

The Construction of National and Muslim Identities through Academic Discourse

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Abstract

The present study sought to analyze how national and Muslim identities are constructed through English textbooks. In this connection, the reading passages of English textbook which is taught to students of grade 5 in Model Colleges for Boys and girls were analyzed with reference to ideologies embedded in them. The study was purely qualitative with theory based content analysis. For this purpose all the reading lessons were classified under broad four categories; Islam, Pakistan, Islam/Pakistan and neutral. In addition, the contents of each lesson were thoroughly examined in order to know how much it is loaded with material related to Islam and Pakistan.

The findings of the study reveal that the reading passages of the textbook are replete with references to Pakistan and Islam. The textbook consists of twelve lessons out of which nine that is 75% are solely about Pakistan and Islam. They are used to disseminate information about Pakistan; its history, heroes, culture and Islam; its teaching, beliefs etc. whereas, there are only three lessons which make 25% of the total lessons are neutral in the sense that they do not contain anything regarding Islam or Pakistan. To sum up, the writer of the textbook tries to construct national and Muslim identities through the reading texts.

Key Words: *Identity, Pakistan, Muslim, Academic discourse*

Introduction

Textbooks play a pivotal role in any teaching learning situation. Both students and teachers blindly rely on them

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considering them authentic¹. However, the language used in textbooks is not neutral due to which it is considered hidden curriculum by Cunningsworth (2002)². Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger³ opine that “As socio cultural materials, they are the product of complex selective processes reflecting political decisions, educational beliefs and priorities, cultural realities and language policies”. It has been observed that different governments try to solve the paradox that is the construction of national identity and the promotion of English language education through textbooks.

It was Said (1978)⁴ who gave the concept of Orientalism and pointed out how white scholars portray non-white people including Muslims inferior in intellect, culture and linguistic ability to white people⁵. In relation to Islam, contemporary scholars Amin (2004)⁶ and Karim (2003)⁷ have shown the multifarious ways in which cultural discourses of West, electronic media and books try to demonize Muslims and Arabs. For such portrayal, English language is used⁸. In order to counter such narratives of the West, the Muslim governments have devised language policies for projecting Islam in their respective countries in positive way. The aim of the present study is to explore how much Islamic and Pakistani ideologies are inculcated in the minds of young learners through English textbook taught at grade 5. This aim is sought to be achieved through a qualitative study with theory based content analysis.

ELT Textbooks and Ideology

According to Zubair⁹ “Language plays an important role in the construction of identities; not only are identities forged through language; languages are emblematic of multiple identities”. In this regard textbooks play an important role. Rahimi and Sahragard¹⁰ view that;

“students and even some academics have turned a blind eye to the nuances and intricacies of discourse production and comprehension”.

Nonetheless, discourses of textbooks should be deconstructed in order to lay bare the hidden ideologies embedded in the texts which apparently seem harmless. The name of education is used for playing such politics¹¹.

In literature of TESOL, there is a tendency of reducing Islam, Arabs and Muslim to a few rules, clichés, stereotypes and generalizations. Moreover, Muslim and Arab students are shown to be rote learners, imitative, without critical insight, creativity and backward¹²

According to Karmani (2005a)¹³ from the beginning of war on terror, an unprecedented and ferocious movement has been started to compel Muslim and Arab governments for reforming curricula. It is believed that the education system of all Muslim countries starting from Jakarta to Rabat played an important role to mobilize the attacks of 9/11 on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Karmani (2005) reports that in an article "Putting English Over Islam," in Washington Post, Glasser (2003) opines that as a result of campaigns of reform in Qatar which is a conservative Islamic country, students are studying more English than Islam. In this regard Arabic and Islamic study classes are curtailed to give more hours to English. Likewise, such efforts for reforming curricula are also made in other Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Egypt etc.

Karmani (2005b)¹⁴ also reports about Stephens & Ottaway (2002) who revealed in Washington post that at the time of occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet, administration of Reagan conceptualized, produced and funded textbooks in Pashto and Dari which are the local languages of Afghanistan. In these books there were overt images of jihad, hatred and war.

In order to counter such narratives textbooks writers in Muslim countries try to project Islam in their countries in positive terms. They use academic discourse for constructing national and Muslim identities. Rahman (2002)¹⁵ opines that messages related to ideology are disseminated to students through textbooks. In this connection, textbooks of social studies and Pakistan studies are mostly employed; however,

these messages are also reinforced through language textbooks. He has enumerated three types of ideological messages which are spread through textbooks of English, Persian, Sindhi, Punjabi, Arabic, Urdu, and Pashto. These messages are related to Islam, nationalism and Jihad.

Data Analysis

The name of the understudy textbook is “Textbook of

<i>S. No</i>	<i>Name of Lessons</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Islam</i>	<i>Pakistan/ Islam</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
1	<i>Flag of Pakistan</i>			Y	
2	<i>A Great Gift</i>		Y		
3	<i>Green and Clean Pakistan</i>			Y	
4	<i>Visit to Quetta</i>	Y			
5	<i>Young Hero-Arfa Karim Randhawa</i>	Y			
6	<i>Health and Food</i>				Y
7	<i>Forest Trails of Islamabad</i>	Y			
8	<i>My Mother-My life</i>			Y	
9	<i>Rhythm of Words</i>				Y
10	<i>Eid-ul-Azha</i>		Y		
11	<i>MaulanaEdhi</i>			Y	
12	<i>Media</i>				Y
	<i>Total</i>	03	02	04	03
	<i>Percentage</i>	25%	22.66%	33.33%	25%

English Grade 5”, it is taught to grade 5 students of Islamabad Model Colleges for Boys/Girls, Islamabad. The textbook is written by a Pakistani writer, Dr. Samina Z. Nadeem¹⁶ and published by National Book Foundation, Islamabad. There are 12 lessons in the textbooks. In order to analyze them, they are classified and tabulated in four categories; lessons portraying Pakistan, Islam, Pakistan/ Islam and Neutral as shown in Table 1. After this the contents of the textbook are thoroughly studied and references related to Pakistan and Islam were sifted out. In addition, neutral lessons are also discussed.

<i>Lessons Related to Pakistan/ Islam</i>	<i>Neutral Lessons</i>
<i>09</i>	<i>03</i>
<i>Percentage : 75%</i>	<i>Percentage : 25%</i>

Table 1: Textbook of English Grade 5

Table 1 shows that there are 12 lessons in the textbook in which 3 lessons i.e. 25% are purely related to Pakistan. Two lessons that is 16.66% are related to Islam and 04 that is 33.33% lessons are about both Islam and Pakistan. Three lessons which make 25% are neutral. It means that 75% lessons are about Islam and Pakistan, whereas 25% are neutral as shown in table 2. ***Lessons Related to Pakistan***

The lesson, “Visit to Quetta” highlights the importance of traveling, describes important places of Pakistan and sheds light on the nationhood of the people. The characters, Mahnoor, Saleyha are Muslim children. They request father to have visit to different places of Quetta, Pakistan. The lesson is projecting the national identity of the people of this country. In this lesson, many places of Pakistan have been discussed in detail such as Wali Thangi, Urak Valley, Hannah Lake etc.

The lesson, “Young Hero-Arfa Karim Randhawa” is about a young Pakistani hero-Arfa Karim Randhawa who represented Pakistan in the world at different platforms. She was the youngest Microsoft Certified Professional of the world. Her talent compelled Bill Gates to invite her to Microsoft headquarters in USA in 2004. This lesson inculcates national pride in the minds of youth and encourages them to work hard for Pakistan. The writer has also tried to maintain the sense of Muslim and national identity in the learners. Some Muslim/Pakistani names are also pointed in the lesson like Arfa Karim, Iqbal, Babar and Allah.

In the lesson, “Forest Trails of Islamabad”, Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan is described in a comprehensive manner. The discussion of different places, animals and birds is present to convince the learners that Pakistan is a beautiful place to live in. It teaches the lesson of nationalism to learners.

Lessons Related to Islam

In the lesson “A Great Lesson”, the author has highlighted the importance of honesty through a story. Honesty is a virtue which is not only emphasized in Islam but also in all religions. In the story, there is a man who is a taxi driver who gets some jewelry left by some passengers. When he comes home, he shares this with family. All the family members are not willing to take it considering it unethical and against the teaching of Islam. The taxi driver returns the box of jewelry to the owners. The author imparts the lesson that good deeds lead to peaceful life and it is also instructed not to take others’ things unlawfully. It is also endorsed in Quran, the holy book of Muslims, “And confound not truth with falsehood nor hide the truth, knowingly”¹⁷. In the lesson, there is use of Muslim/Pakistani names like Ahmed, Ali, Salma etc.

The lesson, “Eid-ul-Azha” is about the famous holy festival of Islam. It traces and narrates the sacrifices given by two famous prophets; Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S) and his son, Hazrat Ismail

(A.S). The words like Muslim, Prophet, Ibraheem, God, Ismail, Zil-Hajj, Islamic, Islam, Satan, Hajj, Isaac (A.S) are solely used to remind Muslim learners their history. This lesson has direct connection with faith and beliefs of Muslims and is included to make them aware of Islamic ideology. The sentence, “God saved him” is used to make the learners understand that those who have strong faith in creator are not afraid of anything and are saved by Him. It also emphasizes the fact that Allah likes such sacrifices and in order to make it permanent till judgment day they have been made compulsory to be observed by every Muslim while performing Hajj, Umra and celebrating Eid-ul-Azha.

Lessons Related to Pakistan and Islam

In the lesson “Flag of Pakistan”, the author talks about the importance of flag, describes the history of Pakistani flag and advises learners to respect flag. The writer has projected the national and Islamic identities through selective use of words. For example, the phrase, “Symbol of Islam” emphasizes that our flag is the not only the symbol of Pakistani identity but it is also a symbol of Islamic identity.

The sentence, “The dark green color represents majority of Muslim community” shows that there is a strong link between Pakistan and Islam. In the lesson, learners are told about national anthem like its writer and the composer of its music. Moreover, the person who gave the idea of the flag is also discussed and mentioned. In addition, the names of Muslim leaders such as “Ahmed”, “Hafeez” and “Liaqat Ali Khan” are also mentioned. In short, the lesson is written to disseminate Islamic and national ideologies.

In the poem “Green and Clean Pakistan”, the poet has tried to convince the readers that Pakistan is full of greenery and being patriotic they should keep the country clean because it is the symbol of their identity. Furthermore, it is the pointing towards the Islamic thought of cleanliness. According to Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him);

“Abu Malik at-Ash'ari reported: The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: Cleanliness is half of faith”¹⁸.

In the poem, the poet has also said about it, “cleanliness, it is next to godliness”. This sentence also reinforces the above mentioned Hadith of Holy Prophet. To conclude, the poet tries to convince the reader that being Muslim we should keep Pakistan clean.

The title of the lesson, “My Mother-My life” has great impact on the minds of the students as it invokes feeling of love for mother by using adjective “my” and by connecting mother with life that is mother and life are synonymous. Through the story of daughter, Salma and son, Ali, the writer emphasizes over love for mother. One day, the mother was not feeling well, she did not make breakfast, the son started calling mother, “mom ... mom”. This very word is the sign of love because it touches heart. Islam also tells its followers to love mother in true spirits. To sum up, this lesson is put in the textbook to inculcate Islamic values in the learners.

The lesson, “Maulana Edhi” is about the great social worker of Pakistan. It tells the readers about his life and how he puts efforts to serve humanity. The word, “Maulana” has strong connection with Islamic ideology. The word is used for those persons who have great command over Holy Quran and Hadith. The writer tries to convince the readers that we should serve humanity as it has connection with Islam. Moreover, Maulana Edhi being Muslim acts upon Islam by serving poor and needy people.

Neutral Lessons

In the lesson “Health and Food”, the writer has talked about food and its importance for health. The lesson is neutral as it neither glorifies Pakistan nor Islam.

In the poem “Rhythm of Words”, the poet talks about nature and its beauty. He describes objects of nature like the sun, the moon, hills etc. This poem is also neutral in the sense that there is no reference to Islam and Pakistan in it.

The lesson, “Media” is the need of the time in the sense that its importance cannot be ignored as it can be used for getting information. The writer opines that media is useful to make us aware about whatsoever is going on in the country and abroad. This lesson is neutral because things are explained neither from the perspective of Islam or Pakistan.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore how Islamic and Pakistani ideologies are inculcated in the minds of young learners through English textbook taught at grade 5. The findings of the study reveal that the reading lessons of the textbook are fully loaded with references to Pakistan and Islam. Nine lessons out of twelve which make 75% of the total lessons are related to Islam and Pakistan. On the other hand, the textbook does not provide information about other religions, countries or cultures. Nevertheless, there are three lessons which are neither about Pakistan nor Islam. They can be called neutral as they do not inculcate any type of ideology in the minds of learners. It is evident from the findings of the study that academic discourse produced in Pakistan tries to project Islam and Pakistan in positive way. Thus it is helpful in constructing national and Islamic identities.

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