

Global Issues in English Textbooks: From Initial Attitude to Final Effect

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Abstract: English language teaching (ELT) has experienced ups and downs in teaching methodology, curriculum development and materials development for three decades. While the mainstream ELT are mostly designed to include non-controversial and safe topics, in recent years the appearance of critical pedagogy in ELT in general and materials development has led to designing some new textbooks which attempt to include some real-life and controversial issues. Reviewing the current English textbooks in Iranian society reveals that almost no English textbook has been designed with the content-based approach dealing with global issues; giving students the opportunity to think and reflect on the subjects they study and help them make a connection between what they study in the textbooks with the realities outside the classroom. In fact, global issues as an approach familiarizes students with the realities of the society through teaching English communication and presenting the real-life concerns, encouraging students to reflect upon the ideas and discover solutions to the problems and accordingly act in the society as an agent of change. Considering this fact, this paper is an attempt to survey the attitudes of Iranian university students toward the inclusion of global issues in their textbooks as well as to study the effect of such a book on their awareness and attitude. To do so, firstly students were asked through a five-scale Likert questionnaire including eight statements about the main aims of global issues on which the textbook is based. Then, 10 lessons based on global issues as subject matter were taught in 16 weeks. After that, again the same questionnaire was distributed to know whether there was a change in their views or not. According to the findings, most of the students welcomed the idea.

Key words: Global issues • Global education • Students' attitudes • English textbook

INTRODUCTION

As our world faces serious global issues of terrorism, ethnic conflict, social inequality and environmental destruction, language teachers of this century are worried about how they can do their responsibilities in preparing students to cope with these problems. A new approach to language teaching attempts to solve, somehow, such problems. Global education is a new idea that aims to enable students effectively acquire a foreign language while empowering them with the knowledge and skills required by world citizens to solve global problems.

According to [1], global education promotes knowledge, attitudes and skills relevant to living responsibly in a multicultural, independent world. Another definition states that global education is an effort to bring about changes in the content and social

context of education to better prepare students for citizenship in a global age [2].

EFL instructors around the world integrate global issues and global education into their teaching in different ways that involve language teaching content, methods, materials and other fields effective in language teaching.

Current ELT textbooks show that most of the topics in these books are either center-oriented or sanitized [3]. Concerning the center oriented-textbooks, [4] maintains that it is precisely the ambassadorial aspect of the ELT coursebooks which has led to criticism. Besides, one effect of the globalization is the imposition of center materials on the periphery in the increasing spread of global ELT coursebooks which are thematically and culturally "inclusive" and "inappropriate" [4].

Due to the importance of global issues as a new approach in the field of ELT and the necessity of paying

attention to what going on around us and making students prepare to solve the global problems [5, 6], this idea was checked among university students through a questionnaire to know students' opinion on different aspects related to language teaching specially cultural, social, economic and other fields in producing materials for EFL classrooms.

Having provided a brief review of the relevant literature, here the context in which this study was conducted is introduced. Then, the findings are presented.

Global Education: The concept of 'global education approach' was first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s with the new ideas in the field of social studies and education.

According to [7], global education 'involves learning about those problems and issues which cut across national boundaries and about the interconnectedness of systems-cultural, ecological, economic, political and technological'.

As an approach to foreign language teaching, global education might aim at 'enabling students to effectively acquire and use a foreign language while empowering them with the knowledge, skills and commitment required by world citizens for the solution of global problems' [8].

Global Issues: [8] suggests 'global issues as subject matter which can both meet the need for more meaningful content and address the lack of educational relevance of much of the general English education in schools around the world.

[9] divided global issues into the following seven groups:

- *Environmental Issues:* Pollution, deforestation, endangered animals, global warming, recycling, natural disasters, etc.
- *Peace Education Issues:* Wars, nuclear arms race, refugees, etc.
- *Human Rights Issues:* Racism, gender issues, children's rights, etc.
- *Intercultural Communication Issues:* Cultural issues, global citizenship vs. national identity, multiculturalism, etc.
- *Socio-Economic Issues:* Poverty, wealth, consumer society, advertising, etc.
- *Health Concerns:* drugs, AIDS, etc.
- *Linguistic imperialism.*

Global Issues and English Language Teaching (ELT):

Education has undergone changes to open up to modern trends and develop a new understanding of the educational process. Ideally, this process should lead to educating people with modern, world-conscious minds and the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for playing an active and creative role in our changing society [9].

Teaching profession has also witnessed a growing interest in global issues in the last two decades. [10] attributed this trend of change to a rethinking of basic educational goals. Language specialists now think about the 'why' of English teaching. Teaching English grammar and communicating daily routines through communication should have purpose. Many language educators reconsidered the idea and proposed that leaning English is for coping with the problem facing people in the world. They put emphasis on the moral dimension of teaching that encourages feeling of social responsibility in the students. English teaching can be called successful if students become socially conscious of what is going on around them. The 'what' of education has also been reconsidered. Content-based teaching came into vogue by many educators such as [11] and [12] who considered language learning as a means of learning about the world with the use of authentic and meaningful materials.

[13] enumerates four reasons for applying global approach to education. The first rationale is to face serious global issues or world problems. Since every day we hear about serious world problems such as violating human rights or people dying from hunger in different corners of the world. The second one deals with the interconnected nature of the world that requires us to care about what happens around us in the world. The third rationale is the ignorance or little knowledge of young generation of the world issues and other cultures. They deal with superficial and interesting side of the world and are not faced with the real problems and many of them think there is no way to change the world. The fourth one is the inadequacy of current educational system to prepare the students for coping with real world problems. The traditional system only prepares the students through rote memorization, passive learning and discourages critical thinking. Therefore, there seems to be the need for a reshaping of the educational system to pay attention more to the human side of the education and caring for other people.

Global Issues and Teaching Materials: According to [14], although coursebooks are designed explicitly for the teaching of English language, they are also highly

wrought cultural constructs and carriers of cultural messages, In [3]'s words, the current commercially produced coursebooks, which form the backbone of instruction in many mainstream language teaching contexts, do not meet the learners' needs as well as the curriculums' ends.

The teaching materials should be in a way to supply students with necessary knowledge and skills to make them socially responsible. Many textbooks deal with global issues but not seriously and try to touch upon issues which favor most international teenagers such as travel, shopping, etc. Of course, many textbooks have recently been published which are specifically engaged in global issues such as *global views* or *the world around us*. Some teachers may develop their own materials regarding global issues like poverty, child labor or armed trades. These materials can be taught audio-visually with the use of videos and through games and discussions. Courses called English through movies also help students observe and discuss issues like peace and war or intercultural understanding. Even some courses for English for special purposes can be designed with global issues topics. For example, global issues in medicine is course for doctors to simulate the problem of spreading malarial or other contagious diseases in certain areas of the world. These courses can also be combined with extracurricular activities such as seminars with global themes and out-of-class activities for students to awaken students' awareness outside the classroom and into different parts of the world.

Today with the help of the Internet, information seems to be more widely available than before and teachers of English can obtain authentic materials, apart from those texts that have been selected and often adapted for their coursebooks [15].

Research Questions: The present research intends to find answers to the following questions regarding the university students' attitudes. They are

- What is the university students' attitudes regarding global issues?
- Do textbooks designed with passages related to global issues have any effect on university students' attitudes related to global issues?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The methodology used in this research was mixed-method including both qualitative and quantitative methods and among the current typological approaches

in mixed methods, Qualitative? QUANTITATIVE was used. [16], considering it as a frequently recommended procedure for designing a new questionnaire which involves conducting a small-scale explanatory qualitative study first to provide background information on the context, to identify and narrow down the focus of the possible variables and to act as a valuable source of ideas for preparing the item pool for the purpose of questionnaire scale construction, states that over the past 15 years, mixed-method research has been increasingly seen as a third approach in research methodology. Thus, following this procedure, in the first phase, a qualitative method, i.e. conducting interview was used to describe students' attitudes to global issues. In the second phase, the researcher utilized a quantitative method, i.e. questionnaire administration, in order to identify and examine university students' attitudes among the population.

Qualitative Part: The strategy used in the qualitative part was interview. To get their attitudes, the participants took part in a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researchers. 6 students participated in this phase. The data gathered in this phase were used mostly in preparing and enriching the questionnaire.

Quantitative Part: The participants of the second phase of study were 112 university students studying at Damghan University. Based on the data gathered in the first phase and the findings found from the literature in this field, a Likert-scale questionnaire was prepared by the researcher included 8 statements.

Of them, 4 were related to global issues and 4 were about the non-controversial issues. Before its actual administration, it was studied and revised repeatedly and then for the purpose of content and linguistic validity, it was piloted with 14 university students. The responses to the questionnaire in pilot stage were fed into SPSS to analyze its reliability. The reliability coefficients were calculated repeatedly for each part. Employing Cronbach alpha, it turned out that the alpha coefficient was 83. Moreover, on the basis of the feedbacks obtained, some modifications were done and in this stage the questionnaire was finalized.

Participants: The participants of the study were 112 students of Damghan University. Based on the data gathered in the first phase and the findings found from the literature in this field, a Likert-scale questionnaire was prepared by the researchers included 8 statements.

Procedure: In the first stage, in the beginning of the semester, the questionnaire was administered in 4 classes including 112 students. After 16 weeks, covering 10 lessons of a textbook designed on the basis of global issues, the same students were asked to fill out the same questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As noted, the questionnaire included 8 statements; 4 statements (1, 2, 6 and 7) belong to the features of global issues and 4 statements (3, 4, 5 and 8) belong to non-controversial or mainstream issues current in such textbooks.

The results of the first and the second participation are as follows:

Regarding the first question which belonged to the global issues, as table 1 shows, the mean of the pre-questionnaire was 3.68 while that of the post-questionnaire was 4.32. These numbers reveal that not only at first the students agreed on this statement, but at the end, their agreement increased.

Regarding the second statement, belonging to global issues too, table 2 indicates that the number of students who agreed on the issue increased from 85 (75.89%) to 107 (95.53%). The increase in mean from 4.01 to 4.41 also proves the effect of the textbooks on students.

Respecting the third question belonging to the mainstream issues, the decrease of those who agreed on this topic as well as the increase of those who disagreed on the topic shows the textbook’s influence on students’ attitudes. Needless to say, the mean decreased from 2.91 to 2.69 (Table 3).

Regarding the fourth question belonging to the mainstream issues, as table 4 shows, the mean of the pre-questionnaire was 2.98 while that of the post-questionnaire was 2.65. They reveal that not only the students disagreed on this statement at first, but at the end, their disagreement decreased.

Regarding the fifth statement, belonging to mainstream issues, table 5 shows that the number of students agreeing on the issue decreased from 23 (20.53%) to 8 (7.14%). The decrease in mean from 2.41 to 1.97 also proves this fact.

Table 5.1: Statistical results regarding question 1

1. Daily problems and concerns in Iran’s society (e.g. poverty, divorce and unemployment) are appropriate topics to be taught in EFL classrooms.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
19	48	41	57	19	2	11	5	4	0	
16.96%	42.85%	36.60%	50.89%	16.96%	1.78%	9.82%	4.46%	3.57%	0%	
Agree				Neutral				Disagree		
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
76		89		19		2		15		5
53.57%		93.75%		16.95%		1.75%		13.39%		4.46%
Mean										
Pre= 3.68					Post= 4.32					

Table 5.2: Statistical results regarding question 2

2. Using global issues and concerns in EFL classrooms not only helps to learn English but also helps increase the learners’ sensitivity and awareness of their world.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
36	58	49	49	22	6	3	3	2	1	
32.14%	51.78%	43.75%	43.75%	19.64%	5.35%	2.67%	2.67%	1.78%	0.89%	
Agree				Neutral				Disagree		
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
85		107		22		6		5		4
75.89%		95.53%		19.64%		5.35%		4.46%		3.57%
Mean										
Pre=4.01					Post=4.41					

Table 5.3: Statistical results regarding question 3

3. Topics in current ELT textbooks with cultural tendency toward the West instead of using topics dealing with Iranian cultural values doesn't tempt the learners to give priority to western culture than Iranian culture.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
10	8	34	13	20	37	32	48	16	9	
8.92%	7.14%	30.35%	11.6%	17.85%	33.03%	28.57%	42.85%	14.28%	8.03%	
Agree				Neutral				Disagree		
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
44		21		20		37		48		57
39.28%		18.75%		17.85%		33.03%		42.58%		50.89%
Mean										
Pre=2.91					Post=2.69					

Table 5.4: Statistical results regarding question 4

4. The tendency of ELT coursebooks is mostly on joyful and promising topics depicting a world free from concerns and trouble.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
25	7	18	18	13	24	42	59	14	8	
22.32%	6.25%	16.07%	16.07%	11.60%	21.42%	37.50%	52.67%	12.50%	7.14%	
Agree				Neutral				Disagree		
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
43		25		13		24		56		67
38.39%		22.32%		11.60%		21.42%		50.00%		59.82%
Mean										
Pre=2.98					Post=2.65					

Table 5.5: Statistical results regarding question 5

5. Presenting any real-life concerns and issues should be avoided In EFL classrooms.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
4	2	19	6	14	8	58	70	17	29	
3.57%	1.78%	16.96%	5.35%	12.50%	7.14%	51.78%	62.50%	15.17%	25.89%	
Agree				Neutral				Disagree		
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
23		8		14		8		75		99
20.53%		7.14%		12.50%		7.14%		66.96%		88.39%
Mean										
Pre=2.41					Post=1.97					

Table 5.6: Statistical results regarding question 6

6. Global issues and concerns such as global warming, water crisis and war are appropriate issues for teaching in EFL classrooms.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
21	31	42	62	30	14	12	5	7	2	
18.75%	27.67%	37.50%	55.35%	26.78%	12.50%	10.71%	4.46%	6.25%	1.78%	
Agree				Neutral		Disagree				
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
63		93		30		14		19		7
56.25%		83.03%		26.78%		12.50%		16.96%		6.25%
Mean										
Pre=3.51					Post=4.00					

Table 5.7: Statistical results regarding question 7

7. Presenting Iranian daily issues and concerns in EFL classrooms instead of dealing with issues which don't concern Iranian society can help increase the students' awareness and self-confidence in learning English.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
14	22	39	58	40	30	15	6	4	1	
12.50%	19.64%	34.82%	51.78%	35.71%	26.78%	13.39%	5.35%	3.57%	0.89%	
Agree				Neutral		Disagree				
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
53		80		40		30		19		7
47.32%		71.42%		35.71%		26.78%		16.96%		6.25%
Mean										
Pre=3.39					Post=3.83					

Table 5.8: Statistical results regarding question 8

8. Neutral issues in ELT coursebooks such as sports, food, shopping are appropriate topics to be taught in EFL classrooms.

SA		A		N		D		SD		
pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	
19	8	52	45	18	32	18	21	5	10	
16.96%	7.14%	46.42%	40.17%	16.07%	28.57%	16.07%	18.75%	4.46%	8.92%	
Agree				Neutral		Disagree				
pre		post		pre		post		pre		post
71		53		18		32		23		31
63.39%		47.32%		16.07%		28.57%		20.53%		27.67%
Mean										
Pre=3.55					Post=3.20					

Regarding the sixth statement, concerning global issues, as table 6 shows, the number of students who agreed on the issue increased from 63 (56.25%) to 93 (93.03%). The increase in mean from 3.51 to 4.00 also proves the effect of the textbooks on students.

Concerning the seventh question belonging to the global issues, according to table 7, the mean of the pre-questionnaire was 3.39 while that of the post-questionnaire was 3.83. It reveals that the students both at first and at the end agreed on this statement.

Respecting the eighth question dealing with the mainstream issues, the decrease of those who agreed on this topic as well as the increase of those who disagreed on the topic shows the lack of the textbook's influence on students' attitudes. The mean also decreased from 3.55 to 3.20 (Table 8).

CONCLUSION

Findings from these two stages show two important points; first, the students' attitudes toward global issues, even before being taught by such a textbook, were positive. Then the changes in the results in the first and second phases, namely the pre and post questionnaire reveal that the topics and lessons have been effective in changing learners' attitudes in such a way that the number of those agreeing on the global issues increased and the number of those agreeing on mainstream issues decreased.

As noted, this paper was an attempt to survey the students' attitude towards global issues in ELT textbooks, as well as to study the effect of such a textbook on students' further attitudes. In addition to students, certainly the role of teachers' voice on the topic can be revealing. Thus, here it is recommended to attend to their views through surveying both qualitatively and quantitatively. Making use of such attitudes, textbook developers also can approach global issues as an alternative area.

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