
**IDENTITY ISSUES IN TURKISH HIGH SCHOOL EFL
TEXTBOOKS****LİSE DÜZEYİ İNGİLİZCE DERS KİTAPLARINDA KİMLİK
SORUNU****İrem KIZILASLAN*****ABSTRACT**

As a dominant force that shapes the multiple environments in which we live, the phenomenon of globalization fundamentally alters the terrain of public and private life, creating tensions between the local and the global, especially for those countries like Turkey, which are characterised by proximity and familiarity. The purpose of the present study is to explore the role of education and of specifically textbooks in resolving this conflict between global transformations and local responses. The research objectives of this qualitative study are to analyze the cultural content of a representative sample of four EFL textbooks and to unearth what some of their unstated beliefs, values and attitudes are. It is hoped that the study will highlight the paramount importance of textbooks in equipping children and youth to confront the dualities globalization creates.

Key words: globalization, tension, culture, education, textbooks

ÖZET

İçinde yaşadığımız çevreyi değiştirme gücüne sahip olan küreselleşme olgusu, özellikle Türkiye gibi geleneksel yapıya sahip ülkeler için yerel ve küresel değerler arasında bir çelişki yaratarak hayatın her alanında kendini hissettirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, küresel değişimler ile yerel tepkiler arasında var olan bu çatışmada, eğitimin ve özellikle ders kitaplarının önemini araştırmaktır. Bu nitel çalışmada, Türkiye’de lise düzeyinde kullanılan dört İngilizce ders kitabını kültürel açıdan incelemeyi ve bu kitaplarda dile getirilmeyen inançlar, değerler ve tutumları ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu yolla, hızla küreselleşen dünyamızda çocukların ve gençlerin karşılaşabilecekleri ikilemlerle daha iyi baş edebilmelerini sağlamada ders kitaplarının rolü ve önemi vurgulanmak istenmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: küreselleşme, çatışma, kültür, eğitim, ders kitapları

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the umbrella term globalization has come into common usage, reflecting an extension beyond national borders in nearly all of the major issues of the new millennium. It has also entered academic debates and become a focus for discussion in education. Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard (2004) see today's world as another place and claim; "While human lives continue to be lived in local realities, these realities are increasingly being challenged and integrated into larger global networks of relationship". In Turkey, as in the rest of the world, we are witnessing that education is being shaped by broader social forces, such as globalization. Some may think that globalization is only a matter of industry and business, and that education as a moral process is no part of this development but, in reality, it has important implications for the future of today's children and youth.

It is increasingly obvious that youth in school today, no matter where they live in, will encounter a totally different world from that of our grandparents. Concurrent with the new tendencies that organize the lives of youth in the world, the globalizing trends and high technologies of the market are also finding their way into Turkey. The number of young people who have access to global information is dramatically increasing and their experiences are being reshaped by these new global impulses. In today's Turkey, the ever-growing use of electronic media has brought information to the doorsteps of the common man and knowledge is at the reach of a mouse click for most youngsters. As a result, the way they experience national identities and cultural belonging is changing, and the local context with its values and worldviews seems to be insufficient to describe this new world.

According to Hewitt (2003), the contemporary society provides a psychological world and a place of identification for its members, but it is not the same kind of enclosing and secure world as the community of the past. Rather, it is a society whose economic and political significance transcends that of the local community. A popular song of the World War era, as Hewitt reminds, 'How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they have seen Paris?' does explicate the common dilemma of communities in modern society.

It is thus crucial that the contemporary person be in many ways a more self-conscious and critical citizen than the resident of a traditional community. Bozdoğan and Kasaba (1997) have argued that scholars in many disciplines are looking for new ways of critically engaging with the modern

project and exploring options beyond it without falling back on an antimodern “return to tradition” or getting lost in the postmodern “global theme park”. Herein lies the role of education in retaining the loyalties of youth who are tempted by the glamour and the opportunities the outside world presents. Education’s challenge, Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard (2004) claim, will be to shape the cognitive skills, interpersonal sensibilities, and cultural sophistication of children and youth whose lives will be both engaged in local contexts and responsive to larger transnational processes. Howard Gardner (2004) highlights the tension between the glacial pace of institutional change in ministries of education and schools and the rapid transformations taking place around them, and suggests that education will need to provide children and youth with knowledge of other cultures and traditions, which should be an end in itself and a means to interacting civilly and productively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, as well knowledge of and respect for one’s own cultural traditions (as cited in Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard, Education for Globalization section).

Apparently, it is the same dilemma between local contexts and larger global processes that worries Turkey and many other traditional communities. While it is difficult to resist the temptation of catching up with the international community, it is essential that while doing so, the importance of national interests should not be ignored. This is of primary importance especially in the field of education which is closely related to the development of human capital. Thus, a very delicate balance is required in the field of education in order to avert the potential pitfalls of entering into the global educational market thoughtlessly. It needs to be stressed that globalization, a reality which cannot be wished away, will mean many different things for education and that we need a new educational agenda in Turkey to examine how education can best prepare children to engage in a global world.

What Mahatma Gandhi, a major political and spiritual leader of India, said in 1921, long before globalization was ever thought of, applies well to countries like Turkey, which cannot turn their back on larger global network of relationships, while trying to maintain the basic components of their culture; “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” (Retrieved August, 2007 from, <http://www.famousquotes.com/>)

1.1. The Current Study

Research has indicated that foreign language textbooks typically contain representations of a particular culture and its social identifications, for this reason it is recommended that “particular attention be paid to the cultural information conveyed through foreign language textbooks” (Pingel, 1999). The overwhelming bulk of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks used at schools in Turkey are imported ones mostly produced by major foreign publishing companies; thus, Turkish youth are confronted with the same lifestyles and a more homogenous world culture created by global processes of change. If that is the case, then the cultural information transmitted through imported EFL textbooks does not put emphasis on cultural content and the social identity of Turkish learners as a focus. Indeed, the EFL textbooks on the market do not provide Turkish youth growing up today with experiences culturally comprehensible to them.

As recommended at the 1988 UNESCO conference held at George Eckert Institute, “the global approach must be complemented by a regional approach. We have to be concrete; we have to give examples that relate to students’ own experiences” (Pingel, 1999). Likewise, Cunningsworth suggests, “In addition to the physical context, the relationships, modes of behaviour and intentions of the characters in the book should be interpretable by the students, so that they can relate the language used to its purpose in the social context” (1995). However, this suggested element of ‘intercultural communication’ seems to be virtually non-existent in imported EFL textbooks of Turkish learners. Rather than deal with the cultural content of such foreign publications, the present study aims to analyze the cultural content of the New Bridge to Success (NBS) series, which constitutes an alternative to imported EFL textbooks available on the market in the sense that it seems to follow a policy of combining the local and the global.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Type of analysis:

Qualitative techniques were applied to textbook content. These included visual analysis, used to evaluate the ways in which images, photographs and cartoons are employed and hermeneutic analysis, used to unearth hidden meanings and messages in the textbooks.

2.2. Textbook Sample:

- 4 English language textbooks, namely New Bridge to Success Elementary, New Bridge to Success Pre-intermediate, New Bridge to Success Intermediate and New Bridge to Success Upper-Intermediate and 4 workbooks, all published in 2005 or 2006.
- All 4 textbooks were found to be widely used at the high school level.
- The series was written by Turkish authors and published in Turkey.
- The NBS series are distributed free to learners by the Ministry of National Education.

2.3. Research questions applied to textbook content include:

- Is Turkish culture presented as individualistic or collectivist?
- How are Turkish men and women portrayed in narratives, cartoons and photographs?
- To what extent are the changes in the roles of women in the past few decades adequately represented?
- Are traditional gender roles of central importance in the workplace? Are occupations perceived as masculine or feminine?
- What assumptions underlie the textual discourse? Do the textbooks transmit a particular message?
- What do the authors appear to value or think important?
- How are narrative, source materials and pictorial evidence combined to create an image of modern Turkish identity?

3. THE ANALYSIS OF NEW BRIDGE TO SUCCESS

3.1. Turkish Culture: Individualism versus Collectivism

Despite the fact that some scholars find the divide of world cultures as 'individualistic' and 'collectivist' simplistic and demeaning in some aspects, much of the research interest in cultural differences centers on the effects of individualism versus collectivism on self-conceptions and identities (see, for example, Hogg and Vaughan, 2002; Brehm, Kassin, and Fein, 2002; Baron and Byrne, 2002; Triandis and Trafimov, 2001). The cultures found in Western Europe, the United States and Australia tend to be individualistic, whereas those that are found in Asia, South America, Africa and most traditional societies tend to be collectivist (Hogg and Vaughan, 2002).

As for Turkey, on the whole societal norm in the country is known to be collectivism. However, it is undeniably true that cultures themselves change over time as they come in contact with each other. Although Turkish people were more collectivist in the past, in recent years there has been a change towards individualism due to the globalization movements. Considering the fact that no society is all one thing or another in our era, Turkish culture cannot easily be placed on one or the other side of the individualism-collectivism scale. Seen in this light, the NBS series portrays a variety of world cultures ranging from the USA to China and does not rigidly categorize Turkish culture as individualistic or collectivist. Rather, it is presented as a culture characterized by strong, cohesive groups such as family and religion, as well as by a concept of autonomy.

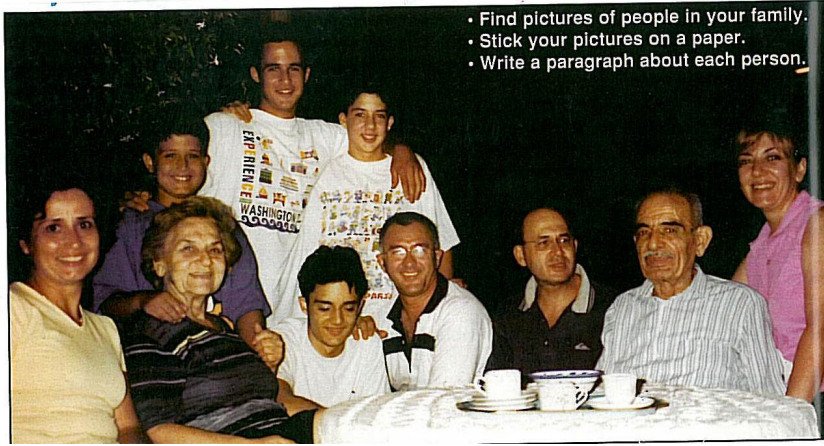


Figure 1. A traditional Turkish family that consists of grandparents and other relatives depicted as a collective unit in NBS/Elementary.

The nuclear family; however, replaces the traditional family in many other contexts, which is a consequence of industrialization and urbanization in Turkish society at large. Although it was rare for a person to live alone in the past, particularly young people today prefer to do so in modern Turkish life. NBS/Upper Intermediate, *Unit 3: Generation Gap* introduces Sezin, a university student at the genetic engineering department. She complains that she had been treated like a baby by her parents during her childhood and high school days. Yet, she later states that things are changed now and that she can make her own decisions and arrange her social life. To her friends' surprise, Sezin finally announces her decision about leaving home and living with her best friend.

Besides the portrayal of autonomous young people like Sezin who can take decisions for their own lives, the NBS series also portrays men and women who are involved in rituals, the performance of which are usually prescribed by religion or by the traditions of Turkish culture. Used as a means of creating social bonds and nourishing interpersonal relationships, traditional wedding celebrations, for instance, are stressed as important cultural events in the NBS series. They begin with the henna evening/night, which is an event for women only. The textbooks under study display women who decorate the hands and fingers of the bride with henna-leaf dye and bring her into the middle with hymn and folk songs about henna. Apart from this ritual, Muslim religious festivals such as the Feast of Ramadan and the Feast of Sacrifice are depicted as happy times spent socializing and exchanging sweets and other gifts. In an overwhelmingly Muslim country, these festivals are considered religious dos and celebrated in a grand scale, providing a sense of national purpose and group identity, as expressed by two young people Hasan and Öykü from the NBS series:

“Ramadan”

Hasan is reporting...

It is the three-day festival. It is the end of 30 days' Ramadan fasting. Young people kiss their elders' hands, and the elders give them pocket money and candies. People help poor people in different ways. All family members usually meet at their grandparents' house. Then, they also visit other relatives.

Öykü and Janet are in the middle of a conversation about traditions:

Janet: What do you like best at festivals [the Feast of Sacrifice]?

Öykü: Well, lots of things such as kissing hands, receiving money (giggles), wearing our best clothes. But for me the best thing is that we visit all our relatives and neighbors. All throughout the festival chocolates and candies are served, which I like best.

Janet: I wish we had traditions like this, too.

By the same token, Şeb-i Arus, “a ceremony held every year on the 17th of December to commemorate the day of Mevlana's death and his reunion with God”, is stressed in NBS/Intermediate as one of the important celebrations that still survive in modern Turkey. The text includes information

about Mevlana, “a great mystic philosopher who addressed all people, regardless of their faith or ethnic origin, speaking of love of God, truth, humanity and nature”, and describes the sequence of events in the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony. In the same textbook, *Unit 7: Music and Dance* also presents another basic component of Turkish culture, namely, folk dances. The unit familiarizes students with the best known Turkish folk dances such as the horon in the Black Sea and the zeybek in the Aegean and teaches the names of the instruments that invariably accompany these dances.

3.2. Gender Roles: Tradition versus modernity

According to Baron and Byrne (2002), “gender refers to everything associated with an individual’s sex, including the roles, behaviors, preferences, and other attributes that define what it means to be a male or a female in a given culture”. In both Western and non-Western cultures, social norms remain traditional and gender-typed behavior is expected. That is, men should be socially dominant and self-assertive, while women should be caring, sensitive and emotionally expressive. Moreover, men are expected to do most household repairs and spend more time in recreational activities, while women spend more time doing household chores and child care.

With respect to gender-typed behavior, it is possible to state that in the NBS series gender roles are not so strictly pronounced. In other words, students are presented images that are quite distant from traditional gender roles, which is a reflection of the great strides Turkish women have made in social life. It is true that the role of women in Turkish society has changed greatly in recent years and women have begun to enter the workplace in increasing numbers. At all levels of the NBS series, women who were generally viewed as mothers and homemakers in the past are portrayed as active participants of business life, indicating that gender stereotypes are fading away both at home and especially in the workplace:



Figure 2. Women in the workplace



Figure3. Women as laboratory scientists

An important photo from NBS/Intermediate depicting Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, dancing with his adopted daughter Nebile at her wedding in as early as 1929 best expresses his goal to improve the status of Turkish women and integrate them more thoroughly into the society.



Figure 4. Atatürk dancing with his adopted daughter

In NBS/ Elementary, the letter written by Sibel, a 14 year-old student from Turkey, includes information about her family members and presents a profile of professional Turkish women as doctors, teachers and architects;

“Dear Mary, I’m Sibel. I’m from Turkey. I’m 14 years old and I’m a student. This is my family tree. My mother’s name is Zeynep. She is 43. She’s a doctor ... Nesrin is my aunt. She is my father’s sister. She is 36. She is married. She is an architect ... Emel and Tarik are our grandparents. Emel is 63 and Tarik is 65. They are teachers...”.

Well-known Turkish sportswomen such as Elvan Abeylegesse, a successful athlete, Neslihan Demir, “the most famous volleyball player on the Turkish national team” and Yasemin Dalkılıç, “the most talented Turkish diver in the world”, as they are described in the textbook samples, are examples of new role models for Turkish women presented in the series. In addition to these nontraditional women in the sports world, it is also possible for students to confront one of Turkey’s most prominent women novelists, Buket Uzuner, who is regarded as “a sample of success”. One of the most successful female Turkish pop singers in Turkey, Sertab Erener, is also introduced as one of the divas of Turkish pop music and added that she is best known for winning the Eurovision Song Contest 2003 with her hit song *Every Way That I Can*.

In the series we see that the concentration of working women in a few occupations has almost diminished as they find employment throughout the economy. While the largest number of women found in the NBS series are still in the traditional female occupations of clerical work, sales, teaching, and nursing, an almost equal number has more diversified employment, as in the case of Sevim Sarı, a female taxi driver who drives to different parts of Istanbul. In spite of the changing circumstances, men still predominate in the upper reaches of much of the occupations, as illustrated in NBS/Pre-Intermediate by Serhat Can, who is a Chief Executive Officer.

3.3. An Image of Modern Turkish Identity

An important aspect that contributes to an image of modern Turkish identity in the NBS series is the emphasis placed on environmental problems. It is clear that the authors of the NBS series seem to value *global citizenship* in the sense that learners are encouraged to act to make the world a more sustainable place and to take responsibility for their actions. Such environmental issues as global warming, deforestation, greenhouse effect, ul-

traviolet radiation, acid rain and many others are prevailing themes at all levels of the series. The successive units from NBS/Intermediate entitled *Unit 21 Environmental Problems*, *Unit 22 Species in Danger* and *Unit 23 Future of Our Planet*, for instance, have all been organized to draw learners' attention to human influences on environmental change and to the measures people can take in order to decrease the problems highlighted. To create a world of global citizens, education must be a priority, therefore; the textbooks give the message that most of the environmental challenges we face could be resolved if each individual and organization slightly changed their habits and practices. The authors aim at more aware children who avoid actions that hinder the well being of individuals or damage the Earth, which is considered precious and unique.

Through awareness raising and education, the authors of the NBS series prepare Turkish children and youth to be informed, engaged and critical citizens in the new millennium. In doing so, they pursue a policy characterized by an interesting combination of clear efforts to be modern and Western, alongside a desire to maintain traditional religious and historical values. With its narrative, source materials and pictorial evidence, the NBS series points to an image of modern Turkish identity composed of "the materiality of the West and spirituality of the East"(Kadıoğlu, 1996). This recurrent image is reinforced by narratives in which Turkey is described as 'a magnificent country' or 'a bridge' that 'links the East and the West' with its rich customs and traditions. It looks as if the legendary dance group, *The Fire of Anatolia*, known as *The Sultans of the Dance*, has been deliberately chosen to stress this unique position of Turkey as a country between tradition and modernity. The text in NBS/Intermediate Workbook describes the dance of the group as follows; "It is not only a classical Turkish dance; it is also an original Anatolian dance bringing the traditional and modern dances together, a composition which harmonizes Anatolia's melodies". Although it is not stated explicitly, it is this harmony of the old and the new that the authors of the series appear to value or think important,

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a fast-changing and interdependent world, we, as educators, need to have better understanding of the complex relationship between globalization and education, and should provide our children and youth with necessary skills to engage in a global world. Tensions between the local and the global, that is, the clashing cultural codes between Turkish culture and the larger globalized culture that they may encounter through EFL textbooks,

for instance, is a matter of profound concern and a serious challenge for their identity development. It is thus essential that education should help young people to meet such challenges they will confront now and in the future. Considering the worldwide change globalization creates, textbooks should not only focus on how to achieve globalization but also how to remain locally accountable. This is especially important for foreign language textbooks that invariably include cultural representations of a larger global world, following a trend towards homogenization around Western norms and culture. In this context, it is crucial that textbooks help nurture the skills and understanding necessary to confront the winds of change without getting lost in the 'global theme park'. In closing, we believe, education can, and should prepare students to deal with the fundamental changes in the area of culture and with the conflict emerging between global transformations and local responses.

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