

# **An examination of senior high school English textbooks from the perspective of developing learners' intercultural communicative competence**

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## **1. Introduction**

In the international community, people with diverse linguistic/cultural backgrounds communicate with each other in English; in general, possessing not only a high level of English proficiency but also intercultural communicative competence (ICC) makes it possible for them to establish a successful communication. ICC is composed of (1) cultural knowledge of one's own country and other countries, (2) respect for others and the attitude of thinking from another's perspective, and (3) the ability to recognize cultural differences to lessen misunderstandings (Byram, 2020, McKay, 2002).

When a country, like Japan, wishes to foster successful intercultural communication in the international community, it is essential to implement language education that emphasizes the development of the above knowledge, attitudes, and ability; Japan has implemented an English language education policy by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). In this policy, learners are encouraged to develop their ICC with following features: (1) good communication skills in English, (2) essential personal traits including positiveness, cooperativeness, and flexibility, and (3) a solid identity as Japanese and a good understanding of different cultures (MEXT, 2011).

While the aforementioned MEXT language education policy has been established, it was not clear to what extent it was reflected in current English language education. In order to determine this, I chose to examine EFL textbooks which function as the main teaching materials for learning languages and cultures (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

In Japan, the use of approved textbooks by MEXT is a requirement at both junior and senior high schools, so that MEXT can ensure the implementation of its curriculum; in classrooms, teachers need to use the textbooks for MEXT's ICC policy to be implemented.

This paper will examine locally published senior high school English textbooks approved by MEXT; I chose senior rather than junior high school textbooks as the senior high school

curriculum focuses more on ICC (MEXT, 2018). First, I will examine which components need to be included in these textbooks, and then I will look to see to what degree the current textbooks include these components. Finally, I will make recommendations as to how the current EFL textbooks might be improved to better develop ICC.

## **2. Essential components for developing learners' ICC**

An EFL textbook functions as the major resource for learners to obtain linguistic data (i.e., syntactic, semantic, phonetic, and sociolinguistic data) and important information about their target cultures in classrooms; therefore, learners should use a textbook containing components which enable the learners to acquire necessary cultural knowledge, attitudes, and ability to nurture their ICC in these environments. This paper examines the textbooks from the two aspects, cultures and activities, to determine whether they are properly designed for the ICC development; (1) culture is chosen because learning culture is as important as learning language in foreign language education (Alptekin, 2002, Hinkel, 1999, Risager, 2018), and (2) activities is chosen as it offers learners opportunities to develop their ICC by practicing language use, analyzing differences, and thinking about issues and solutions.

### **Three types of cultural knowledge**

Today, the number of non-native English speakers exceeds that of native English speakers (Crystal, 2003); meanwhile, the instrumental use of English is recognized in academic studies, professional contacts, and commercial pursuits involving international transactions where communications are increasingly carried out in English by non-native English speakers (Alptekin, 2002). This indicates that in international settings people communicate with others from different linguistic/cultural backgrounds who are not only from native English-speaking countries but also non-native countries. Acknowledging the presence of non-native English speakers in international settings, what cultures are necessary for EFL learners to acquire in English language education?

Traditionally, EFL textbooks, one of the essential teaching materials in classrooms, have been designed to learn American/British English by exhibiting discourses between native English speakers; in dialogues and/or readings in the books, learners encounter expressions and conversation protocols used by native speakers as well as social norms/beliefs in the community of native speakers. However, in globalized society many of the discourses are different from the ones presented in the textbooks given peoples' different linguistic/cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the learners need to know about culture and the English use of both natives and non-natives. Accordingly, an EFL textbook only aiming to acquire American/British English and its culture needs to be changed to a more suitable one to fit the current English use (Alptekin, 2002).

Perhaps, some people may think that learners need to learn as many cultures as possible, as they will interact with English speakers with diverse backgrounds and do not know with whom they will interact. However, an EFL textbook presenting a large variety of cultures is not practical as there are too many cultures; learners will be overwhelmed by the

differences. Instead, the textbook should adopt an approach of presenting a small number of cultures by culture type. As long as the cultures are presented in this way, any culture can be selected for the textbook; this approach is recommended by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and McKay (2002) who propose the use of three types of cultures for study in an EFL textbook: Target culture, source culture, and international culture. Target culture refers to the culture of a native English-speaking country while source culture means the learners' own culture. International culture indicates neither a culture from a country other than the learners' own culture nor a native English-speaking country, but is a culture or a mixture of cultures from countries where English is used as a common language of communication by people from different linguistic/cultural backgrounds.

An EFL textbook needs to include dialogues and/or readings presenting the three types of cultures, and this type of textbook is essential especially in countries like Japan where many English speakers are not present in society. In Japan, learners have few opportunities to encounter English speakers from international culture in classrooms; instructors are generally either Japanese or native English speakers. Therefore, in this environment, the textbook functions as a valuable resource to help learners recognize that English is used by a culturally diverse population.

### **The importance of deep level thinking**

Presenting culture from the perspective of the three culture types in an EFL textbook better serves learners if it easily leads the learners to acknowledge the cultural diversity by the use of reading texts. While learning culture from each culture type, the texts need to engage the learners in deep level thinking activities, which make it possible to enhance their understanding of the meanings, beliefs, values, and behaviors in other countries in relation to their own (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). When reading the text with these features, the learners acquire appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and ability, which are necessary to manage misunderstandings and miscommunications caused by cultural differences.

It is important for an EFL textbook to contain activities that enable learners to engage in deep level thinking for their ICC development. However, presently many textbooks are more likely to be designed to learn culture at the traditional knowledge-oriented level, as pointed out by Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2011); in other words, these textbooks may not provide many opportunities for the learners to tackle activities with deep level thinking.

### **Useful activities in classrooms**

Activities in an EFL textbook have important functions; in general, they offer opportunities for learners to practice the language, enhance their understanding of a given reading text, and develop their communication ability. The textbooks themselves also contain particular activities designed to develop ICC, and these activities will additionally foster the learners' understanding, attitudes, and ability for intercultural communications. Hoa (2011) lists the following activities which will develop the learners' ICC; some of them will encourage deep level thinking:

1. Lecture and readings about cultural differences: Learners are given a reading

which may cause a misunderstanding or offense due to the cultural differences; prior to this there will be a lecture which will examine the different cultural points of view and anticipate the problems that may arise from the assigned reading.

2. Cultural assimilators using a critical incident of cross-cultural behaviors: Learners are asked to choose the correct response after the explanation of an incident.
3. Cultural capsule: Learners are given a set of questions to enhance class discussion after a presentation about differences between cultures.
4. Self-confrontation: Learners engage in a mini drama about miscommunication to induce an emotional response and evoke self-confrontation; a discussion will follow.
5. Role play: Learners perform a role about a situation in their culture or another culture which they can experience from different perspectives.
6. Cultural simulation games: Learners engage in the game to simulate culture shock.
7. Discussion: Learners discuss various topics from intercultural aspects to motivate their learning and stimulate their critical thinking.
8. Inviting foreigners: Learners listen to an invited speaker's talk about his/her culture or experience.

As recommended by Hoa, a combination of the above eight activities, rather than any single activity, would be the most effective way to develop ICC in EFL classes.

### 3. High school textbook examination and its results

Generally speaking, a unit in an EFL textbook is composed of a main reading text, several exercises such as warm-up questions, reading comprehension questions, and grammar/vocabulary exercises, and one or two activities such as discussions and role-plays. There are various definitions of activity in literature, and in this paper, activity refers to “a learning procedure directed at communicative language use” in a meaningful way (Hunter, 2017, p.517), which is different from exercises which are most likely concerned with the production of correct forms regardless of the learners' understanding of the meaning (Ur, 2009, cited in Hunter, 2017).

Since the aforementioned MEXT language education policy aims to develop learners' ICC, the textbook needs to contain appropriate reading texts and activities to develop this competence; reading texts need to come from the three culture types, and Hoa's (2011) ICC activities suitable for textbooks must be included.

In order to see whether senior high school English textbooks in Japan are organized properly, I examined nine textbooks of *English Communication I* produced by three publishers (*Sanseido*, *Tokyo Shoseki*, and *Keirinkan*); these publishers were randomly chosen from the 2020 MEXT textbook list (which listed thirteen publishers). An *English Communication I* class aims to develop learners' four basic English skills, and is a required class for first-year senior high school students. Every examined textbook has either 10 or 12 units, each of which basically includes a reading text along with warm-up questions, a summary

completion exercise, reading comprehension questions, and vocabulary/grammar exercises; some units have additional reading text as well as output activities, such as writing paragraphs and/or engaging in discussions.

### **Research questions**

To see whether the nine textbooks are designed to develop learners' ICC, this study examines the use of culture types and activities. The following are the research questions of this study.

1. *What type of culture is presented most in each textbook?* This question examines whether the textbooks introduce readings from the three types of cultures (the target culture, international culture, and the learners' own culture (source culture)); possessing knowledge of these cultures is seen as essential for learners in ICC development classrooms.
2. *To develop ICC, what type of activity among those listed by Hoa (2011) is presented most in each textbook?* Hoa recommends the eight activities for the development of ICC in classrooms, and those which are suitable for the textbooks are the following six: cultural assimilators, cultural capsule, self-confrontation, role play, cultural simulation games, and discussion. These activities are important as they provide learners with opportunities to practice verbal communication and enhance their understanding of intercultural communications.

If the textbook presents readings from the three culture types together with the ICC activities, it is seen to advance learners' ICC.

### **Study results**

#### **What type of culture is presented most in each textbook?**

In order to see the use of culture types in the textbooks, I investigated what type of culture is presented as the main topic of each reading text; the cultures are categorized into four types. The first type is "International" culture which means that the reading text is about a story or an event that is either in a non-English speaking country or involves more than one country; for example, a story about a Soviet astronaut would be categorized as international culture as would a story about a curry dish that becomes popular in several countries. The second type is "Japanese (learners' own culture)"; when the reading text is about Japanese culture such as woodblock printing in the *Edo* Period and the event happens only in Japan (no involvement of other countries), this is classified as "Japanese". The third type is English-speaking countries (target culture), which includes topics only involving native English speakers and their culture. The last type is "Non-specific", as some readings in the textbooks are not associated with any particular country or countries and are therefore labeled as "Non-specific": for example, the study of animal behavior and the development of robots belong to this category.

To illustrate what type of culture is presented, I counted the number of the culture types in the nine textbooks which contained 131 reading texts in total, and calculated the percentage of each culture type. Table 1 illustrates the results.

Table 1. Culture types used in textbooks

International	49.62%
Japanese	22.14%
English-speaking countries	16.03%
Non-specific	12.21%

As in Table 1, “International (49.62%)” culture appears most in the examined textbooks, followed by the culture of “Japanese (22.14%)” and lastly “English-speaking countries (16.03%)”. The finding that the textbooks use the “International” culture most means that learners engage in readings portraying people’s interactions; this is evidence that the textbooks are most likely concerned with developing the learners’ ICC. As a matter of fact, it is important for the textbooks to include readings from international culture which depict discourses between native and non-natives as well as between non-natives, so that learners can encounter conversation protocols used in these discourses. These readings also invite the learners to find problems appearing in intercultural communications and think about the solutions.

To date, there is no consensus in the literature about how much each type of culture should be presented in a textbook; however, I think international culture should always be given a priority as it provides more opportunities for the learners to develop a sense of what international communications really are.

### What type of activity is presented most in each textbook?

The textbooks were examined to show how much each of the six activities suggested by Hoa (2011) appears in them. I counted the number of the activities, and found that only “role-play” was used in the textbooks; the other five activities were not presented in them.<sup>1)</sup> The role-play activity in the examined textbooks provides learners with a model conversation in a specific situation, so that they can practice what to say in English. After practicing the model conversation, they are asked to express their ideas by changing a few parts of the conversation. In this activity, they can see how people in other cultures behave and express their ideas, which leads the learners to reflect on their own culture.

The results of the study are described in the table below.

Table 2. Role-play activity used in the examined textbooks (no other activity types used)

Textbook	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Role-play	0	25	31	0	13	6	10	0	36

As illustrated in Table 2, the amount of role-play varied depending on the textbooks; three textbooks did not contain this activity at all. To better develop the learners ICC, some of the textbooks should increase the amount of role-play so that they are similar to textbooks B, C, and I in the table above. In addition, all of the textbooks need to include a combination of the following activity types: cultural assimilators, cultural capsule, self-confrontation, role

play, cultural simulation games, and discussion.

#### 4. Discussion

The examination results revealed that the senior high school English textbooks do not provide many types of activities aiming to develop learners' ICC although the textbooks introduce the target culture, international culture, and the learners' own culture. This demonstrates a discrepancy between the use of cultures and activities in the textbooks; on the one hand, all the essential culture types necessary to develop ICC are included, and on the other, activities to foster such competence rarely appear. This finding indicates that the textbooks are partly designed to foster learners' ICC but there is a lot of room for their improvement; they need to present various types of activities to foster learners' ICC.

##### **Suitable textbook design**

The study result by Davcheva and Sercu (2005) also suggests the necessity of textbook improvement for learners' ICC development. In their study, it was revealed that very few language instructors teach culture from the learner-centered approach, an approach which invites the learners to engage in deep level thinking as they reflect on and explore specific aspects of the different foreign cultures. The researchers also found that the majority of instructors will follow the textbooks; therefore, if there are appropriate questions in them that will engage the learners in deep level thinking, the instructors will follow that.

Taking the findings of Davcheva and Sercu (2005) into consideration, I propose several improvements to the current EFL textbooks to better develop learners' ICC:

First, appropriate activities need to be included, and not one type of activity but a combination of activity types should be provided. Importantly, activities which enable learners to engage in deep levels of thinking must be included because they will get learners to think about how to deal with cultural differences and misunderstandings when communicating with various English speakers.

Secondly, not only activities but also the readings in an EFL textbook must be carefully chosen, and this must be done in consideration to the three types of cultures as well as the appropriateness of contents that evokes the learners' awareness and respect of cultural differences in relation to their own culture. The literary work suggested in a paper by Nault (2011) is an example of a suitable reading; learners were assigned to read several excerpts from a novel about an Indian boy written by R. K. Narayan. From the excerpts, the learners learned Indian history and culture, such as the class system, customs, and beliefs, during the British colonial period. They were also assigned to analyze people's interactions in the excerpts, some of which depicted conflicts between the interlocutors. After the analysis, Nault asked the learners what could have been done to avoid the conflict between the boy and his British teacher; the learners would look at the cultural differences of Britain and India, comparing those with their own, and become more aware of how cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings.

The readings should also be selected by considering how much they appeal to the learners and are relevant to them, as mentioned by Nault (2011); these readings will motivate them to learn the language and culture. Today, many of the learners are interested in communicating with people from different linguistic/cultural backgrounds and/or working in international settings (Igarashi, 2016). Therefore, readings presenting international culture would be welcomed by the learners.

Finally, the proportion of each culture type appearing in a textbook should be determined according to the learners' needs; given the learners' interest in international culture, this culture type should be emphasized. Further, the current English use in the world should be also reflected; learners need to know about the use of English as a common communication language among a diverse range of English users. Therefore, the proportion of readings involving international culture should be the largest. The rest of culture types (source and target) should be also included as knowledge of each of the three culture types is necessary to further prepare the learners for their future intercultural communications; additionally, target culture should be presented to a minimum, as Widdowson (1998) sees that discourses exhibiting conversation protocols by native English speakers, such as the rule of turn-taking and backchanneling, are not so relevant to many EFL learners.

In summary, to develop learners' ICC in classrooms, an EFL textbook needs to have suitable readings presented in appropriate proportions. Once readings are determined, activities for each reading must be formed in a way so learners engage in different types of ICC activities and employ deep levels of thinking.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of the textbook examination revealed that MEXT's language education policy of developing learners' ICC is not sufficiently reflected in the examined textbooks. Textbooks are essential teaching materials to foster ICC in classrooms; therefore, this paper makes a few suggestions to improve them. An ideal textbook is one that contains readings coming from the three culture types which accompany ICC activities; accordingly, MEXT as well as publishers in Japan must ensure that textbooks include such readings and activities.

This would also apply to any EFL textbooks published outside of Japan that wish to develop ICC; not many textbooks are designed to develop it. Today, internationally, many instructors simply follow the content in the textbooks to meet their national curricular requirements, which are not overly concerned with the development of the learners' ICC, as noted by Davcheva and Sercu (2005).

This paper looks at locally published EFL textbooks rather than the internationally distributed ones by the major UK/US publishers as Alptekin (1993) and Gray (2010) point out that these publishers primarily promote the acquisition of American/British English and their culture. However, given our globalized environment, as discussed by Alptekin (2002) and McKay (2002), EFL textbooks, regardless of whether they are locally or internationally



published, must change to better correspond to the global community.

## Notes

- 1) Please note that although discussion activities appear in all the textbooks, they disagree with the explanation of "Discussion" provided by Hoa (2011), which is the activity where learners discuss various topics from intercultural aspects. In the examined textbooks, the discussion activity is used simply to develop learners' reading comprehension skills and enhance understanding about the content of the reading; discussion questions from intercultural perspectives are missing. Therefore, "discussion" in the examined textbooks is not counted as the discussion activity for ICC.

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## 異文化間コミュニケーション力育成の観点から見た 高校用検定英語教科書の構成について

国際社会では多様な言語 / 文化背景を持つグローバル人材が活躍しているが、彼らは高度な英語力のみならず異文化間コミュニケーション力を身につけてうまく意思疎通を行っている。よって、グローバル人材を育成するには、どの国においても異文化間コミュニケーション力を養う教育の実施が不可欠となる。

日本でも文部科学省がグローバル人材育成を目標に英語教育を行っていることから、異文化間コミュニケーション力育成が重要なものとなる。しかしながら、実際どの程度英語教育がこの能力育成に対応し、教育を実施しているのかは明らかになっていない。そこで筆者は異文化間コミュニケーション力育成への対応状況を確認するため、英語の授業で必須教材となっている教科書を調査することにした。この調査での対象教科書は、中学よりも高度なコミュニケーション力育成を目指している高校の検定英語教科書で、調査項目としてリーディングが扱っている文化の種類と異文化間コミュニケーション力育成を目標とする練習問題を取り上げた。具体的に文化の種類に関しては、Cortazzi and Jin (1999) や McKay (2002) が学習者の異文化間コミュニケーション力育成に必要としている3つの文化の「target culture, source culture, international culture」の使用状況を、そして練習問題は、Hoa (2011) が推奨している6つの異文化間コミュニケーション力育成用問題の使用頻度を調査した。

この調査の結果から、上記の3つの文化全てが使用されており、特に international culture の使用が顕著なことが明らかになった。練習問題に関しては、ロールプレイのみが使用されていることが示された。これらから、教科書は、リーディングが扱っている文化では異文化間コミュニケーション力育成に配慮しているが、提供している練習問題に大きな問題があり、文科省の英語教育の目標を達成するには改善が必要な状況となっていると言える。

本稿は、高校英語教科書の構成の改善策として以下の点を勧める。まず、文化の相違や多様な英語話者とのコミュニケーションで誤解が生じた時にどう対処していくべきかを考えるような異文化間コミュニケーション力育成用練習問題を多く組み込む。またリーディングも、3つの文化の観点からの選択を確実に言い、更に学習者のモチベーションを上げるために彼らの興味や必要性に合ったものを選ぶ。そして、3つの文化の割合も、先行研究が多くの学生が国際社会で活躍したいと考えていることを明らかにしていることから、international culture に比重を置いたものにする。

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