

EXAMINING INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL ISSUES IN PALESTINIAN ENGLISH TEACHING TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract: This study examines international and intercultural issues in the *English for Palestine* textbook series, specifically evaluating intercultural comparisons, mutual representations, and relations in terms of their effectiveness in enhancing students' cross-cultural communication skills. The examination of the textbooks employed a qualitative methodology, enriched by the inclusion of quantitative components. The findings show that the textbooks under investigation comprise an insufficient and inadequate amount of international and intercultural issues, consisting of celebratory topics of surface culture with very little attention paid to conflictive aspects of deep culture. This study is a reminder of the importance of appropriate intercultural components in developing students' critical thinking skills and minimizing intercultural misunderstandings. Hence, it aims to sensitize stakeholders and teachers to the potential losses associated with poor representations of international and intercultural issues in English teaching textbooks. Consequently, it urges them to take action by either amending the textbooks or using supplementary material to compensate for the identified lapses.

Keywords: international, intercultural competence, culture teaching, English for Palestine, EFL textbooks

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Earlier models of culture teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have been noted to refer only to teaching certain cultural aspects of the target culture by comparing and contrasting its features to their counterparts in the source culture. Recent models of culture teaching, however, aim at teaching cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help EFL learners to interact with a broader audience (i.e., international) than the native speakers of English (see, e.g., Byram's [1997] model of intercultural communicative competence).

This shift in culture teaching, which came as a response to the status of English as a lingua franca, has resulted from numerous arguments that aimed to enhance the cultural content of EFL textbooks to develop students' competence in cross-cultural communication. For example, Oxford (1995) argues against the traditional tendency of exposing students to only the positive aspects of the target culture. She stresses the need for a balanced approach, which incorporates the negative aspects along with the positive ones (examples of negative aspects are homelessness and unemployment, while generosity and hospitality are considered positive cultural aspects). Rodríguez (2015) further explains that controversial aspects can be introduced to students

“through critical approaches based on debate and contestation rather than just learning passively about the neutral and congratulatory aspects that characterize a given community” (p. 170). Hames-Garcia (2003) argued that such simple cultural representations encourage students to become passive learners by exposing them to one-sided views, which do not help improve their critical thinking skills and knowledge of controversial issues.

Similar to the previous arguments, calls for deep cultural representations have recently gained momentum. Contrary to surface culture, deep culture can be defined as the “invisible meanings associated with a region, a group of people, or subcultures that reflect their own particular sociocultural norms, lifestyles, beliefs, and values” (Rodríguez, 2015, p. 168). Surface culture, on the other hand, is made up of “Culture (with a capital ‘C’), including fine arts, literature, drama, classical music and popular music, and other visible aspects such as popular games, cooking or forms of dress” (Bent, 2017, p. 16). According to Schein (2010), superficial representations of culture may lead students to use their own cultural patterns to make sense of the presented cultural aspects without paying attention to relativity when studying them, which leads to misunderstandings and false perceptions of the target culture. Another danger of poor contextualized cultural representations is the inability of students to practice or grasp certain foreign cultural norms, which usually results from presenting cultural patterns as inexplicable and static facts or behaviours (Schein, 2010).

In light of the aforementioned, this paper studies the international and intercultural issues incorporated in the *English for Palestine* textbook series. It investigates to what extent these elements are created in line with the most recent paradigms of culture teaching. The study comprehensively analyses the international and intercultural issues in the entire *English for Palestine* textbook series. Hence, the results can be of great value for Palestinian stakeholders and material makers, who can use them to amend or supplement the coursebooks with the necessary material to compensate for any lack of intercultural issues in the EFL classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In today’s world, where English has become the main tool of international contact, the need to request our priorities as EFL teachers has become inevitable. EFL learners now need skills that would help them succeed in intercultural communication more than ever since they are more likely to use English with non-native English speakers than with native ones. Thus, questions related to the appropriateness of EFL textbooks in improving students’ performance in intercultural encounters have recently gained more momentum.

According to Heyward (2002), catering to students’ current needs called for a shift from a cultural approach, which advocated for the acquisition of cultural facts of the target culture (e.g., Hirsch, 1987), to an intercultural approach whereby students were encouraged not only to acquire cultural facts but also to develop skills and attitudes that would enable them to succeed in cross-cultural encounters. Accordingly, an appropriate international and intercultural component in EFL textbooks is deemed necessary for the implementation of the latter approach.

However, it is important to clarify the difference between the terms ‘international’ and ‘intercultural’ before proceeding with the description of the study. Heyward (2002) explains that “while the term ‘international’ gives primacy to nationality as the presumed salient and

significant identity construct, the more significant identity construct highlighted by the term ‘intercultural’ is culture” (p. 10). Thus, international issues refer to interactions or events involving multiple countries or nations. Intercultural issues, on the other hand, pertain to interactions that occur between different cultures, irrespective of whether those cultures belong to different countries or exist within the same nation. It should be noted that the study does not use both terms (i.e., international and intercultural) separately since it is not considered necessary in doing so. This approach stems from recognizing their equal importance in fostering students’ communication skills within intercultural contexts.

Discussions about the importance of an appropriate international and intercultural constituent in EFL textbooks have attracted many scholars. Benefits of adopting an intercultural approach in the EFL classroom include—although not exclusively—developing critical cultural awareness of one’s own culture and the target cultures (Baker, 2011; Ho, 2009), nurturing intercultural empathy (Bredella, 1992; Walton, 2013), reducing international tensions and misunderstandings (Chlopek, 2008; Pashmforoosh & Babaii, 2015) and promoting cultural relativity (García, 2005).

Driven by the aforementioned gains, a number of scholars have analysed the intercultural content of certain EFL textbooks. García (2005), for instance, has examined fourteen EFL textbooks used in Spain to teach students at secondary level (referred to as *Bachillerato* in Spanish). The study aimed to evaluate the textbooks’ international and intercultural content regarding its potential for promoting intercultural competence. The findings showed that most of the textbooks under analysis were heavily dominated by the British culture, which normally has been presented in isolation from other cultures. Besides, intercultural comparisons and representations have been noted to be scarce.

Similar findings have been reported in a study by Pasand et al. (2018). Three EFL textbooks used in Iranian junior high schools were analysed using Hillard’s (2014) framework. The analysis has shown that most of the textbooks’ space was allocated to tackle the local culture, leaving very little space for the intercultural component. The results have also demonstrated an unbalanced representation of positive and negative aspects of local and international cultures.

In another study that targeted three EFL textbooks used at upper-secondary schools in Vietnam, Nguyen (2011) investigated speech acts (e.g., advising, agreeing, and apologizing) regarding their appropriateness to promote communication at an intercultural level. The analysed pragmatic aspects were presented in relation to communications that were taking place between Vietnamese and Asian characters, with very few cases targeting other cultures. Hence, the incorporated intercultural component had low value for promoting intercultural competence.

On the other hand, research on international and intercultural issues in the English for Palestine textbook series has been scarce, focusing only on a few textbooks of the entire series. The analysed textbooks mostly belonged to the secondary and upper-secondary school levels. Two of the most recent studies (i.e., Faraj et al., 2021; Shamallakh, 2020) have confirmed the lack of an adequate international and intercultural constituent in the English for Palestine textbooks 6, 7, and 12. The importance of this present study stems from the fact that it is the first to provide a comprehensive analysis of the international and intercultural constituent of the entire *English for Palestine* textbook series.

Whereas previous research on international and intercultural issues has examined the topic from different perspectives, such as pragmatic features in relation to intercultural competence, the current study uses Risager's (1991) definition of international and intercultural issues as a guiding tool to formulate its research questions. Her definition of international and intercultural issues includes topics that cover comparisons between foreign and local cultures and mutual representations of and relations between different cultures (Risager, 1991). In other words, the current study aims to describe all the cultural contents in the textbooks under investigation that deal with representations of various cultures and international relations of cooperation and conflict (Risager, 1991). More specifically, the international and intercultural issues under investigation comprise the following categories, which were rephrased by Gray (2006) as follows:

- “Comparisons between the foreign country and the pupil's own
- Mutual representations, images, stereotypes
- Mutual relations: cultural power and dominance, co-operation and conflict” (p. 66)

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the international and intercultural components of the *English for Palestine* textbook series regarding its proportion and the appropriateness of its topics in depicting a realistic and deep image of the cultures represented. To do so, three research questions were formulated as follows:

1. How much space do international and intercultural issues occupy in the *English for Palestine* textbook series?
2. How deep and realistic are the international topics included in the textbooks?
3. What international comparisons, mutual representations, and mutual relations are present in the textbooks?

METHOD

The study uses a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach (Johnson et al., 2007), where qualitative research is emphasized, complemented by quantitative elements. This approach was deemed suitable for carrying out a textbook evaluation because, as Harden and Thomas (2005) claimed, texts are hybrid in nature. Raich et al. (2014) clarify that “while the content, evaluations, and emotions hidden in a text are qualitative in nature, frequency, or spatial proximity of mentions are quantitative aspects of the data” (p. 738). Hence, this approach was used in an attempt to provide the most comprehensive image of the international and intercultural features under analysis, which entailed covering both quantifiable and non-quantifiable data.

Materials

The selection of textbooks for this study was based on their extensive popularity and widespread adoption in Palestinian state schools. These particular EFL textbooks hold exclusive

approval from the Palestinian Ministry of Education for use in the region's state schools. Consequently, they were regarded as having more significant influence than other Palestinian EFL textbooks.

The *English for Palestine* textbook series is made up of 24 textbooks. As the name suggests, the textbooks were exclusively designed to teach English to Palestinian students. They were written to cover the entire school level, which is twelve grades. The coursebooks for the first ten levels are named using the grade number and a letter referring to either the first or second semesters. For example, *Pupil's Book 1A* and *Pupil's Book 1B* are used for the first and second semesters of the first grade, respectively. As for the eleventh and twelfth grades, two textbooks are used for each grade during the entire academic year. The names of the books are *Pupil's Book 11*, *Pupil's Book 11 Reading Plus*, *Pupil's Book 12*, and *Pupil's Book 12 Reading Plus* (see Appendix).

Throughout the results section, the textbooks under analysis will be grouped based on either the school grade they are used for or the educational stage they belong to. The results of the quantitative analysis will refer to each grade coursebook separately, using their abbreviated forms (see Appendix). Therefore, the twenty-four textbooks will be arranged into twelve groups, from the first grade (age 6) to the twelfth grade (age 18). The titles of the first twenty textbooks have been abbreviated in the same way: using the initials of the phrase 'Pupil's Book' followed by the grade number (e.g., the first-grade textbooks are referred to as PB1). However, as the titles of the textbooks used at the eleventh and twelfth grades are different, they were abbreviated differently: the initials of the phrases 'Pupil's Book' and 'Reading Plus' were put together using the sign '&', followed by the grade number (PB&RP 11, PB&RP 12). However, throughout the qualitative analysis, key findings were made with regard to the educational stages. Thus, the coursebooks were referred to as *elementary*, *upper elementary*, *secondary*, and *upper secondary* textbooks. This decision has been taken since carrying out an individual analysis of each textbook would be impossible and redundant because many textbooks, especially those designed to teach close levels, have been observed to share almost the same features.

Data Collection

Before starting the data collection process, decisions had to be made with regard to what texts could be considered part of international and intercultural issues. Thus, the decision was made to exclude all literary works (i.e., poems, short stories, novels, and plays) since they are usually difficult to classify into either international/intercultural or culture-specific. Besides, the cultural content represented in a visual format was excluded. Hence, the analysis included all texts represented in textual format and depicted in the three categories listed earlier, which together comprise the international and intercultural issues under investigation.

For the quantitative part to be realized accurately, the space that the identified international and intercultural issues occupy in the textbooks was measured in cm². For this purpose, an online software that measures space on PDF files was used. The PDF measuring tool, referred to on the website, is powered by PDFTron and can be accessed on the internet free of charge. Thus, each textbook in PDF format was uploaded to the website before measuring the space that the targeted cultural elements occupy. Next, the values of the measured space were added up to a total

number. Finally, the resulting sums were converted into percentages based on their ratio in comparison to the overall space of the textbooks, which was also measured in cm². A simple calculation of frequencies of international and intercultural issues was also used to know the exact number of negative/positive and deep/surface issues in the textbooks.

Regarding the collection of qualitative data, a close examination of the *English for Palestine* textbooks was carried out to explore the aforementioned international and intercultural issues. After being thoroughly examined, the issues under investigation were organized into the three categories, i.e., comparisons between cultures, mutual representations, and mutual relations. Finally, they were related to four more categories, representing the school stages they belong to, i.e., elementary, upper elementary, secondary, and upper secondary.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The resulting numerical data are shown in three tables in the Findings section. Whereas Table 1 presents the space allocated to international and intercultural issues compared to the overall space of the textbooks, Table 2 and Table 3 display the topics of international and intercultural issues distributed over negative/positive and deep/surface categories. The quantitative analysis made comparisons between the textbooks and the aforementioned categories.

Qualitative Data

The identified international and intercultural issues were investigated regarding their degree of reality, the possibility of promoting stereotypes, and their value and quality. Then, the findings were presented under three subcategories: intercultural comparisons, mutual representations, and mutual relations. Examples extracted from the *English for Palestine* textbooks were used to clarify and highlight the presented data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings section is divided into two parts. The first part answers the first and second research questions, which aim to give a clear image of how much international and intercultural content is present in the *English for Palestine* textbooks and whether this content is adequately represented to promote a deep and realistic understanding of the embedded foreign cultures. The second part, on the other hand, targets the third research question, which aims to evaluate the incorporated international and intercultural issues regarding their potential for promoting critical cultural awareness, intercultural empathy, and understanding of international cultures.

Findings

Quantitative Results

As shown in Table 1, all the textbooks under investigation have allocated a small proportion of their overall space to address international and intercultural issues. Underrepresentation of

international aspects is clearly noticed in the textbooks PB1, PB2, PB3, PB6, and PB8, which have no mention of any international or intercultural issues. Slight improvement is noted in PB4, PB7, PB9, PB10 and PB11 (7%, 2.87%, 8.64%, 7.70%, and 5.39%, respectively). A relatively high representation of international and intercultural issues (12.34% and 11.25%) occurs only in PB5 and PB&RP 12.

Table 1. Proportion of International and Intercultural Issues in the Textbooks

	PB1	PB2	PB3	PB4	PB5	PB6	PB7	PB8	PB9	PB10	PB&RP11	PB&RP12
International culture	0%	0%	0%	7%	12.34%	0%	2.87%	0%	8.64%	7.70%	5.39%	11.25%
Total in cm ²	49.350	49.350	49.350	49.350	54.285	55.107	55.737	64.124	66.470	72.726	100.756	101.990

*Total in cm² = total space of textbooks

It was important to see how deep their topics are to get a clearer image of the integrated international and intercultural issues. As shown in Table 2, the analysis revealed that twenty-four topics out of the total number of the tackled topics, i.e., twenty-eight, belong to surface culture. The four remaining topics touch on deep cultural aspects. Almost all the textbooks included only intercultural topics of the surface culture type, except for PB&RP 12, which included three deep topics compared to four surface topics.

Table 2. Classification of Intercultural Issues into Surface and Deep Topics

No. of surface/deep intercultural topics	PB1	PB2	PB3	PB4	PB5	PB6	PB7	PB8	PB9	PB10	PB&RP11	PB&RP12
Surface	0	0	0	1	3	0	4	0	4	5	3	4
Deep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

The topics of international and intercultural issues were also inspected to observe up to what point they represent a realistic or unrealistic image of life. Therefore, the intercultural topics were distributed into positive/neutral and negative topics. An overwhelming dominance of positive and neutral topics over negative ones in all the textbooks were clearly shown in Table 3 below. Except for PB1, PB2, PB3, PB6, and PB8, which have no intercultural content, the rest of the schoolbooks include a higher number of positive/neutral topics. The only two textbooks to incorporate negative topics are PB9 and PB10. However, the negative topics are still less than the positive ones. They are still insignificant, though, as there is only one negative topic for PB9 and two for PB10.

Table 3. Classification of Intercultural Issues into Positive/Neutral and Negative Topics

No. of positive/negative intercultural topics	PB1	PB2	PB3	PB4	PB5	PB6	PB7	PB8	PB9	PB10	PB&RP P11	PB&RP P12
Positive/neutral	0	0	0	1	3	0	4	0	3	3	4	7
Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0

Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis, which aims to answer the third research question, comprises three parts: intercultural comparisons, mutual representations, and mutual relations.

Intercultural Comparisons

Intercultural comparisons play a major role in opening students' eyes to similarities and differences between their own and other foreign cultures. Comparisons can cover issues related to the Palestinian and British cultures or reach beyond that to cover a wide range of international cultures. They can also touch upon deep cultural issues or be limited to superficial facts.

Overall, there is a steady increase in the number and quality of comparisons as we move towards higher levels. Throughout the elementary textbooks, only a few comparisons touch upon direct information about school timing and weather in Palestine and the UK. An example of that can be seen in PB4 B, which shows two pictures of an example of a school in the UK and Palestine. The pictures show a swarm of Palestinian pupils walking through what seems to be a school owned by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and another picture of a British school where children are reading and playing quietly with beautiful scenery behind them (see Figure 1).

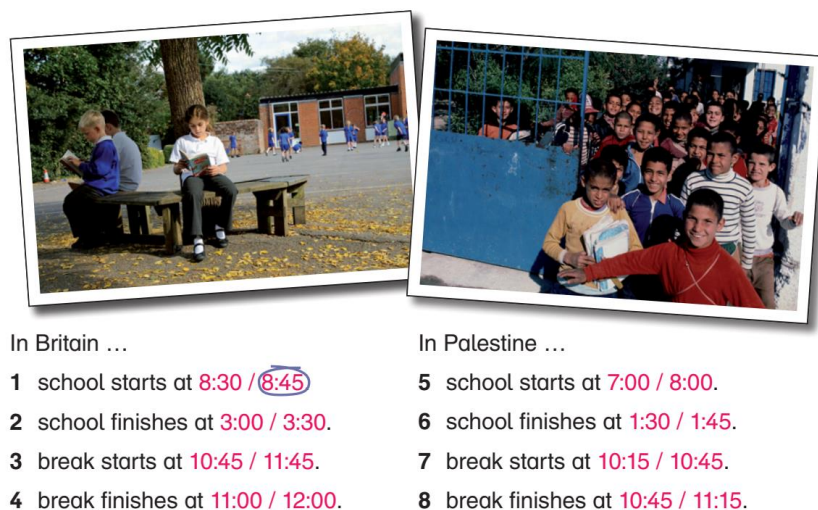


Figure 1. An Example of Misrepresentation of Local Culture in *Pupil's Book 4B* (Arnold, 2011, p. 18).

The number and intercultural scope of the comparisons change at the secondary and upper-secondary levels. Starting with PB7 A and ending with RP12, countries such as China, Russia, Bangladesh, Finland, Algeria, Palestine, or the UK become the center of intercultural comparisons. Around ten comparisons are included in the secondary textbooks. The comparisons cover a wide range of social (wedding customs), educational (education systems),

economic (time concept), and political (government and political systems) topics. The topics of the comparisons are low-level, which cover mainly contrastive information, with very little attempt to compare attitudes and values of different cultures (see Figure 2). Similar to the rest of the incorporated comparisons, this example states facts about how weddings are celebrated in various countries. The last two lines in the text stress the difference in wedding customs around the world in a sentence that reads, “Round the world, wedding customs are very different, but they are all for the same purpose: to put a man and a woman on the road to a happy future as husband and wife” (Macfarland, 2013, p. 44). Although the sentence stresses the shared purpose of various wedding customs, it also exaggerates the differences in wedding customs, which are actually not significantly different.

What a wedding!

Everyone loves a wedding, but people celebrate weddings in a thousand different ways. Here are some of the most interesting customs.

Before the wedding: In the Philippines, the bride and her assistants must all wear the same dresses. They do this to stop bad spirits from finding the bride and carrying her away.

At the wedding: A groom in Spain gives his bride her wedding ring and then a little money in order to show that he will work hard for everything they need.

At the wedding party: In many countries, the bride and groom both hold the knife in order to cut the wedding cake together. This shows that they will be a good team. In Scotland, people only eat half of the cake at the wedding. They keep the other to eat when the first child arrives.

After the wedding: In Palestine, the bride sticks some bread dough to the front door of her new home. This is to show that she and her husband will stay together all their lives.

Round the world, wedding customs are very different, but they are all for the same purpose: to put a man and a woman on the road to a happy future together as husband and wife.




Figure 2. An Example of Superficial Comparisons of International Wedding Customs in *Pupil's book 8B* (Macfarland, 2013, p. 44).

Mutual Representations

Mutual representations are discussed from a nationality point of view. In other words, the main concern here is to find out how the self is contrasted to the other at the international level. Mutual representations can take the form of images and stereotypes about various cultures. Stereotypes in the EFL textbooks could be direct or indirect. Direct stereotyping is usually a straightforward claim about self or other, whereby certain characteristics are attributed to them. An example of direct stereotyping is the claim that Americans are monolingual. Indirect stereotypes, conversely, can take the form of visuals or be embedded indirectly in the texts

without explicit references being made. Such stereotypes usually need a scrutinizing eye to be recognized.

Direct stereotypes were spotted only on three occasions. The first occurred in PB9 B when the main character Hadeel, who had just arrived from the USA to visit her aunt in Palestine, referred to the Palestinian neighbours as more helpful than the American ones back in the USA. Addressing her aunt, who was cooking for their neighbour, as she was going through a tough time, she said, “If something like that happens back home, neighbours don’t usually help as much. You seem to have a closer community here” (Macfarland, 2014, p. 4). Aunt Nada, the Palestinian character, replied with a simple confirmation of what Hadeel had said, which reflected a simplified and non-critical way of thinking. Another stereotype was included in the same textbook, describing how time was perceived in different cultures. The idea was presented in connection to business training only with no reference to the cultural roots of such differences or sparking a discussion in the post-reading questions over the validity of such stereotypes, which would have surely enabled students to think about themselves and others in a more critical way than just taking things for granted. It is worth mentioning that invitations to discuss the validity of such stereotypes were not found at all throughout the entire textbook series.

Indirect stereotypes, on the other hand, are related to the depiction of both Palestine and Britain as monoethnic societies. While this claim could be acceptable about the Palestinian society, it is not the case for the British society, which is ethnically diverse without question. This representation is indirectly introduced to the students by means of illustrating the textbooks’ main characters, who are supposed to be British, with blonde hair and a fair skin complexion, with no references to any type of another British person who would have different hair and skin colours. Another visual reinforces the view of Africa as a poor conflict zone, as depicted in Figure 3, which represents African people as refugees who receive volunteer donations. The picture shows a group of African people who seem to have fled a war (referred to as ‘a man-made disaster’ in the textbook) while being helped by white people.

There has been fighting in Africa, and hundreds of families have been leaving their homes to find safety. Volunteers are helping to build a camp for the victims of this man-made disaster.

- 1 A large plane is dropping food over the camp.
Food is being dropped over the camp by a large plane.
- 2 People are carrying bags of food to somewhere safe.
Bags of food are being carried somewhere safe.
- 3 Two engineers are setting up equipment to provide clean water.
- 4 Two more engineers are looking at plans for a new road.
- 5 People are building simple homes for the families who are arriving.
- 6 A nurse is checking babies and young children.
- 7 People are cutting up wood to use for cooking.
- 8 A newspaper reporter is asking people questions.



Figure 3. An Example of Reinforcement of Students’ Previous Perception in *Pupil’s book 9B* (Macfarland, 2014, p. 79).

Mutual Relations

A close inspection of the coursebooks under study has revealed that the textbooks used at the elementary and upper elementary levels depict only mutual relations based on cooperation at the characters' level rather than at the level of countries. This trend seems to change at the secondary level, with PB9 tackling almost three cases of cooperation that take place at the international level. The cases concern saving the oceans, helping war victims, and doing community work. Some other references to early Muslim conquests of Jerusalem and Spain are also found on the same level. The references are straightforward, providing only facts about the heroic deeds of the Muslim leaders. Pride of the Muslim history is clearly shown in the dialogues, describing Muslim rule in Andalusia and Jerusalem as a golden age.

The upper secondary level, on the other hand, includes more texts on international cooperation, conflict, and dominance issues. While cooperation issues are still tackled the most, topics related to conflict and dominance received less coverage. Texts on international cooperation covered sports (construction of a skate park by the British group SkatePal, RP11, p. 18), political (mediation in international conflicts by the United Nations, PB10 B, p. 75), and scientific domains (British/Palestinian joint research, PB10 A, p. 4). Conflict topics, on the other hand, included the devastating effects of Israeli settlements on the Palestinian landscape, Palestinian refugees around the world, and the Nakba (i.e., the permanent displacement of Palestinians in 1948). Topics related to Americanization and decision-making in the International Olympic Committee formed examples of power and dominance relations.

The comprehension questions about cooperation and power issues following the reading texts are of the content and language-question types. Very few questions are of the affect-question type, aiming to assess students' feelings and attitudes towards the information in the reading texts (Freeman, 2014). Such questions of low value do not offer much for developing students' critical thinking.

Discussion

So far, the results have shown that the amount of the incorporated culture dealing with international and intercultural issues is very scarce in most *English for Palestine* textbooks. Even in cases where there was slightly more culture of the international type, the content lacked representation of deep topics, rendering the international comparisons to be of low value. Similarly, mutual representations were found to promote stereotypical descriptions of both self and other. On the other hand, mutual relations have been restricted to covering issues related to cooperation at the elementary, upper elementary, and secondary levels. Very few cases where issues related to conflict and power were covered in the upper secondary level. This could be justified since the target age group does not allow for a wider representation of such topics. However, the incorporated topics should have been done at a deeper level.

The fact that the *English for Palestine* textbook series lacks sufficient and adequate representation of international and intercultural issues indicates that the textbook series does not support students' acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to succeed in intercultural communication. This unbalanced representation, as argued by Pasand et al. (2018), can encourage "a one-sided worldview in which learners prefer particular nationalities, groups,

races, and genders over others” (p. 65). To address this issue, Murray (2022) stresses that avoiding the formation of such one-sided perspectives requires incorporating multiple voices and opinions about a wide variety of minorities and nationalities in school textbooks.

Similarly, the importance of including deep and contentious cultural topics in EFL textbooks stems from the fact that such realistic representations, as argued by Rodríguez (2015), can help students think critically about issues related to racism, political conflicts, dominance, and gender. Awayed-Bishara (2021) suggests that such involvement encourages students to participate in social change, which is essential in defending the rights of minorities and making the world a safer place for all. Certainly, the visual illustration that compares schools in the UK and Palestine stands out from the rest of the comparisons. The picture, introduced to ten-year-olds, communicates a negative message about their schools as crowded and untidy. British schools, on the other hand, are portrayed as beautiful, quiet, and friendly (see Figure 1). Such comparisons can be misleading, as the Palestinian school referred to is a refugee school, whereas the British school seems to be a state or private one. Instead, the writer could have used the picture of a state school to make the comparison fairer for the Palestinian students. As argued by Ndura (2004), such representation reinforces students’ previous views of the represented culture, which are usually stereotypical. Thus, students’ perception of the UK as a more advanced country than their own is expected to be reinforced.

Moreover, stereotypes are based on a collective judgment of a certain culture, which contradicts the current view of culture by prominent scholars in the EFL field, who see culture as heterogeneous and dynamic (Atkinson, 1999; Byram, 1992; Clifford, 1992; Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; Kubota, 1999; Oxford, 1995). In fact, mutual representations have become more appropriate to be made on certain age or social groups (e.g., waged women in Spain vs. waged women in Palestine) than on entire cultures since static cultures no longer exist. Thus, it is recommended to avoid making collective stereotypes that view different countries as fixed and homogeneous because they do not make a place for critical thinking and reasoning based on context (Byram, 1992; Clifford, 1992). As a result, claiming that Palestinians have closer social ties than Americans does not seem to go along with the current views of culture. Similarly, visual illustrations can have an equal or even bigger effect on confirming existing false representations of other cultures, as in the case of the picture that depicts Africans fleeing from regional conflicts and receiving humanitarian aid from Western people.

As for issues related to cooperation, conflict, and power, one might justify the underrepresentation of such topics at the elementary level due to the necessity of linguistic simplification. However, this lack was compensated at the upper secondary level, touching on various topics. In this context, García (2005) confirms that this type of topic can be used as an opportunity to “examine how misunderstandings often occur in intercultural contacts and how they can be resolved in the future” (p. 67). Thus, the incorporation of more topics of mutual relations would be beneficial.

Overall, although the number of international and intercultural issues in the EFL textbooks is important, their quality makes a real difference in enhancing students’ competence in intercultural communication.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study focused on the importance of integrating adequate international and intercultural content in Palestinian EFL textbooks. The analysis employed a mixed methods approach, with a predominant qualitative component, to evaluate the appropriateness of the international and intercultural themes within the English for Palestine textbook series. The results have shown that the aspects under analysis were not represented adequately, rendering the books less likely to enhance students' competence in cross-cultural communication. The inadequacy was particularly evident from the amount of space the international and intercultural issues occupied in the textbooks and the presentation of international comparisons, mutual representations, and mutual relations.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) by focusing on the potential of EFL textbooks for promoting intercultural competence. The findings have substantial implications at the levels of pedagogy, student development, and professional practices. At the pedagogical level, this study can inform educators and curriculum developers in TESOL settings about significant considerations when integrating intercultural content within EFL textbooks, which could improve teaching materials and curriculum design. This is essential in enhancing students' communicative skills in intercultural contexts. As for the professional level, acknowledging the potential of EFL textbooks in fostering intercultural competence can prompt educators to adapt their instructional practices and engage in continuous professional development. Ultimately, the insights of the study contribute significantly to nurturing a more globally competent and culturally sensitive generation of language learners.

Recommendations based on the findings of the current study are directed toward English teachers, material makers, and stakeholders. They are encouraged to seek ways to compensate for or/and amend the lack of adequate international and intercultural issues in the *English for Palestine* textbook series. Whereas English teachers are recommended to use supplementary materials, syllabus designers and stakeholders can create an updated version of the series or start working on another one with up-to-date international content.

It is worth mentioning that this study has only focused on the international and intercultural aspects of the EFL textbooks regarding their potential for promoting students' competence in cross-cultural communication. However, other cultural aspects of the textbooks (e.g., visuals) have not been investigated. Therefore, further research is required to depict a clearer picture of the *English for Palestine* textbook series regarding its international and intercultural components from a variety of perspectives and analyses.

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Appendix. The English for Palestine Textbooks and Their Abbreviated Forms

Textbooks	Grade	Age	Abbreviated Form	Stage
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 1A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	1st	6–7	PB1	Elementary
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 1B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 2A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	2nd	7–8	PB2	
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 2B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 3A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	3rd	8–9	PB3	
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 3B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 4A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	4th	9–10	PB4	Upper elementary
Arnold, W. (2011). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 4B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Arnold, W. (2012). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 5A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	5th	10–11	PB5	
Arnold, W. (2012). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 5B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Arnold, W. (2013). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 6A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	6th	11–12	PB6	
Arnold, W. (2013). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 6B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Coates, N., & Mauchline, F. (2013). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 7A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	7th	12–13	PB7	Secondary
Coates, N. (2013). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 7B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Macfarland, M. (2013). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 8A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	8th	13–14	PB8	
Macfarland, M. (2013). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 8B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				

Textbooks	Grade	Age	Abbreviated Form	Stage
Macfarland, M. (2014). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 9A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	9th	14–15	PB9	Upper secondary
Macfarland, M. (2014). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 9B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Macfarland, M. (2014). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 10A</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.	10th	15–16	PB10	
Macfarland, M. (2014). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 10B</i> . Macmillan Publishers Limited.				
Baxter, S. (2015). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 11</i> . Springer Nature Limited.	11th	16–17	PB&RP 11	
Coates, N. (2015). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 11 Reading Plus</i> . Springer Nature Limited.				
Baxter, S. (2015). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 12</i> . Springer Nature Limited.	12th	17–18	PB&RP 12	
Baxter, S. (2015). <i>English for Palestine: Pupil's book 12 Reading Plus</i> . Springer Nature Limited.				