
Cultural and Linguistic Ideology in English Textbooks in Korea: Implications for Educators

Bogum Yoon
State University of New York at Binghamton
U.S.A.

Diana Murtaugh
State University of New York at Binghamton
U.S.A.

ABSTRACT: Research shows Eurocentrism dominates English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, but does it still? Grounded in critical literacy, this study examined cultural elements in 11 South Korean EFL textbooks. The findings reveal 1) a variety of cultural topics, 2) dominance of Western cultures, and 3) white people as key figures. This suggests that the textbooks introduce many countries' cultural and historical information but marginalize non-Western people, implicitly giving power to Western people. This suggests that equal representation of diverse people and cultures is necessary in textbooks for EFL learners' access to genuine diversity, equity, and inclusion.

KEYWORDS: EFL textbooks, Korean English textbooks, critical analysis, cultural ideology, linguistic ideology

Theoretical Perspectives
Methodology
Findings
Discussion and Implications for Future Research
Acknowledgements
References
Author Contact

Grounded in critical language and literacy perspectives, this paper aims to report on the critical analysis of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks used in Korean high schools. In Korea, learning English is required and a crucial criterion for students' college entrance and future jobs (Lee & Heinz, 2016; Ra, 2019; Yoon, 2009). Textbooks are the primary resource for students learning the English language (Richter, 2022), as well as gaining an introduction to different cultures; therefore, textbooks used to relay linguistic and cultural information should be inclusive of the diversity around the world. As outlined in Korea's national curriculum, English language learning should encourage students to be global citizens (Kim & Lee, 2023; Ministry of Education, 2015). We believe that EFL textbooks should include content, images, and references that deepen students' understanding of the world, inspiring them to act as critically and globally-oriented human beings with multiple perspectives.

As critical scholars have astutely observed (e.g., Apple, 2014; Janks, 2014; Kubota, 2023; Luke, 2018), all texts, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, are not neutral but are inherently political. They can perpetuate certain ideologies by favoring certain groups over others, implying that some cultures are superior. Therefore, it is important to critically analyze the contents of EFL textbooks, mainly how they depict cultures, people, and cultural elements in the texts. While there have been some studies on the analysis of textbooks in EFL contexts from cultural and social perspectives (e.g., Lee, 2009; Migdadi, 2008), these studies were published more than a decade ago, and there is little contemporary research in this area. Our study, therefore, presents a timely analysis of English language learning textbooks in South Korean (henceforth referred to as Korean) contexts, shedding light on the current situation and the need for equal representation.

The research question that guided our critical content analysis of English textbooks used by Korean schools is: How do EFL textbooks in Korean contexts portray cultural elements worldwide? To address this broader question, we examined the portrayal of linguistic and cultural ideologies in Korean EFL textbooks, grounded in critical perspectives. Although our focus is on Korean EFL textbooks, the findings can be applicable to other contexts since EFL textbooks are commonly used worldwide. The current study aims to provide implications and directions for future research and practice in EFL education.

Theoretical Perspectives

Our study on EFL textbooks is guided by a broader perspective of critical literacy (Janks, 2014; Kubota, 2023; Luke, 2004, 2018; Norton, 2000; Yoon, 2022). Our stance is that all textbooks, including EFL textbooks, are political, not neutral, and intend to serve the interest of given groups through “official knowledge” (Apple, 2014, p. 1). Due to this, educators in EFL contexts need to develop students’ critical consciousness to be active and not passive learners. The first step is to help educators understand the content of textbooks. There are several ways to understand textbook contents. Guided by the research question, we particularly focus on how EFL textbooks portray cultural elements across the world. For this section, we first start with the definition of critical literacy in relation to EFL textbooks, followed by relevant research on EFL textbooks.

Critical Literacy and EFL Textbooks

We define critical literacy as a school of thought examining language and power in texts. The term “critical” originated from the Greek word *kritikos*, which has a meaning of being able to discern, argue, and judge (Luke, 2012). Critical literacy is situated in a social constructivist orientation (Freire, 1970; Gee, 2015; Handsfield, 2016; Lewison et al., 2002). Although critical literacy is defined differently among critical scholars (e.g., Janks, 2014; Luke, 2018; Yoon, 2016, 2022), our study aligns with Luke’s (2004) idea, which views critical literacy as practice that includes “second guessing, reading against

the grain, asking hard and harder questions, seeing underneath, behind, and beyond texts, trying to see and ‘call’ how these texts establish and use power over us, over others, on whose behalf, in whose interests” (p. 4). In short, critical literacy is a political and social aspect of learning. One of the major purposes of critical literacy is to raise awareness about how texts position learners and how learners can be empowered to resist being positioned as passive learners.

The question remains as to why EFL textbooks are selected for this purpose. EFL textbooks are one of the major resources in English language classes (Rahmawati, 2018). Examining EFL textbooks from critical literacy perspectives starts from the premise that language learning is inseparable from learning culture (Brown, 2014; García, 2009; Kramersch, 2002; Kuo & Lai, 2006; Norton, 2000; Yoon, 2021; Yoon & Pratt, 2023; Yu, 2020). Therefore, foreign language education incorporates learning culture in tandem with learning a foreign language; textbooks are the main resource for this purpose.

In addition, textbooks can serve as an important resource to promote students’ learning through multiple perspectives about the world and reality and provide opportunities for students to understand linguistic and cultural power structures. Through the contents and images, EFL textbooks might implicitly and explicitly deliver the message that certain groups have more power in relation to other cultures. The implicit and explicit messages in the texts often govern students’ views of life and the world. For this reason, all texts, including EFL textbooks, need to be examined and critiqued with a critical lens to transform cultural and social norms (Luke, 2004).

Research on Content Analysis of EFL Textbooks

Our literature review on EFL textbooks shows that they are evaluated based on two different criteria: 1) linguistic perspectives and 2) cultural and social perspectives. Studies based on linguistic perspectives (e.g., Nuralawiah et al., 2024; Rahmawati, 2018; Wengrum, 2020) examine the content of EFL textbooks by focusing on functional purposes, including clear objectives, while studies guided by cultural and social perspectives focus on the current reality of the world in the texts. We first share the findings of the studies that evaluate the textbooks from linguistic perspectives, followed by cultural and social perspectives.

Rahmawati (2018) and Nuralawiah et al. (2024) examined EFL textbooks in Indonesian contexts. Based on the criteria of “a good English textbook” (p. 3), Rahmawati (2018) examined the content of elementary EFL textbooks by using several criteria, including “aim and objective, facilitate teaching learning process, activity/exercises, and vocabulary” (p. 4), and found that most textbooks met the criterion of lesson objectives, while some failed the criterion of vocabulary because it was outdated. Although the focus differed, the study of Nuralawiah et al. (2024) also analyzed textbooks from linguistic perspectives. They examined EFL textbooks based on four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They found that the studied EFL textbooks

met the criteria; however, the researchers did not recommend the books due to the lack of “knowledge and culture” about “the Indonesian nation” (p. 16046).

Such studies of EFL textbooks from linguistic perspectives are common, but studies from cultural and social perspectives are few in current research. Although contemporary research is scarce from these perspectives, we found a consistent theme among past studies on EFL textbooks. For instance, Migdadi’s (2008) study examined several textbooks from a college in Jordan, where English was taught as a major foreign language. In the study, Migdadi discovered that the EFL textbooks overwhelmingly focused on English-speaking people and countries when they discussed cultures. Lee’s (2009) study also supports the findings of Migdadi’s study. In the study that analyzed 11 Korean EFL conversation textbooks, Lee argued, “There was a strong sense of a hierarchical representation of the Anglophone world in which the US culture served as the supreme source” (p. 1). Similarly, Motschenbacher (2019) analyzed EFL textbooks in German contexts and found that the books overwhelmingly promoted the United Kingdom (UK) as legitimate speakers of English with some mention of the United States, Canada, and Australia. Motschenbacher (2019) concluded that the exclusion of other cultures “affect[s] EFL learners, as they are by such representational practices downgraded to second-class English users whose language use is of no import and whose experiences outside of Anglophone cultural contexts are only poorly reflected” (p. 304).

Findings from these studies suggest that linguistic and cultural hegemony is grounded in Eurocentric ideas. Further examination is needed to determine whether this linguistic and cultural hegemony has continued in contemporary EFL textbooks and, if so, how it is portrayed. This current study adds to that conversation by analyzing textbooks, particularly EFL textbooks in Korea, where English is considered one of the significant content areas in schools, in addition to mathematics and the Korean language.

Methodology

For this critical analysis paper, we reviewed 11 randomly selected Korean EFL textbooks to obtain an overall sense of the portrayal of worldwide cultures in the books. Below, we provide the data sources and analysis details, followed by a presentation of our positionality.

Data Source and Analysis

The first author collected current textbooks from two high school EFL teachers from different schools. When she shared her interest in examining EFL textbooks, the EFL teachers she knew through her personal and professional connections were willing to contribute textbooks from their schools for this research project.

The selection process of the EFL textbooks for their schools is similar: 1) major publishers publish the approved textbooks in Korea (e.g., *Jihaksa*) and 2) the approved

textbooks are delivered to the school's English department and then selected after a department meeting. Therefore, although these books are government-approved, there is some variety in the textbooks adopted school by school. It is unknown how many publishers are involved in publishing EFL textbooks, but the books we reviewed are from diverse publishers. See Table 1 for the list of reviewed textbooks with publisher information.

All textbooks were published in Korea in 2018, guided by the 2015 Revised National Curriculum, and approved by the Korean Ministry of Education. As Kim and Lee (2023) noted, "Textbooks used in primary and secondary schools in Korea are strictly regulated and subject to authorization by the government" (p. 546). See Korea Textbook Association (2024) for details of the textbook approval process.

Table 1

Textbook List

Book	Book Title & Publisher
1	High School English II by <i>Darakwon</i> (다락원)
2	High School English II by <i>Bisanggyouk</i> (비상교육)
3	High School English II by <i>Neungryul</i> (능률)
4	High School English II by <i>Chunjegyouk</i> (천재교육)
5	High School English II by <i>Jihaksa</i> (지학사)
6	High School English II by <i>Dongachulpan</i> (동아출판)
7	High School English II by <i>Kumsungchulpan</i> (금성출판)
8	High School English II by <i>YBM</i> (와이비엠)
9	High School English II by <i>YBM Holdings</i> (와이비엠홀딩스)
10	Multilingual High School English II by <i>YBM</i> (와이비엠)
11	High School English I by <i>Dongaculpan</i> (동아출판)

We analyzed the textbook data set using the content analysis method (Krippendorff, 2019) and coding strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to identify cultural patterns across the books. Since we used critical literacy as our conceptual lens on linguistic and cultural ideology, we needed a methodological tool that systematically identified patterns in book contents. Krippendorff's (2019) content analysis and Corbin and Strauss's (2015) coding analysis methods were methodologically proper for our study, which focuses on patterns across the books.

We randomly created two sets of textbooks (e.g., sets of six and five), reviewed each set, and switched. We used the multiple analysis processes of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Initially, we decided to review the books using the open coding process to obtain a general sense of the content without any particular focal point. After this initial review, we shared with each other the distinctive patterns we observed across the books at our weekly meetings. One example of distinctive patterns is that most of the books offer a variety of cultural topics such as foods and traditions. In

sum, during the open coding process (e.g., the initial stage for examining and categorizing data for a bigger picture), we focused on the *what* in the textbooks.

For the axial coding process (e.g., identifying how the categories connect), we focused on *how* cultural patterns are portrayed in each book, guided by the research question of our study. In this process, we took notes on specific examples. Although we initially approached this study by focusing on the text (e.g., words, discourses), we found that the images and features served as supporting examples of the text. For instance, images of food match chapters about food. Through this process, we identified the dominant themes: 1) diverse cultural topics, 2) dominant Western cultures and people, 3) white people as key figures, and 4) cultural stereotypes through given topics.

We revisited all books for the selective coding process (e.g., validating the relationships among the categories) to confirm, refine, or extend the themes. This process included identifying multiple specific examples that support each theme based on the research question. The following themes were developed through axial coding: 1) variety of cultural topics, 2) dominance of Western cultures, and 3) white people as key figures. As shown, the four themes developed in the axial coding stage were combined into three themes. The fourth theme (e.g., cultural stereotypes through given topics) was integrated with the third theme because cultural stereotypes were shown by the images throughout the texts, particularly the reliance upon white males. In sum, these themes will serve as our study findings, which will be discussed in detail with specific examples to support the findings.

Researcher Positionality

Our identities are an important part of our data analysis and interpretation. The first author (e.g., Korean heritage, multilingual) is a teacher educator who works with pre- and in-service teachers in a literacy education program in the USA. Her areas of research are critical literacy and critical global literacy. She approaches research from a critical lens. She grew up in Korea and moved to the USA; she has cultural experiences in both countries.

To incorporate American perspectives, the second author (e.g., white, monolingual) was invited to analyze the textbooks with the first author. The second author was born and raised in the USA and taught high school English for several years. She is a doctoral candidate, and her area of research is the power dynamics among the cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and preservice teacher during the student teaching experience.

Findings

The findings show that the EFL textbooks in Korean contexts represent worldwide cultures by including diverse global topics, including history, food, language, popular culture, and technology. However, when the books discuss these cultural topics, certain

groups of people are more dominant than others. Three themes are drawn from the findings of the study: 1) a variety of cultural topics, 2) dominance of Western cultures, and 3) white people as key figures.

A Variety of Cultural Topics

Our analysis suggests that EFL textbooks cover various cultural topics. Most of the textbooks are mixed with contemporary topics (e.g., topics that are current and of high interest to students, such as technology or pop culture) and traditional topics (e.g., topics that are routine in language learning, such as history and food). For instance, several books (books 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11) dedicated an entire chapter to encouraging students to reflect on current technological advancements (e.g., robots, AI). Book 10 has students read and discuss augmented reality (AR). That chapter challenges students to think about technological obstacles impacting the widespread use of AR or how it can be used in varying environments, such as the medical field. The technology chapter in book 1 outlines the changes in “smart” technology and the potential advantages and disadvantages of configuring one’s domicile into a “smart home.” Books 5 and 9, however, do not have a unit on technology, but those two books mention technology abstractly, including images of cell phones or robotics. Including technology in the study of English may be a way to introduce current, culturally relevant information and engage students with a topic they may find interesting.

Traditional topics are delivered through historical information on key people or events in a given country and food worldwide. Each book differs slightly in what cultures are covered and which foods are mentioned, with some favoring healthy eating (e.g., book 9) and others history (e.g., book 2), but the reviewed books are often used to introduce several different cultures in one chapter. For example, in book 11, there are passages dedicated to the cultural significance of hot dogs (USA and Canada), ais kacang (Malaysia and Singapore), harira (Morocco), and pastel (Brazil). In book 4, one chapter introduces students to famous sites in Turkey, France, and Thailand and provides a brief overview of Morocco. These diverse topics are used to improve Korean students’ reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. It shows that the textbooks attempt to deliver the message that cultures around the world are diverse.

Dominance of Western Cultures

Another consistent theme across the textbooks is that they portray the English language and culture as belonging to Western people (e.g., white people in predominantly U.S. contexts) and not other, non-Western groups. The dominance of Western cultures is evident with the language hegemony portrayed through Western cultural examples. Although English is spoken by many groups of people around the world for communication purposes (e.g., Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Nigeria, Singapore), it is rare to find examples of other non-Western groups. This positioning of Western cultures starts with the cover choices. Four of the 11 textbook covers (books 1, 3, 7, and

9), the only books with clear culturally driven covers, solidly root themselves in Western cultures, with books 1 and 7 displaying images of British palace guards and books 3 and 9 touting American culture with an image from Chicago on book 3 and a cartoon rendering of an American football player on book 9.

Within the texts are numerous Western examples, prioritizing mostly American and then British cultures over others. However, more surprising is the inclusion of non-English-speaking, Western countries, such as Germany, France, and Denmark. It could be argued that the authors choose to focus on English-speaking countries as a means to deliver English instruction, even if it leaves out a majority of English-speaking countries; however, it leaves the question as to why the authors would then choose non-English speaking countries, primarily in Europe, as cultural diversity examples. For example, the art unit in book 6 includes a six-page mini-biography and art accomplishments of the French painter Rousseau (Western, white, male, primary language French). With this example, the focus is on the accomplishments of Western cultures at the expense of non-Western cultures. In the same book, in a chapter about travel, the authors included a four-page travel log of Denmark, adding information about famous sites and people instead of exploring a non-Western country. In book 11, the German tradition of “schultuete” is a first-day-of-school example from around the world, yet other cultures are not depicted. The findings suggest that the Korean EFL textbooks indirectly convey that Western cultures, regardless of language, are preferred.

Furthermore, important moments in history and civic engagement are situated in Western cultures, ignoring the opportunity to include other cultures. For example, book 8 has a chapter about civil unrest and moments of citizens striving for equality. Although this is a tremendous step in venturing outside of typically “safe” topics such as food, it only explores historical and contemporary moments in the USA (e.g., Martin Luther King Jr., Katherine Switzer, The Woman’s Suffrage Movement, and Black Lives Matter). Even though many countries have political movements and acts of protest, none are included. In a similar theme of helping humanity, book 5 has a chapter encouraging students to find and bring positivity to the world. However, the focus is on a movement from the UK instead of introducing moments of positivity from other cultures. The chapter in book 5 outlines a white, British woman’s movement of “yarn bombing,” an act where the artist wraps items in yarn to bring joy to those who see it. The chapter does not branch out to include non-Western contexts of yarn bombing or similar initiatives. These chapters push students to think civically and broaden their critical engagement, but they fall short by heavily relying upon Western cultures.

Featured works of literature in the examined textbooks also demonstrate that English only belongs to Western cultures. Although it is reasonable to assume that an EFL textbook would include English literature, the chosen pieces tend to be Western literature, mostly written by white male authors. Seven of the 11 books include a literary piece, all highlighting a Western author. Six of the seven authors were white and male. Book 2 includes “Harrison Bergeron” a short story written by American author Kurt Vonnegut (white male); book 3 includes “The Cactus” a short story written by American author O. Henry (white male); book 5 includes an abridged version of *The Wizard of Oz* written by American author Frank Baum (white male); book 6 includes “The Child’s Story,” a short story written by British author Charles Dickens (white male); book 8

includes “The Gorgon’s Head,” a short story written by American author Nathaniel Hawthorne (white male); and book 10 includes “The Red-headed Client’s Case,” a short story written by British author Arthur Conan Doyle (white male). It should be noted that book 4 includes a shortened version of *A Single Shard*, written by American author Linda Sue Park (Korean-American female); the only book to deviate from white and male and, although Park is American, the story takes place in 12th century Korea. However, six of the seven books use literary pieces from Western white men, solidifying the understanding that Western countries are the primary owners of English.

White People as Key Figures

The books depict white people as key figures by positioning them in the center of the content, representing white people as central characters. Many photos and illustrations throughout the books are designed to break up the content and engage the reader with vibrant, eye-catching images. All images match the page’s content, such as illustrating the story “Harrison Bergeron” in book 2 to match the story’s conflict. When including images of people, however, the authors chose photos of white people instead of people of color. For example, all books provide mock conversations between teenagers. Pictures of teenagers accompany the dialogue, implying that those teenagers are conversing. Often, one or more of the teenagers are white, such as the conversation in book 5 between a white teen male and a white teen female discussing the Internet. Images of white people overwhelmingly dominate the textbooks (see Table 2).

Table 2
Distribution of Images

Book	White People	Non-white People	Mixed Group	Unknown	Total Images
1	44 (62%)	15 (21%)	5 (7%)	7 (10%)	71
2	38 (50%)	20 (26%)	11 (14%)	7 (9%)	76
3	57 (61%)	26 (28%)	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	93
4	22 (36%)	27 (44%)	8 (13%)	4 (7%)	61
5	37 (56%)	13 (20%)	4 (6%)	12 (18%)	66
6	69 (70%)	13 (13%)	11 (11%)	6 (6%)	99
7	52 (47%)	28 (25%)	24 (22%)	6 (5%)	110
8	44 (66%)	15 (22%)	6 (9%)	2 (3%)	67

9	51 (66%)	17 (22%)	7 (9%)	2 (3%)	77
10	64 (63%)	27 (27%)	2 (2%)	8 (8%)	101
11	44 (52%)	24 (29%)	8 (10%)	8 (10%)	84
Total	522 (58%)	225 (25%)	91 (10%)	67 (7%)	905

Note: All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number; they may not add up to 100%.

For each book, all images of people were assessed by their racial appearance as white or non-white. For those categories, all people in the image were the same race. Images in the mixed group category included multiple people of different races. In the unknown category, race could not be determined. Famous people (e.g., Brad Pitt, Justin Bieber, etc.) were counted for all categories, but ancients (e.g., Pythagoras, Confucius, etc.) were not. Ancients were excluded because they were represented by pictures of statues or an artist's rendering of that individual. Cartoons specific for the textbooks were counted, but images of book covers (e.g., *To Kill a Mockingbird*), movie posters (e.g., *Lord of the Rings*), famous works of art (e.g., Mona Lisa), currency (e.g., Queen Elizabeth II on British currency), or album covers (e.g., John Lennon's *Imagine*) were excluded. Although the authors chose to use these cultural references, they did not choose the images associated with those references. Images that occurred in a series, such as comic strips or the same characters carried over for several pages, were counted once (e.g., several pages about Steve Jobs with pictures of him were only counted once). Images with the person completely obscured (e.g., a SCUBA diver, a person in shadow, or the back of the head) were not counted. Pictures of hands were excluded unless they were intentionally used to demonstrate racial and global unity (e.g., several hands clasped together with differing national flags painted on their wrists to suggest racial and global unity), then it was counted as a mixed group image.

As shown in Table 2, ten of the 11 books used images of white people more than any other race. Book 4 is the exception, with white people making up 36% of the photos. Of those ten books, nine out of ten use white people more than half the time. Book 7 is less than half at 47%, although that is still more than nonwhite people at 25%. Overall, a total of 905 images were counted, and white people were the main characters in 522 photos or 58% of the time.

Images of white people dominate even the most innocuous moments in the textbooks. For example, in book 6, a smiling, middle-aged, white man leaning on a lectern in front of students depicts a teacher. He seems to love his job and find joy in teaching. In book 7, a photo of a teenage white boy dressed in common American attire of jeans, a white t-shirt, and a plaid overshirt is next to a Korean food discussion. These images reinforce white male dominance and Western contexts.

These rather innocuous choices are ever-present. Referring back to book 11 and the "schultuete" tradition in Germany, accompanying that passage is a photo of a white family of four: a woman and a man with two young male children. All are dressed in

business attire (males in khaki pants and dress shirts, and the mother in a blazer with pearls) with big smiles on their faces, seeming to enjoy their time together. In book 7, after a listening passage about a woman traveling via an airplane, accompanying a comprehension check activity, are images of the presumed traveler, a white woman, with her presumed partner, a white man. Both are depicted smiling and seemingly enjoying their time together. On the same page, pictures of white people demonstrate actions, such as a white teenage girl pouting her lips with a notebook pulled over her head like a hat while doing homework; an elderly white couple, smiling carrying boxes; a white young adult man scrubbing the tire of his car; a white woman with her eyes closed and head downcast with a tissue held to her nose, tending an illness.

Twenty-five percent of the time, images of non-white people are central characters, but the authors chose group photos to depict diversity. The chosen photos, however, are unsubstantial and generic; they do little to promote diversity education or an interconnected global world. They merely serve as a means to add diversity to the textbooks with as little effort as possible. In fact, the generic images are easy to find with a simple Google image search and are free to use (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1

Diversity Photo in Books 1 and 7



Photo by Rawpixel. Downloaded from 123RF.com.

Figure 2*Diversity Photo in Book 9*

Photo by Rawpixel. Downloaded from 123RF.com.

Furthermore, although the groupings are diverse, white people are still the majority (see Figures 1 and 2). For instance, Figure 1 from books 1 and 7 shows two non-white women with four white young adults, and Figure 2 from book 9 shows two non-white teenagers surrounded by five white teenagers. The photos demonstrate a weak attempt to include diversity in the texts, especially since most of the pictured people are white. These findings suggest that the books position white people as a representation of Western culture. It implies that the textbooks implicitly deliver the message to students in Korean contexts that white people are the ones who represent Western culture.

It should be noted that every textbook credits most of its images to Getty Images or Shutterstock, two companies that provide royalty-free images, such as the ones pictured here. These companies provide a database of searchable images and, for a flat fee, companies can use these images for their needs, in this case, textbooks. These companies may provide an overwhelming number of images depicting white people; however, that analysis is not included in this paper. Furthermore, the creators of the textbooks still chose to continue with these images instead of seeking alternatives. With this in mind, it still stands to reason that the EFL textbooks continue to perpetuate white people as central to Western culture. Within this theme, every textbook featured multiple sections on influential people (e.g., artists, scientists, actors, etc.), but white males dominate (see Table 3).

Table 3
Influential People

Book	White Men	White Women	Asian	Other POC	Total
1	14 (82%)	2 (12%)	1 (6%)	0	17
2	10 (59%)	2 (12%)	4 (24%)	1 (6%)	17
3	7 (47%)	4 (27%)	4 (27%)	0	15
4	4 (31%)	5 (38%)	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	13
5	11 (44%)	3 (12%)	11 (44%)	0	25
6	13 (72%)	3 (17%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	18
7	13 (48%)	4 (15%)	8 (30%)	2 (7%)	27
8	8 (57%)	3 (21%)	0	3 (21%)	14
9	21 (81%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	26
10	11 (69%)	3 (19%)	2 (13%)	0	16
11	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	2 (29%)	7
Total	113 (58%)	32 (16%)	39 (12%)	11 (6%)	195

Note: Percentages were rounded up to the nearest whole number; they may not add up to 100%.

For Table 3, each instance of white men, white women, Asian men and women, and other people of color were tallied. Anytime students were expected to learn about a particular person, regardless of how small, it was counted. For example, a multi-page spread about Rene Descartes was counted once, holding the same weight as a small blurb about Barbara Walters; therefore, these numbers only reflect instances about a specific person, not the depth of discussion. Furthermore, nationality was not differentiated. For example, Americans, such as Linda Sue Park, and Asians, such as Korean painter Kim Hong-do, are included in the Asian category. The same is true for other people of color, such as Americans Michael Jordan and Jackie Robinson, as well as South African Nelson Mandela. All images of white people are Western, but their nationality is not delineated. For literature sections, the author was counted but not the images of the fictional characters (e.g., William Shakespeare was counted but not Romeo and Juliet).

Table 3 shows that the textbooks overwhelmingly favored influential white males, with an overall total of 58%. There are three outliers: books 4, 5, and 11. White men in book 4 make up 31% of influential people; however, when including white women, white people are still favored at 69%. The same is true for book 5; white men make up 44%, but when added to white women, white people are still favored at 56%. Book 11 had the fewest mentions of influential people at seven. The percentages for book 11 are, therefore, skewed. The raw data for book 11 shows that the seven mentions are evenly distributed with two white people, three Asian people, and two other people of color. Book 11 is the only book with a more even distribution.

Students learn more about white men than any other gender or race while they learn English. Book 8, for example, dedicates a section to Captain Chesley Sullenberger, a white American male pilot credited with saving lives by safely completing an emergency landing in the Hudson River. Book 1 summarizes three significant scientific achievements combining the Ancient Greek Pythagoras, a 17th-century German painter Maria Sibylla Merian, and 20th-century Apple founder Steve Jobs, all of whom are white and Western, and book 9 includes the accomplishments of Albert Einstein, a Western, Jewish, man.

Few books dedicate passages to female Western scientists or notable figures. Some include little blurbs or photos of women, such as book 6 with Barbara Walters and book 4 with J.K. Rowling. We found only a few female Western scientists, including Marie Curie in book 7 and Maria Sibylla Merian mentioned twice in books 1 and 3, but none of the books portray female non-Western scientists (e.g., Chien-Shiung Wu). Numerous female figures contributed to history (e.g., Yu Gwan-sun as a Korean activist for the independence movement); however, the EFL textbooks favor white male heroes over female figures of any race.

In addition to the examples mentioned earlier, book 9 includes an overview of the accomplishments of NASA (an American space company) regarding cultivating plant life outside Earth. Although the piece is about NASA, the passage includes images of Matt Damon (white, male, American, actor) and an unnamed NASA astronaut (white and male). The same book also dedicates a passage to the achievements of Rene Descartes (white, male, French). Book 10 includes a passage about Chuck Close, an American white male painter. Examples of white, male, Western heroes are ever present in EFL textbooks. These choices implicitly convey the idea that Western culture is paramount and is identified by white people, mainly white men.

Discussion and Implications for Future Research

A critical analysis of the findings suggests that the EFL textbooks attempt to convey diversity in the world by introducing many countries' cultural and historical information. However, depicting non-Western people as marginalized groups in the EFL textbooks implicitly gives language and culture power to Western people and cultures. The study confirms, extends, and refines the findings of existing studies on EFL textbooks and provides important educational implications.

First, our findings confirm those of existing studies (e.g., Lee, 2009; Migdadi, 2008; Motschenbacher, 2019; Nuralawiah et al., 2024; Rahmawati, 2018) that show linguistic and cultural hegemony in textbooks. However, the specific examples from our study provide important insights into how linguistic and cultural hegemony is delivered in Korean EFL textbooks through content, discourses, images, and references. According to Lim and Apple (2018), curriculum development involves “ideological work” (p. 139). The Korean EFL textbooks are no exception. It appears that the textbooks continue to portray white English-speaking people and countries over others and limit students’ critical global understanding.

These findings point to the need for students’ critical literacy in EFL learning. Critical literacy focuses on developing students’ critical and socially conscious lens in engaging in texts, society, and the world to empower themselves as active agents for change (Uliassi, 2022; Yol & Yoon, 2020; Yoon, 2022). Students in EFL settings need this practice in the classroom, but studies (e.g., Alford, 2021; Yoon, 2015; Yoon & Uliassi, 2019) show that they have rarely been exposed to it. Given that the EFL textbooks deliver the message of dominant ideologies of Eurocentrism as shown in our analysis, EFL students need more opportunities to identify what ideologies are prevalent in the textbook and how they can be changed and reframed for diverse perspectives. These practices should be integrated into the EFL curriculum daily, not as one-time activities.

Additionally, our findings refine the study by Kim and Lee (2023) on Korean EFL textbooks. Compared to our study, which focused on high school EFL textbooks, they focused on middle school EFL textbooks and how they promote national identity. They suggest that the textbooks promote Koreanness. One example they outline is that the textbooks use characters’ last names followed by first names, which is the order of the Korean language. Kim and Lee (2023) claim that this example “is an explicit marker as well as an initial, meaningful step toward the acceptance of nativized norms” (p. 556). This is an intriguing finding that uses a lens of national identity. However, in our textbook analysis that focused on how the books portray the world, we did not find enough examples of this practice to outshine the reliance upon white men as the focus. In fact, when the textbooks used Korean teenagers as their central characters, the teenagers only used their first names. The textbooks we analyzed favor Western cultures and white men, and by limiting exposure to non-white and non-Western cultures, the textbook creators further add to the marginalization of others.

The different findings between the EFL middle school and the EFL high school textbooks provide important insights. They show that a different lens (e.g., national identity vs the world) might bring different findings. The findings also open the need for critical literacy for students in EFL contexts. Critical literacy does not promote one single interpretation and analysis to understand complex text. Inviting EFL students to examine several English textbooks and to discuss how their different lenses can lead to different interpretations of the text would help them engage in critical literacy practice. For example, students can critique how the characters in the book that Kim and Lee (2023) studied, who use their names in a Korean language style (e.g., last name followed by first name), not in an English language style, can actually introduce themselves with Westernized images of people who like “pizza” (e.g., Western food) and “*The Lion King*” (e.g., Western-produced movie).

Furthermore, our findings suggest that EFL textbooks must include diverse representations of people and cultures around the world. EFL textbooks should serve as examples of how diverse cultures and people can be equally represented. Although students can challenge the lack of diverse representations in textbooks through critical literacy practice, it does not mean that textbooks should continue to predominately portray Western and male characters and ignore others. Students in EFL contexts learn about the world through textbooks. If the textbooks implicitly and explicitly deliver Eurocentric ideas and male-dominant figures, as shown in our analysis, students might see these ideas as norms and standards about the world. If these ideas are continuously reinforced in EFL settings where English learning is key, it could limit the students' deeper understanding of the complex and diverse world and position underrepresented groups of students as disempowered. Through these books, EFL students might see themselves as peripheral entities, not major figures who can influence the world. Students' empowerment matters in EFL learning and should be promoted through textbooks that represent them as major figures.

This study also offers suggestions for future research in the field of foreign and second language education. Although we focused on Korean EFL textbooks due to our linguistic and cultural backgrounds, further examination of other EFL textbooks in K-12 settings would be helpful to refine and expand the current study's findings. Also, we examined only 11 EFL textbooks obtained through two EFL high school teachers. Although the consistent themes were identified through our rigorous analysis, we considered this a limitation of our study. Future research could expand our findings by examining all of the available textbooks. Finally, it is unknown how the Eurocentric and stereotyped ideas on specific cultures and groups have continued. As noted earlier, all of our reviewed EFL textbooks are approved by the Korean government (e.g., Ministry of Education) and are published in Korean contexts. Despite the rigorous approval process by the government, it is unknown how Eurocentrism and white narratives are prevalent in all EFL textbooks that we reviewed. The current study's findings open the door for future studies on who the authors of the textbooks are and how EFL textbooks are constructed to move the foreign and second language education field forward.

Acknowledgments

We appreciate the IMJE editors' careful reading and consistent support during the entire process of initial submission and revisions. We also thank the reviewers for their insightful comments and thoughtful suggestions to make this manuscript stronger. Finally, our special thanks go to the two high school teachers who hand-carried the heavy textbooks for our study. Their commitment to education is invaluable.

References

Apple, M. W. (2014). *Official knowledge* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. SAGE.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gee, J. P. (2015). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. Routledge.
- Handsfield, L. (2016). *Literacy theory as practice: Connecting literacy theory and practice in K-12 classrooms*. Teachers College Press.
- Janks, H. (2014). *Doing critical literacy: Texts and activities for students and teachers*. Routledge.
- Kim, S-H., & Lee, H. (2023). Asserting Koreanness in South Korean middle school English textbooks. *World Englishes*, 42, 544–561. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12548>
- Korea Textbook Association (2024). *Overview of the association*. <https://www.ktbook.com/user/intro/business/business1.do>
- Kramersch, C. (2002). Language and culture: A social semiotic perspective. *ADFL Bulletin*, 33(2), 8-15.
- Krippendorff, K. (2019). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. SAGE.
- Kubota, R. (2023). Linking research to transforming the real world: Critical language studies for the next 20 years. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 20(1), 4-19.
- Kuo, M., & Lai, C. (2006). Linguistics across cultures: The impact of culture on second language learning. *Journal of Foreign Language Instruction*, 1(1), 1-10.
- Lee, J. Y., & Heinz, M. (2016). English language learning strategies reported by advanced language learners. *Journal of International Education Research*, 12(2), 67–75.
- Lee, K-Y. (2009). Treating culture: What 11 high school EFL conversation textbooks in South Korea do. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 8(1), 76-96.
- Lewison, M., Flint, A. S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79, 382–392.
- Lim, L., & Apple, M. W. (2018). The politics of curriculum reforms in Asia: Inter-referencing discourses of power, culture and knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 48(2), 139-148.
- Luke, A. (2004). Foreword. In M. McLaughlin, & G. Devoogd (Eds.), *Critical literacy: Enhancing students' comprehension of text* (pp. 4-5). Scholastic.
- Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory Into Practice*, 51, 4-11.
- Luke, A. (2018). *Critical literacy, schooling, and social justice: The selected works of Allan Luke*. Routledge.

- Migdadi, M. A. H. (2008). *The teaching of English and its culture in EFL contexts: A case study of English language instructors and students in the language centre at Al Al-Bayt University, Jordan*. (Dissertation). Institute of Education, International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur.
- Ministry of Education (2015). *The English curriculum*. Retrieved from http://www.edunet.net/nedu/ncicsvc/listSub2015Form.do?menu_id=623
- Motschenbacher, H. (2019). Non-nativeness as a dimension of inclusion: A multimodal representational analysis of EFL textbooks. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 29, 285-307.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Longman.
- Nuralawiah, V., Syafrizal, & Baihaqi. A. (2024). An analysis of the English textbook "English in mind second edition" based on the Merdeka curriculum. *Journal of Education*, 6(3), 16046-16056.
- Ra, J. J. (2019). Exploring the spread of English language learning in South Korea and reflections of the diversifying sociolinguistic context for future English language teaching practices. *Asian Englishes*, 21(3), 305-319.
- Rahmawati, L. (2018). *Content analysis of the English textbook entitled primary English as a second language*. (Thesis). English Education Department. Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya. Pembimbing: Muhtarom, and Hilda Izzati Madjid.
- Rawpixel. [Group of students huddle together] [Photograph]. 123RF.com https://www.123rf.com/free-photo_81675498_group-of-students-huddle-together.html
- Rawpixel. [Young adults reading books] [Photograph]. 123RF.com https://www.123rf.com/free-photo_54785631_students-youth-adult-reading-education-knowledge-concept.html
- Richter, N. E. (2022). An investigation of learning English as a second language in Korea. *Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 9(2), 77-86. Retrieved from <https://www.ejpb.org/journal/view.php?number=80>
- Uliassi, C. (2022). Morning meetings as spaces for critical global conversations. *Journal of Critical Issues in Educational Practice*, 12(1), 45-61.
- Wengrum, T. D. (2020). An analysis of English textbook in the first grade of junior high school. *Journal of Research in Language Education*, 1(1), 26-30.
- Yol, O., & Yoon, B. (2020). Engaging English language learners with critical global literacies during the pull-out: Instructional framework. *TESOL Journal*, 11(2), 1-15.
- Yoon, B. (2009). Education fever and exam hell: The current educational systems and issues in South Korea. In S. B. Mertens, V. A. Anfara, and K. Roney (Eds.), *Handbook of research in middle level education: An international look at educating young adolescents* (pp. 115-134). Information Age Publishing.

- Yoon, B. (2015). Complexities of critical practice: The conflict between the teacher's ideological stance and the students' critical stance. In B. Yoon and R. Sharif (Eds.), *Critical literacy practice: Applications of critical theory in diverse settings* (pp. 79-93). Springer.
- Yoon, B. (2016). *Critical literacies: Global and multicultural perspectives*. Springer.
- Yoon, B. (2021). English language learners' language and literacy development: A brief synopsis of theoretical orientations for middle school teachers. *Middle School Journal*, 52(1), 23-29.
- Yoon, B. (2022). Critical literacy for English language learners. *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1740>.
- Yoon, B., & Pratt, K. L. (Eds.) (2023). *Primary language impact on second language and literacy learning: Linguistically responsive strategies for classroom teachers*. Lexington.
- Yoon, B. & Uliassi, C. (2019). Educators' practice for English language learners' critical consciousness: From marginalized identities to active agents. In K. M. Brinegar, L. M. Harrison, and E. Hurd (Eds.), *Equity and cultural responsiveness in the middle grades handbook* (pp. 239-256). Information Age Publishing.
- Yu, R. (2020). Culture in second or foreign language acquisition. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 11(6), 943-947. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1106.10>

Author Contact

Bogum Yoon, byoon@binghamton.edu

Diana Murtaugh, dmurtaug@binghamton.edu