



## Evaluation of textbook series 'Life' in terms of cultural components\*

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### Abstract

This study aimed to identify elements related to 'intercultural communicative competence' in the textbook series Life at A1 and A2 level published by National Geographic Learning which incorporates plentiful photographic content. Activities in the textbooks, based on the four skills and visuals, were analyzed through a checklist focusing on source, target and international cultural elements as well as big c and little c features. To explore opinions about the cultural content of the textbooks, a questionnaire was applied to six lecturers from two universities in İstanbul who used them in their English preparatory classes. An adapted version of the instrument was also applied to 26 students. Four of the six lecturers were interviewed. Findings indicated that the textbooks were quite rich in terms of covering a variety of cultures except for direct references to the source culture, which is Turkish. Big C and little c themes were found to be fairly balanced except for overrepresentation of geography due to the textbooks' National Geographic content. While the textbooks were generally satisfactory, guidance for teachers needs to be more developed for their effective implementation in the classroom in order to integrate cultural components into lessons.

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**Keywords:** Cultural components, English as a lingua franca (ELF), intercultural communicative competence, teaching culture, textbook evaluation

## 1. Introduction

The integration of culture into English as a foreign language (EFL) classes has attracted much attention recently as a result of changes in the status of English and where influences are observable in language teaching methodologies regarding its lingua franca role (Canagarajah, 2006; Maley, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). With English becoming an international language owing to worldwide political and economic developments, educational settings have been influenced by its current role, i.e. the way English language and culture is taught has been updated when it became unclear as to whom English belonged. Perceived as a world language, its culture is now thought of as a world culture.

In this respect, the definition of culture by Corder and Meyerhoff (2007) may help illustrate the situation since they regard culture as dynamic in the sense that it is 'reproduced' as the individuals who share it alter it. The current study believes culture to be an active phenomenon. In addition,

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‘shared by a group of people’, or referring to culture as common practices, beliefs and values, hints at communication between people being facilitated through a shared language. Culture is formed through language, and language is shaped through culture; therefore, it is clear their interaction brings them alive. In fact, they represent two sides of the same coin (Derrick, 2008). It is inevitable therefore that foreign language (FL) classes include cultural components, which can be provided through classroom materials or real life experiences.

The spread of English has resulted in its becoming a lingua franca (Canagarajah, 2006) and, as an international language, is said to have more non-native speakers than native speakers (Maley, 2009). This has made the relationship between language and culture more complex, changeable and emergent (Baker, 2008), with interactions by people from different cultures.

The impact of this shift has been observed in educational settings as well and the appearance of the notion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is one shifting thought about teaching culture in the FL classroom. Developed as a reaction to Chomsky’s notion of linguistic competence, Canale and Swain (1980) contributed to the concept of communicative competence with four sub-competences to be acquired, namely, grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic. However, these sub-competences proved insufficient for learners’ needs in today’s multicultural and globalized world. For this reason, it would be unrealistic to take only the target cultures of English as a reference in FLCs. A new competence should be inserted into the existing four competences with a specific emphasis on the new role of English as a world language (Alptekin, 2002). Additionally, the eminence of ICC has been emphasized as critical to achieving successful communication in EFL contexts as linguistic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary items (Baker, 2008). Together with this, the ultimate goal of an intercultural approach to language education is not so much ‘native speaker competence’ but rather ‘ICC’ (e.g., Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 1997). Corbett (2003) defined ICC as ‘The ability to understand the language and behaviour of the target community, and explain it to members of the “home” community – and vice versa... [A]n intercultural approach trains learners to be “diplomats” who are able to view different cultures from a perspective of informed understanding’ (2003, p. 208). Thus, teaching culture has become a matter of integrating intercultural dimensions into language classrooms (Lessard-Clouston, 1997).

As a result of these changes, language learners need more exposure to intercultural situations to improve their language skills. Ihm (1996) states that EFL students often have little chance to experience genuine cultural contact and the EFL classroom is therefore the prime source of cultural information. Mackey (2003) also remarks that the cultural content of materials used in the EFL context should not be ascribed solely to native speaker cultures but should cover world cultures. In this respect, EFL textbooks become a significant source in presenting cultural information to FL learners systematically, especially when it is not possible to provide them with real-life environments.

It is assumed that the textbook series Life should contribute to the development of ICC by dealing with geography, as one of the essential cultural components (Razi, 2012), since the series benefits from the National Geographic (NG) database where a wide spectrum of worldwide information is available. Integration of worldwide cultural elements unavoidably addresses criticism related to limiting cultural values in FL teaching to the culture(s) of L1 speakers (e.g., MacDonald, Badger, & Dasli, 2006; McKay, 2003). ICC awareness enables (re)building learners’ schema with familiarization of a variety of cultures. Such an expectation has its roots in Bartlett’s (1932) schema theory, with specific emphasis on cultural schema, a term which was later re-introduced by Yule (1996), being considered as a culture-specific extension of content schema (Ketchum, 2006). Thus, integration of the NG database might be beneficial in providing relevant schematic knowledge and/or schema activation for the receptive language skills since the database provides authentic materials that can increase learners’ motivation. The following quote from Young (1996, p. 182) provides evidence for such an

expectation: ‘Learning intercultural communication would proceed better ... through relatively complex and carefully-constructed simulations of culturally-embedded institutional talk contexts, and focused not on rules but on strategies and critique’.

### 1.1. Target, source and international cultures

Two related perceptions, namely, English as an International Language (EIL) and World Englishes (WE), have resulted in various types of culture being categorized as ‘Target’, ‘Source’ and ‘International’ cultures by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). This categorization is adopted in this study. By *source culture* elements in textbooks, the materials that reflect the learners’ own culture is intended. Source culture materials are significant in that they are one of the key concepts to promoting ICC in classrooms (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002), as learners becoming aware of their own culture is one of the aims. *Target culture* materials, on the other hand, refer to Kachru’s (1992) inner circle countries, mostly denoted as British and American cultures. Including this type of culture in ELT materials has been criticized strongly by several scholars, such as Alptekin (1993, 2002), since English does not belong solely to British or American culture any more. Alptekin, in essence, criticized the situation where learners of English are exposed extensively to the target cultures and textbook writers, consciously or unconsciously, usually reflect an ideal image of British or American culture. Finally, *international culture* materials consist of activities or examples from outer and expanding circle countries, which the rationale of today’s teaching culture supports for inclusion in textbooks. Alptekin argues that integrating international culture material into lessons should be embraced as it highlights the diversity of world schematic knowledge and assists learners in developing ICC skills, such as positive attitudes towards other cultures/otherness.

### 1.2. Big C and little c cultures

The so-termed *big C* and *little c* themes of culture form another aspect of the current study since their inclusion is a significant feature of cultural content in textbooks. As previously mentioned, the definition of culture has changed over the years. First defined as high culture, which is *big C*, *little c* features have also been specified as the notion of culture shifted from a static to a dynamic view. Chastain (1988) defined *big C culture* as one which is related to contributing to a community and its people such as with the political, economic, historical, literary / artistic, scientific and geographical features of a community. By *big C culture*, Lafayette (1975) refers to features recognizing and explaining geographical monuments, historical events, major institutions (administrative, political, religious, educational, etc.), and major artistic monuments. *Little c culture*, on the other hand, has been defined as features of communities related to daily routines such as food, holidays, lifestyle, customs and values (Pulverness, 1995; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). This recognises and explains everyday active cultural patterns such eating, shopping and greeting people; passive patterns such as social stratification, marriage and work; and how to act appropriately in common everyday situations (Lafayette, 1997).

These two different concepts of culture are demonstrated in Hall’s (1976) *iceberg model*. The visible part of the iceberg is related to *big C* culture while the invisible part indicates *little c* culture features. Considering the dynamic nature of culture, the cultural content of FL textbooks is designed accordingly. The activities to which learners are exposed should contain not only *big C* themes but also *little c* themes so that learners perceive the dynamic sense of culture, since the socio-cultural values, norms, beliefs and assumptions provided through *little c* culture help EFL students better perceive how to communicate in multi-cultural surroundings in English (Liu & Laohawiriyanon, 2012).

### 1.3. Role of textbooks in teaching culture

Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2000) express the need for learning language and culture as ‘the context’, which consists of several elements such as setting, teacher, learner, instructional methods and materials, and assessment approaches. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) highlight the significance of textbooks by referring to them as a potentially *a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skinner* where skills are analysed systematically and *an ideology*. EFL learners may not have the opportunity for contact with the culture of a specific language. For this reason, the classroom is generally the only place for learners to experience some connection with the culture. On this point, textbooks are important inputs to create cultural contact for learners, in consideration of the impact of authentic material (Ihm, 1996).

To be effective in promoting ICC, it is suggested that textbooks be designed accordingly and that both linguistic and cultural objectives should overlap. When reviewing cultural representation in textbooks, it can be observed that they follow their specific era’s approaches and objectives. Before the 1940s, when culture was perceived as a static and easy-to-describe phenomenon, a variety of components was not included in textbooks. Rather, culture was seen as a set of facts that could be learnt through studying and they usually reflected the authors’ viewpoint. With the emergence of a more communicative approach, integrating the target culture into EFL classes via authentic cultural materials gained importance (Paige et al., 2000). Byram et al. (2002) state that reading and listening texts together with all types of visuals in an ICC-integrated lesson should be authentic. Furthermore, they mention their implementation in the class for learners to gain ICC skills. The authors also assert that the activities should result in understanding, discussing and writing in the target language rather than memorization of information. Moreover, textbook activities should support critical thinking via comparing and contrasting, which leads students to analyse the information. Alptekin (2002, p. 63) points to the ‘global appropriacy and local appropriation’ of ELT materials and mentions key features regarding EIL pedagogy. He directs attention to the materials, including local and international characteristics, and their relevance to language learners’ experiences.

### 1.4. Relevant studies

Ihm (1996) studied a series of textbooks in the EFL context to evaluate cultural representation to see if they reflect the diversity of the target culture as well as racial and gender stereotypes. The findings indicated that the textbooks did not reflect the multicultural structure of the American community. Instead, they presented prejudiced images of Asian Americans, Native Americans, Japanese and Chinese people. Recognising that the images in textbooks affect learners, Ihm suggested that they should not include misleading and inaccurate information and that textbook writers should be more conscious of this issue.

Aliakbari (2002) investigated which cultures were presented in the cultural content of four Iranian English textbooks and to what extent they fostered ICC. The findings indicated that the cultural content in both new vocabulary and reading comprehension sections was extremely limited and basic.

Xiao (2010) examined ICC features in the listening textbook *Contemporary College English for Listening 3*. Its cultural content was analysed as well as the target, source and international cultures. The results indicated that the textbook had been designed mainly to present the target culture, particularly British and American. Analyzing the *big C* and *little c* culture themes, it was found that the top three themes included in the textbook belonged in the *big C* category (politics, education, history, music, economy) while scripts related to *little c* cultures were placed within lifestyles and

values themes. Xiao concluded that the significance of *little c* culture had been ignored in improving learners' ICC.

Çelik and Erbay (2013) evaluated the textbook series *Spot* used in Turkish elementary schools in terms of its ICC. They examined whether the books reflected a local, target or international approach towards culture. The results demonstrated a balance between local, target and international cultures; however, there was a tendency towards European cultures. The reason for this was interpreted as being the Turkish government's strategic goals towards the Common European Framework of Reference.

To sum up, related analysis of textbooks indicated some common findings, which can be itemised as insufficient cultural content, unidentifiable cultural activities, and dominance of British and American cultures rather than more diverse cultures. The textbooks were found to be either superficial in their presentation of culture or weak in promoting learners' ICC since they did not develop learners' intercultural awareness or empathy towards other cultures/otherness. Yet, a slight improvement over the years can be observed, such as less exposure to the target cultures, more definable cultural content and better structured activities, which may somewhat raise learners' intercultural awareness.

### 1.5. Research questions

With regards to the aforementioned discussions, the current study aimed to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: What features does the textbook *Life* at A1/A2 level include in terms of ICC?

RQ2: What are the opinions of the users, namely, university lecturers and their students, regarding the intercultural dimensions of the book?

## 2. Method

The data were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Firstly, the textbook analysis was carried out. Then, the opinions of participants (teachers and students) were collected concerning the cultural content of the textbooks, by means of a questionnaire. To enable triangulation, focus-grouped interviews were conducted.

### 2.1. Sample / Participants

The data were collected from two universities in Istanbul, Turkey. Four lecturers from Istanbul Yeniüzyıl University and two lecturers from Medipol University participated in the survey study. Four lecturers of Istanbul Yeniüzyıl University were also interviewed. The questionnaire was delivered to 26 students (21 female, 5 male) from Istanbul Yeniüzyıl University.

### 2.2. Instrument(s)

The textbooks analysed were *Life A1* - Beginner level (Dummett, Hughes, & Stephenson, 2012a) and *Life A2* - Elementary level (Dummett, Hughes, & Stephenson, 2012b), intended for young adults, and published by National Geographic Learning (NGL). The books were regarded to be rich in cultural content ('National Geographic Learning', 2012a, 2012b) as they represent effective National Geographic (NG) content through the images used, which also contribute to the process of culture learning.

Three instruments were used to collect data. The first was a checklist adapted from Xiao (2010) for analysing textbooks in terms of their cultural elements; consisting of source, target and international

cultures as well as *big C* and *little c*. ‘Target culture’ was taken as meaning British and American culture. ‘Source culture’ was considered as the students’ own culture, which was Turkish. Other cultures were classified under ‘International Culture’. The *big C* culture category included the themes of politics, the economy, history, geography, literature / art, social norms, education, architecture and music while the *little c* culture category consisted of food, holidays, lifestyle, customs, values, hobbies and gestures. Skopinskaja’s (2003) likert-type scale was adapted to collect data on the participants’ opinions regarding cultural content of the textbooks. The survey was in five sections, namely, *cultural content, knowledge, attitudes, intercultural awareness, and culture and language*. It was administered to both lecturers and students. The student version was translated into Turkish and two independent language experts established reliability (back translation). Finally, an interview was conducted that included three open-ended questions.

### 2.3. Data collection procedures

Firstly, the reading, writing, listening and speaking activities were put into ‘target culture’, ‘source culture’ or ‘international culture’ categories. Activities related to American or British culture were considered as the target culture since they are the cultures to which students are most exposed. Turkish culture was the source culture since the target group was Turkish. Bearing Byram et al.’s (2002, p. 20) criteria in mind, of promoting ICC where ‘learners compare and contrast their own culture with another and develop awareness’, the activities which asked for reflection on the students’ own culture were put in the source culture category even though Turkish culture was not mentioned specifically in the activity. The teachers’ manual was examined (Dummett, Hughes, & Stephenson, 2012c) as well, which supported the logic of placing activities in this category. Moreover, this view was confirmed during the interview with lecturers who had been using the textbooks as they reported that there had always been discussion of similarities and differences when the topic was about culture. Finally, countries from the inner circle such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and outer circle cultures and expanding circle cultures represented in the textbooks, were placed in the international culture category.

Secondly, the activities were divided according to their themes into *big C* and *little c* cultures. The focus of the units and the aims of the activities, as well as guidance in the teachers’ manual, were taken into consideration while categorisation took place.

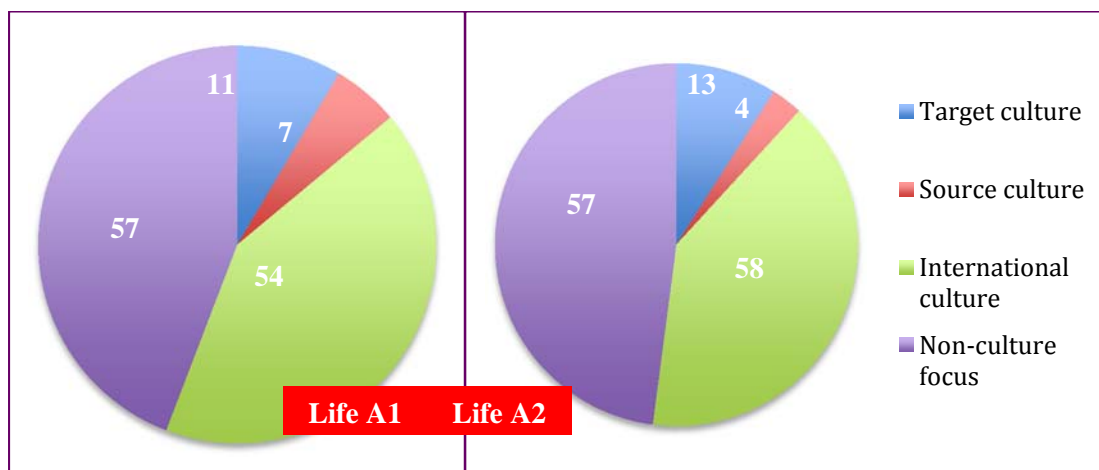
### 2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were run by using SPSS 20.00. Sections of the questionnaire were ranked in descending order to see which aspects of the books were regarded powerful or weak. The findings were then interpreted taking Xiao’s (2010) criteria as reference: 1.00-1.80 = not at all, 1.81-2.60 = not really, 2.61-3.40 = to some extent, 3.41-4.20 = to a large extent, and 4.21-5.00 = completely.

Interviewees’ responses were evaluated in accordance with questionnaire findings and similar / dissimilar views compared with the textbook evaluation findings were identified.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows features related to ICC in textbook *Life A1* and *A2*.



**Figure 1.** Types of culture in Life A1 ( $N_{Total\ activities} = 129$ ) and Life A2 ( $N_{Total\ activities} = 144$ ).

The results indicated that *Life A1* textbook contains 11 activities teaching the basic skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing that belong to the Target Culture category, 7 Source Culture activities, and 54 International Culture activities. Fifty-seven of the activities were categorized as having a non-culture related. The target activities included reading passages and listening and speaking activities, supported by visuals if possible. For example, one target culture activity (Dummett et al., 2012a, p. 70) introduces pumpkins and pumpkin pie as a traditional food in the United States. It is illustrated with a picture and the popularity of competitions for giant vegetables is also emphasized.

Source culture activities, on the other hand, were not directly about the learners' source culture, which is Turkish in this study. The activities included under this category usually asked students to compare a cultural feature with their own culture. For example, one source culture activity in the 'writing and speaking' section asks students to: 'Work in pairs. Write five tips for travellers in your country or a country you know' (Dummett et al., 2012a, p. 110).

Byram et al. (2002) explain that one of the skills that assists learners in promoting ICC is 'Critical Cultural Awareness', which is defined as 'an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries' (p. 9). Comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between cultures is said to develop Critical Cultural Awareness over time. For Byram et al., the rationale is to expose learners to texts and materials which contain contrasting perspectives and raise learners' awareness by having them analyse texts rather than factual information. For this reason, activities which require learners to reflect on their own cultures were considered as source culture activities that lead them to an awareness of their own culture, as well as others. To decide on this aspect, the instructions for the activities included in the teachers' manuals were also considered. Activities which were supported by instructions, such as 'ask students to compare it with their own cultures' were chosen, since they are intended to create a discussion atmosphere in the classroom. For example, a source culture activity in the writing and speaking section provides instructions on how to guide learners: 'Ask students to prepare tips. Start students off by providing two or three tips for your own country, and ask reasons for them. If students are from the same country, ask them to prepare tips in pairs first' (Dummett et al., 2012c, p. 102).

Analysing five different textbooks, Hamiloğlu and Mehdi (2010) point to the importance of comparison of cultures in EFL classes and confirmed that the *New Hotline* textbook partially fulfils this objective as it include a variety of cultures such as Pakistan, Austria and Turkey. This is explicitly stated in the book, ‘Students are encouraged to compare their own language and culture to that of the world of English speakers’ (p. 22).

This standpoint was confirmed by the questionnaire item related to source culture, which was: ‘Does the TM offer insights into the students’ own culture?’ Both teachers and students responded positively ( $Item = 9$ ,  $M_{student} = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $M_{teacher} = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). In addition, teachers’ responses in the interview assisted with this view. All interviewees answered the question ‘Do the textbooks raise students’ awareness about their own culture through comparing and contrasting cultures?’ quite positively.

International culture activities comprise nearly half of the activities in the textbook by including cultural elements from such countries as Mongolia, the North Pole, Australia and China. Thanks to the NG content, cultures presented in the books are not just well-known countries and cultures but also unique cultures about which the students may not hear of very often, such as the life of the Sami People, Home life in Sumatra, or plants that grow in the forests of Madagascar. For example, a video activity at the end of Unit 7 entitled ‘The people of the reindeer’ deals with the traditional lives of the Sami people accompanied by images of spectacular scenery and typical family members (Dummett et al., 2012c, p. 102).

Thus, *Life* provides samples from many different cultures, even less well-known ones. This finding is in line with both students and teachers’ opinions on the cultural knowledge part of the questionnaire applied. They both stated that the books exhibit a variety of cultures ( $Item\ 8$ ,  $M_{teacher} = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ,  $M_{student} = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). *Life* includes texts that focus on the lifestyles of farmers or facts about the first Americans, which are subcultures of their society. Teachers’ opinions about ‘Does the TM offer insight into a variety of sub-cultural groups (namely, professions)?’ confirms this point of view since they were highly positive about the item mentioned ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ).

Regarding the first research question of the study, ‘What features does the textbook *Life A1/A2* include in terms of ICC?’, it can be stated that the findings related to promoting ICC were highly positive. The types of culture are well balanced throughout the activities. The target culture (British or American) is not over-presented and the international culture elements cover a wide variety, as suggested for the improvement of ICC skills. Moreover, even though not directly denoted, the textbooks are relevant to the source culture through compare and contrast activities. All in all, it can be inferred that *Life A1* and *A2* textbooks fulfil the expectations of modern EIL-context ELT textbooks.

Table 1 shows the distribution of *big C* and *little c* cultural elements in each unit of *Life A1*.



**Table 1.** Distribution of big C vs little c cultural elements per unit in textbook *Life A1*

Units / Topics	N Tasks	Target Culture		Source Culture		Int. Culture		Non- Culture Related
		Big C	Little c	Big C	Little c	Big C	Little c	
Unit 1: Hello	11	-	-	-	-	3	3	5
Unit 2: Holidays	9	-	-	1	1	2	3	3
Unit 3: Families	12	-	-	-	2	1	5	4
Unit 4: Cities	11	2	-	1	-	4	-	4
Unit 5: Inventions	11	-	-	-	-	1	2	8
Unit 6: Passions	11	1	2	-	-	-	3	5
Unit 7: Different lives	9	-	-	-	-	-	5	4
Unit 8: Routines	11	-	1	-	-	3	2	5
Unit 9: Travel	10	-	-	1	-	4	-	5
Unit 10: History	10	3	-	1	-	2	-	4
Unit 11: Discovery	12	1	-	-	-	7	-	4
Unit 12: The Weekend	10	-	1	-	1	-	3	5

Analysis showed that cultural content mostly consisted of aspects of international culture, such as Mongolian, Japanese or Australian. The other crucial point observed in Table 1 with regard to ICC in *Life A1* and *A2* is the theme of culture reflecting a multiple sense of culture. Considering the *big C* and *little c* culture themes, the number of activities are nearly equal in *Life A1* (Beginner) ( $N_{Big\ c} = 38$ ,  $N_{Little\ c} = 34$ ) yet there is a slight increase towards *big C* cultural content in *Life A2* (Elementary) ( $N_{Big\ c} = 52$ ,  $N_{Little\ c} = 30$ ), which includes information about the geography, literature/art, history or social norms of different cultures. The reason for this difference may be that learners are primarily developing their basic linguistic knowledge and skills in English at the elementary (*A1*) level.

Reflecting the dynamic aspect of culture, some scholars (Chastain, 1988; Pulverness, 1995; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993) put emphasis on the existence of *little c* themes (values, food, customs, etc.) in EFL textbooks. Xiao (2010) asserts that cultural themes should focus on the customs, habits, holidays, lifestyles or values of societies as they have more potential for fostering the ICC of learners. A balance between the two themes would perhaps be welcome in textbooks since reflecting different aspects of culture is crucial in improving ICC skills. For the present study, while *Life A1* includes nearly the same number of cultural themes, there is a tendency towards *big C* culture themes in *Life A2*. The reason for this difference might be the learners' increasing level of English in *A2* as *big C* themes entail a higher command of language in which to study and discuss literature, history, geography, social norms or architecture. On this point, it would be noteworthy to emphasise that *Life A1* and *A2* textbooks are published by NGL. Thus, NG content can easily be observed throughout both books with a large number of geography-themed activities and this is by far the most-featured theme by number that occurs in both books ( $A1_{geography} = 29$ ,  $A2_{geography} = 26$ ). On the other hand, grammar and vocabulary items such as daily routines and food are taught in *Life A1*. Hence, such themes occur more at *A1* than *A2* level. Furthermore, these themes are easier to comprehend at lower levels of learning.

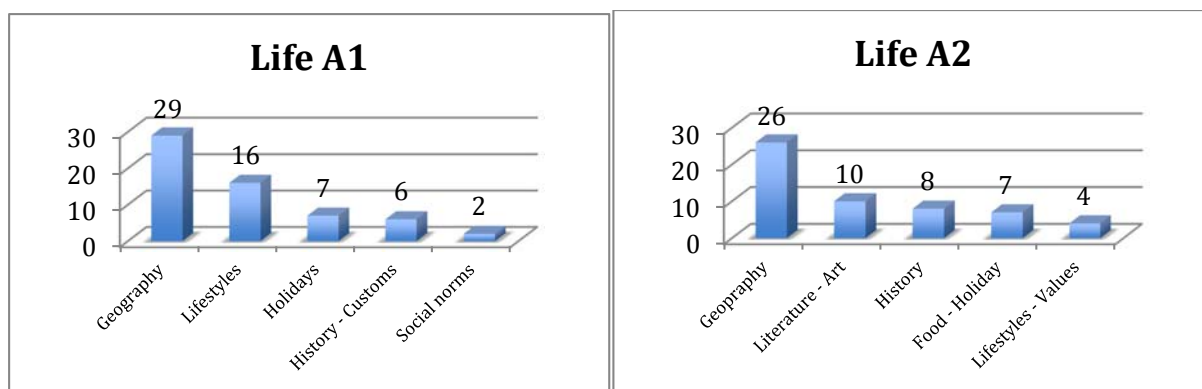
**Table 2.** Distribution of cultural themes by unit in *Life A1* textbook

Units / Themes	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Unit 11	Unit 12	Total
Big C themes													
Politics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Economy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Music	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social Norms	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Literature/Art	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Education	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
History	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	6
Geography	2	2	1	5	1	1	-	3	5	-	8	-	28
Architecture	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Little c themes													
Values	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lifestyle	3	-	3	-	2	-	3	3	-	-	-	2	16
Customs	-	-	3	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	6
Hobbies	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Holidays	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	7
Food	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Gestures/Body	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Language	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	6	6	7	7	3	6	5	6	5	6	8	5	71

The findings indicated a small tendency towards Geography in *Life A1*. Some missing themes, such as politics, economy and music, were identified in *Life A1*. However, the *A2* level textbook includes activities related to all the themes above. This is perhaps because of the difference in linguistic knowledge required for the two books. Activities focused on politics and economy would entail a higher level of linguistic knowledge.

The most-introduced *big C* themes were found to be geography, lifestyles, holidays, history, food, and customs. The activities related to ‘geography’ include topics such as international phone calls where different countries are shown on a map, a tour to Antarctica video, and places in a town. ‘Lifestyles’ are introduced with topics such as that of a Mongolian family or daily routines of the Sami people. Activities which inform the student about the space race or the history of a currency are placed under the ‘history’ theme. ‘Food’ is introduced by restaurant menus, well-known national dishes, or food markets. Finally, examples in the ‘Customs’ theme include wedding celebrations, a traditional party, and a Scottish bagpiper playing in the street.

Figure 2 shows the top five themes in the textbook *Life* at *A1* and *A2* levels.



**Figure 2.** Top 5 cultural themes in Life A1 ( $N_{Total\ activities} = 60$ ) and Life A2 ( $N_{Total\ activities} = 55$ ).

As illustrated in Figure 2, the Geography theme clearly has the highest number of activities in both textbooks ( $N_{geography} = 29$ ). In *Life A1*, ‘Lifestyles’ is the second most touched-on theme ( $N_{lifestyles} = 16$ ) while ‘Holiday’ is in the third rank ( $N_{holiday} = 7$ ). The History and Customs themes have the same number of activities ( $N_{history}, N_{customs} = 6$ ). Finally, Social Norms and Architecture are the fifth ranking themes ( $N_{social\ norms} = 2, N_{architecture} = 2$ ) dealt with in the textbook. In *Life A2*, on the other hand, the Literature / Art theme ( $N_{literature/art} = 10$ ) is in second place and History ( $N_{history} = 8$ ) rated third. Food and Holiday themes ( $N_{holiday} = 7, N_{food} = 7$ ) come next while the Lifestyles, Values, Customs, and Social Norms themes share the same number of activities in last place ( $N_{lifestyles} = 4, N_{values} = 4, N_{customs} = 4, N_{socialnorms} = 4$ ).

The distribution of the themes is more or less the same in both books with little changes in the order. *Big C* and *little c* distribution seems to be almost equal in *Life A1* while the dominance of *big C* can be observed in *Life A2*.

Not surprisingly, Geography is by far the most utilized theme through the activities. The striking and wide-ranging content of NG can be clearly observed throughout the textbooks as awe-inspiring pictures taken in distinctive locations all over the world. Most of the videos used at the end of each unit also reflect the NG influence. Lecturers and learners’ answers to the item ‘the geographical perspective presented to explain certain features of the national character of the foreign culture(s)’ also assist in this view since they gave high points to the item ( $M_{teacher} = 4.00, SD = 0.63, M_{learner} = 3.08, SD = 1.09$ ).

To address RQ2, the opinions of the users of the book related to its intercultural dimensions were considered. The lecturers’ mean score was ( $M = 4.50$ ). Regarding Xiao’s (2010) criteria, *Life* provides complete samples from different cultures, including marginal ones. From the point of view of learners, the mean score was ( $M = 3.73$ ). For them, *Life* provides samples from different cultures to a large extent. When it came to raising awareness of one’s own culture, the participants gave lower mean scores. The learners ( $M_{learner} = 3.17$ ) indicated that the book contributed to their own cultural awareness to some extent whereas the lecturers ( $M_{teacher} = 2.50$ ) lowered the mean scores by highlighting that it did not really contribute to the development of their own culture by enabling comparison-contrast with various cultures.

Concerning the contribution of the visuals to learner motivation, *Life* probably assists learners. Since real life visuals possess a high potential for raising learner motivation (McGrath, 2002), *Life* may be quite fruitful in EFL classes from both the linguistic and cultural point of view. Lecturers interviewed also agreed with *Life*’s power in its use of authentic images and videos.

*Interviewer:* Are the visuals and videos authentic in the books?

*Respondent 1:* Yes, the videos are authentic.

*Respondent 2:* Since they are taken directly from real life, the videos and visuals are quite successful. For example, I was teaching colours recently. The video of that unit was also about a group of people who wear colourful clothes. It was great.

*Respondent 3:* They are authentic, I think. Real life material captures the learners' attention and it makes lessons fun.

*Respondent 4:* Yes. We learn a lot of different things and it captures attention in the class. I think because the books are published by NG, there are distinctive topics from different places and this works well in the classroom.

As the transcription reveals, all lecturer-participants appreciated the authenticity of the images and videos and reported that they could use them effectively in class. Moreover, this helped with catching the attention of learners and encouraged them to participate in the lesson more eagerly. Thus, it would be realistic to say that the authenticity of the NG content and the quality of *Life* is helpful in motivating learners in language learning, while also portraying a variety of cultures.

To learn whether *Life* raised awareness with regard to the learners' own culture, four lecturers were interviewed. The following excerpt highlights their opinions:

*Interviewer:* Do the textbooks raise student awareness about their own culture through comparing and contrasting cultures?

*Respondent 1:* Yes, there are compare and contrast activities such as 'How about in your country?' and this works in the class.

*Respondent 2:* Yes, after talking about a different culture, 'How about your culture?' questions make students aware of the differences and similarities.

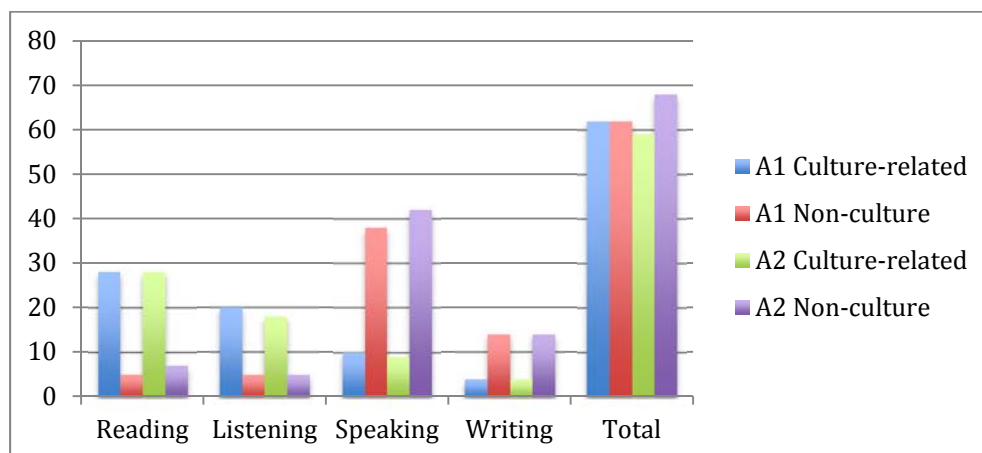
*Respondent 3:* Yes, it happens after every new topic. For example, think about marriage in Korea. At the end of this topic, we talk about marriage in Turkey since the book leads us to such questions. Thus, the students have the chance to compare and contrast cultures.

*Respondent 4:* Well, maybe. I think it also depends on the teacher. I try to do this most of the time by asking 'How is it in our culture?' We automatically compare things such as food and clothes, especially in speaking sessions.

*Interviewer:* So, you raise cultural awareness in the class?

*Respondent 4:* Yes, of course. It is always good to compare things!

To understand how the activities in *Life* contribute to ICC development, it might be beneficial to consider the distribution of activities in consideration of the proportion devoted to the four basic skills. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution by comparing culture-related activities with non-culture related activities.



**Figure 3.** Culture-related and non-culture-related activities in *Life* textbooks concerning language skills.

As illustrated, the receptive skills of reading and listening benefit from more culture-related activities whereas the productive language skills of speaking and writing are dominant in terms of non-culture related activities. This difference between receptive and productive skills can be explained in terms of schema (re)construction since success in receptive skills depends on processing the relevant schematic knowledge. This finding is similar to the findings of Hamiloğlu and Mehdi (2010) in which receptive skills provided the main cultural input.

#### 4. Conclusions

Concerning the first research question, *Life A1* and *A2* were examined in terms of target, source, and international culture types. The results indicated that they offer a variety of cultures in their activities, even less familiar ones such as Mongolian families and the life of the Sami people, thanks to the NG content. They do not solely focus on British or American culture. Source culture activities were also identified in the form of compare and contrast activities in each unit, which may lead students to improve awareness of their own culture. This is evidenced by guidance in the teachers' manual and feedback from the lecturers when they talk about the source culture in their classes. Still, the activities can be considered as limited in number. On this basis, it may be inferred that *Life A1* and *A2* is partially well-balanced regarding types of culture and may assist EFL learners in developing their ICC.

The other analysis performed related to *big C* (geography, literature/art, economy) and *little c* (food, hobbies, lifestyles, holidays) culture themes. The findings indicate that the number of *big C* and *little c* themes are balanced in *Life A1* apart from a few missing themes from *big C* such as politics and economy. The reason for this is thought to be the limited linguistic level of learners, since these themes would entail a higher level of vocabulary, as well as more complex language patterns. It was also found that in *Life A2*, the number of *big C* and *little c* themes are not balanced. Numerically, it contains more *big C* themes than *little c*. However, examples of all themes can be found in that level. This is due to the fact that *big C* culture themes may require higher levels of linguistic competence which learners are more capable of comprehending at *A2* level. Perhaps for the same reason, a rise in the variety of themes was also identified in this textbook. Given this, it can be reported that both *A1* and *A2* levels include activities related to almost all of the themes, which is crucial to achieve a dynamic sense of culture.

Among the top five themes, geography, lifestyle, literature/art, holidays and social norms were listed. Geography is the dominant theme with authentic images and videos from all over the world since the books have NG content. Concerning the contribution of authentic visuals to learner motivation and lecturers' positive opinions about real life content in the textbooks, it can be concluded that *Life A1* and *A2* are attractive in engaging learners in the learning process.

Another aspect analysed was cultural accumulation through the four skills. It was found that cultural content is mostly provided via the receptive skills. The productive skills were categorized as having a non-culture focus most of the time. This is natural since receptive skills are necessary to provide cultural input for the learner, which is then used for comparison and contrast via speaking and writing activities.

Lecturer and student responses were generally positive regarding the cultural content of *Life*. Almost all the lecturers and students stated that *Life A1* and *A2* foster these intercultural features to a large extent. Interview results also supported this view since the lecturers were highly positive about the cultural variety and authenticity of the books. On the other hand, the interviewees reported that the effectiveness of the textbooks in terms of teaching culture may depend on how it is handled. Thus, the

evidence appears strong that *Life A1* and *A2* can promote ICC in practice as well, depending on implementation.

All in all, it can be inferred that the intercultural elements within *Life A1* and *A2* appeal to the EIL context of ELT textbooks and have the potential to foster ICC in EFL classes. They focus learners' attention on the international nature of the English language and have the potential to develop the intercultural skills of learners, albeit lacking in some parts.

## 5. Implications

Regarding pedagogical implications, firstly, the teachers' manuals do not give direct and clear instruction about implementation of the activities in terms of cultural integration in EFL classrooms. Thus, it would be more appropriate given the aims of culture teaching in EFL classrooms if the teacher manuals included full instructions on the implementation of cultural activities in the classroom. Secondly, the teacher manuals may include guidance on using visuals effectively in the classroom to exploit the advantage of having NG content so that learners can fully develop ICC. Finally, these implications could be especially helpful for novice teachers.

Regarding methodological implications, one suggestion for further research would be a complete evaluation of the 6-level series to provide a general perspective regarding the cultural content to reveal they have similar weaknesses and strengths. The other point would be to enlarge the number of participants to obtain different opinions related to use of *Life*. The opinions of teachers from all regions of Turkey could assist to understand whether the books are culturally appropriate in the Turkish context.

The final methodological implication is related to the proportion of *big C* and *little c* culture. Some scholars (Chastain, 1988; Pulverness, 1995; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Xiao, 2010) have asserted that more emphasis should be given to *little c* themes in textbooks since they have more potential to foster learners' ICC. However, there is currently a gap in the literature as to whether they should be balanced or *little c* themes should outnumber *big C* themes. For this reason, researchers could gather more views from scholars, teachers and learners to define the ideal 'balance' between *big C* and *little c* culture in textbooks. To sum up, this study might be enlarged and enhanced and better feedback could be obtained related to the cultural features of the *Life* series. In this way, a more productive atmosphere for promoting ICC in EFL classes might be created and the ELT classroom can be a gateway for learners and individuals to act appropriately in intercultural situations and to secure harmonious dialogue.

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## 'Life' ders kitapları serisinin kültürel bileşenleri açısından değerlendirilmesi

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### Öz

Bu çalışma 2012'de yayımlanan ve National Geographic (NG) içeriğine sahip yetişkin ders kitapları 'Life' A1 ve A2 seviyelerini 'kültürlerarası iletişimsel edinç' ile ilgili unsurlarını incelemiştir. Okuma, yazma, konuşma ve dinleme becerilerini içeren aktiviteler kitapların kültürel içeriğini incelemek üzere hazırlanmış bir kontrol listesi ile analiz edilmiştir. Daha detaylı bir şekilde, kitapların öğrencilerin kültürlerarası iletişim edinci geliştirmesine yardımcı olan kaynak, hedef ve uluslararası kültürler ait elementleri değerlendirilmiş ve dört beceri etkinlikleri coğrafya, edebiyat gibi büyük kültür ve yaşam tarzı, gelenekler gibi küçük kültür öğeleri açısından incelenmiştir. Görseller ve videolar da kültürel ifadeleri açısından analiz edilmiştir. İstanbul'da iki üniversitede daha önce hazırlık sınıflarında Life ders kitaplarını kullanmış altı öğretim elemanına anket uygulanmıştır. Aynı anket 26 hazırlık öğrencisi için de adapte edilmiştir. Öğretim elemanlarının dördüyle anket bulgularını desteklemek amacıyla görüşme yapılmıştır. Bulgular, kitapların kültür çeşitliliği açısından zengin olduğunu, fakat Türk kültürü olan kaynak kültüre dair direkt referanslar bulunmadığını göstermiştir. Büyük ve küçük kültür öğelerinin çoğunlukla dengeli olduğu, fakat NG içeriğinden dolayı coğrafya temasının diğer temalardan baskın olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Kitaplarda kullanılan görsel materyalin otantik olduğu ve dolayısıyla öğrenciyi dil öğrenimi için teşvik edebileceği düşünülmektedir. Fakat, kitapların derslere kültür öğretimi dahil etmede etkili bir şekilde kullanılabilmesi için öğretmen kitaplarının bu açıdan geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* ders kitabı inceleme; kültür öğretimi; kültürel bileşenler; kültürlerarası iletişimsel edinç

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