language (Liu et al., 2021; Sun and Kwon, 2020;

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Davidson and Liu, 2020; Xiong and Peng, 2021). Intercultural competence is a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context-specific manner in real-time communication (Risager, 2021; Canale, 2021). Language textbooks' functions must take an explicitly global perspective in the globalized world.

This study adopted the previous theoretical research and investigations focusing on English education policy and English language textbooks' functions in the globalized world.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research questions

This research aims to give the answers to the following questions: 1) Are the models of cultural competence in English textbooks diverse enough to embrace the multilingual and multicultural contexts? On the other hand, are the models of cultural competence depending on a particular culture and language form? 2) What kind of cultural contents are presented in English textbooks in Korea? Are they just superficial features of cultural manifestation? On the other hand, do they include a more deep understanding about intercultural communication?

3.2. English textbook analysis procedures

This study analyzed 15 middle school English textbooks currently used in S. Korea.

1) The analysis counted types and tokens of every noun and pronoun related to cultures in the reading passages and cultural sections. The analysis counted types and tokens of every noun and pronoun related to cultures in the reading passages and cultural sections.

2) Each noun/pronoun that could be identified as referring to culture in any way was classified according to these 7 categories: (1) Natural attractions (2) Achievements (3) Persons (4) Social activities (5) Customs and holidays (6) Material products (7) Value systems.

3) This textbook analysis identified the nouns and pronouns with referential meanings that referred to any country, region, or continent. A total of 49 countries are referred to at least once, so the country names were categorized into South Korea, Inner circle countries (6 countries; Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, U.K, U.S.A), Europe (16 countries), Middle Asia (3 countries), Africa (4 countries), South America (6 countries), and Asia (13 countries). So 49 countries over almost 6 continents were referred to as culture-related information, which proves that Korea's English textbooks contain diverse cultural information from the world.

The information about English textbooks analyzed in this study are like these: Middle School English 1 from 5 publishing companies (authorized in 2017), Middle School English 2 from 5 publishing companies (authorized in 2018), Middle School English 3 from 5 publishing companies (authorized in 2019). The textbooks analyzed in this study consist of 8 lessons each textbook, so a total of 120 lessons (8 lessons*15 books) were analyzed focusing on the cultural contents of reading passages and cultural sections in each lesson.

4. Result and discussions

The results of analyzing Middle School English textbooks focusing on the nouns and pronouns related to the culture show the following results. Table 1 lists the diverse cultural representations in English language textbooks, which explains that Korean English textbooks contain various cultures from 49 countries over 6 continents. As shown in Table 1, a total of 49 countries are referred to at least once, so the country names were categorized into South Korea, Inner circle countries (6 countries; Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, U.K, U.S.A), Europe (16 countries), Middle Asia (3 countries), Africa (4 countries), South America (6 countries), and Asia (13 countries). So 49 countries over almost 6 continents were referred to as culture-related information, which improves that Korea's English textbooks contain diverse cultural information around the world.

Table 1: Cultural representations from diverse countries in English textbooks of S. Korea

Category	Name of the country (Number of Culture references)	Number of Culture references	Ratio (%)
Korea	Korea(46)	46	18.3
Inner Circle Countries	Australia (6), Canada (5), Ireland (2), New Zealand (6), U.K. (10), U.S.A. (31)	60	23.9
Europe	Belgium (1), Bulgaria (2), Denmark (3), Finland (1), France (16), Germany (6), Greece (1), Italy (9), Netherlands (3), Norway (1), Poland (1), Romania (1), Russia (4), Spain (8), Sweden (2), Switzerland (1)	60	23.9
Middle East	Israel (3), Saudi Arabia (1), Turkey (2)	6	2.3
Africa	Egypt (5), Kenya (1), Nigeria (1), South Africa (2)	9	3.5
South America	Argentina (1), Brazil (3), Chile (1), Colombia (1), Mexico (3), Peru (1)	10	3.9
Asia	Bangladesh (1), Cambodia (2), China (19), India (7), Indonesia (1), Japan (10), Malaysia (2), Nepal (1), Pakistan (1), Philippines (3), Taiwan (1), Thailand (6), Vietnam (6)	60	23.9
Total		251 (49 countries)	100

Fig. 1 shows the ratio of cultural representation from diverse continents; Inner circle countries (23.9%), European countries (23.9%), Asian countries (23.9%), Korea (18.3%), South American countries (3.9%), African countries (3.5%), and Middle East countries (2.3%). From Fig. 1, this study can suggest that the English education policy of Korea tries to introduce diverse cultures from many countries to Korean young learners. If we consider Korea as one nation counted in this analysis, we can suppose that the 18.3% is relatively high. From these results, we can assume that English language textbooks of S. Korea not only contain the diverse cultures from 49 countries but also include much information about Korean culture in order to enhance Korean learners' pride in their own country and its culture. And this educational policy is adequate for cultivating the cultural competence of Korean EFL learners because the ability to understand the different cultures from their own is a very essential component for the young people who can be leaders in the globalized world.

Table 2 reveals the specific information about cultural representations based on the 2 categories; one is the name of countries, the other is the cultural sub-categories numbering 1 to 7, and the definitions of the sub-categories are given in Table 3. This study analyzed the cultural contents of English textbooks according to the above 2 categories. The analytic results for sub-categories about culture can reveal the kind of cultural content presented in English textbooks of Korea. Are they just superficial features of cultural manifestation? On the other hand, do they

include a more deep understanding about intercultural communication? The results of the sub-categories show that the cultural contents of English textbooks don't concentrate on the superficial manifestations of culture, rather on the cultural contents for 4) Social activities (SA), 5) Customs and holidays (CH), and 6) Material products (MP) are relatively high.

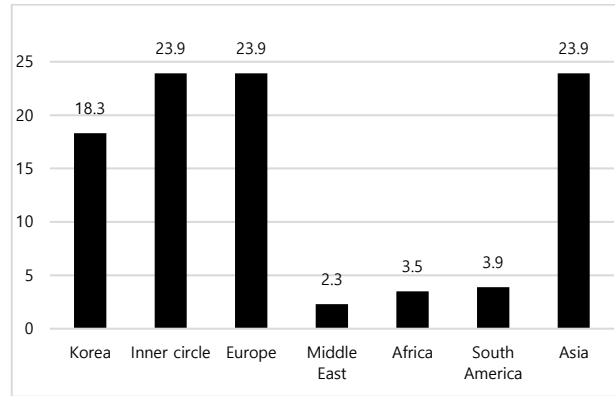


Fig. 1: Ratio of cultural representation from diverse continents

In this study, the cultural representations were subdivided into 7 sub-categories about culture. Table 3 explains the definitions of sub-categories of culture; 1) Natural attractions (NA), 2) Achievements (Ach), 3) Persons (Per), 4) Social activities (SA), 5) Customs and holidays (CH), 6) Material products (MP), 7) Value systems (VS) (Ping, 2015).

Table 2: Cultural representations from diverse countries in English textbooks of Korea (2)

Group	Nations	Number of categories							Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Korea	Korea	14	2	5	10	5	9	1	46
	Australia	1			2		2	1	6
	Canada				3		1	1	5
	Ireland	1						1	2
Inner Circle Countries	New Zealand	1			1	1	1	2	6
	U K	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	10
	U S A	2	2	6	11	5	2	3	31
	Total	6	3	8	21	6	7	9	60
	Belgium						1		1
	Bulgaria				1	1			2
	Denmark				1	1		1	3
	Finland				1				1
	France	1	3	2	3	1	3	3	16
	Germany		1	1	3		1		6
	Greece							1	1
	Italy	1		1	3	2	1	1	9
	Europe	Netherlands		1		1			1
Norway								1	1
Poland						1			1
Romania								1	1
Russia				1		3			4
Spain		1			3	1	1	2	8
Sweden				1		1			2
Switzerland							1		1
Total		3	5	6	16	11	8	11	60
Israel						3			3
Middle East		Saudi Arabia		1					
	Turkey					1	1		2
	Total		1			4	1		6
	Egypt	3				1		1	5
Africa	Kenya				1				1
	Nigeria							1	1
	South Africa					1		1	2
	Total	3			1	2		3	9
	Argentina				1				1
South America	Brazil							3	3
	Chile	1							1
	Colombia				1				1

	Mexico				1	2		3
	Peru	1						1
	Total	2		2	1	2	3	10
	Bangladesh			1				1
	Cambodia	2						2
	China	2	1		3	3	5	19
	India		1	1	2	3		7
	Indonesia						1	1
	Japan	1			4	1	2	10
	Malaysia						1	2
	Nepal							1
	Pakistan			1				1
	Philippines						1	3
	Taiwan						1	1
	Thailand				1	2	1	6
	Vietnam					4	2	6
	Total	5	2	2	11	14	14	60
Total	49 nations	33	13	21	61	43	41	251

Table 3: Definitions of sub-categories of culture

Category	Definitions of Sub-categories
1) Natural attractions (NA)	Geographical information, such as country name or city in a particular country
2) Achievements (Ach)	Information about material achievements, such as historical buildings and industrial outcomes as well as non-material national achievements, such as literature, artistic and scientific works
3) Persons (Per)	Cultural information about historical figures or role models in a particular nation
4) Social activities (SA)	Information about sports, household chores, leisure activities, literacy learning, etc.
5) Customs and holidays (CH)	Cultural information about customs and festivals in a particular nation
6) Material products (MP)	Information about material products in a particular national culture, such as food, clothes, money, etc.
7) Value systems (VS)	Explanations of the values and beliefs behind certain activities

Fig. 2 shows the ratio of cultural representations from sub-categories in this study; Social activities (24.3%), Customs and holidays (17.1%), Material products (16.3%), Value systems (15.5%), Natural attractions (13.1%), Persons (8.3%), and Achievements (5.5%).

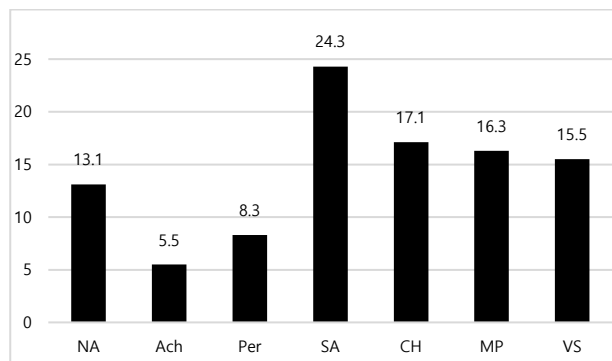


Fig. 2: Ratio of cultural representation from sub-categories

As we can see in Tables 2 and 3, and Fig. 2, Korean English language textbooks contain various cultural information from the world. When we investigate the cultural information by dividing the cultural categories into sub-categories, we can find the following results: The cultural contents of English textbooks are diverse enough to include not only geographical information, achievements, persons, and material products, but also social systems, customs and holidays, and value systems. Also, the ratio of sub-categories representation shows that social activities, customs and holidays, and value systems are represented higher than in the other sub-categories, which means that the cultural policy of English education in South Korea aims to

train deep understanding of cultures different from our own.

5. Conclusion

Through surveying the cultural contents in English language textbooks of Korea, this research can give the following suggestions as to the answers to the research questions in this study.

1) Are the models of cultural competence in English textbooks diverse enough to embrace the multilingual and multicultural contexts? On the other hand, are the models of cultural competence depending on a particular culture and language form?

Table 1 and Fig. 1 show that the English textbooks of Korea contain various cultural content from 49 countries from 6 continents in the world. These results concluded that South Korea advocated a policy that actively accommodates the various cultures of other countries, prompting Korean society to assimilate into other cultural elements, especially those of the English-American bloc. Also, these results can imply that English language textbooks of S. Korea not only contain the diverse cultures from 49 countries but also include much information about Korean culture in order to enhance Korean learners' pride in their own country and its culture. So these results imply that English language textbooks in Korea are adequate for introducing cultural diversity to Korean young learners and cultivating the national pride of EFL learners in Korea.

2) What kind of cultural contents are presented in English textbooks in Korea? Are they just superficial features of cultural manifestation? Or do they

include a more deep understanding about intercultural communication?

Tables 2 and 3 and Fig. 2 explain that the cultural contents of English textbooks are diverse enough to include not only geographical information, achievements, persons, and material products, but also social activities, customs and holidays, and value systems. Also, the ratio of sub-categories representation shows that social activities, customs and holidays, and value systems are represented higher than in the other sub-categories, which means that the cultural policy of English education in South Korea aims to train deep understanding of cultures different from our own.

South Korea has tried to cultivate Korean learners who can lead the nation into the globalized world. Especially Korean government emphasized two missions in the educational field: improving English skills and cultivating cultural competence. Through analyzing the cultural contents of English language textbooks in South Korea, this research tried to prove that Korean education policies are adequate for cultivating the cultural competence of Korean young learners in the globalized world. The results of the English textbooks analysis prove that English language textbooks include diverse cultural representations and a deep understanding of the cultures different from our own, which implies that English language textbooks in South Korea can lead an essential role in cultivating the cultural competence of Korean EFL learners.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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