

3-5-2021

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<https://zuscholars.zu.ac.ae/works/4147>

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Cultural determinants affecting pedagogical decisions in content design: a case study

Pedagogical
decisions in
content design

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Received 18 October 2020
Revised 15 December 2020
Accepted 15 December 2020

Abstract

Purpose – Commercially produced educational materials often reflect the pedagogical beliefs and culture(s) of the content developers. While many teachers involved in teaching English as a foreign language have relied on commercially published content in the past, the advent of ubiquitous technology has afforded them the ability to create content that is contextualised and to share it with other educators across the globe. The purpose of this study is to investigate cultural determinants which affect the pedagogical decisions of teachers when designing content.

Design/methodology/approach – This case study, conducted at a higher educational institution in the Gulf, addresses the issues that arise when cultures or ideologies of educators as material developers are different to that of the target audience. Three semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted in an effort to understand cultural determinants that influence decision-making about pedagogy when creating in-house content to motivate undergraduate students on an English language program in the United Arab Emirates.

Findings – The results of this study indicated that the participants maintained mainly essentialist perspectives of local cultures and sub-cultures and their thinking in content creation was not all that different to that of commercial publishers.

Practical implications – This study holds implications for awareness-raising and pedagogical training for educators involved in in-house content development.

Originality/value – This case study addresses an area that has been under-researched in the Gulf region.

Keywords Culture, Linguistic imperialism, Pedagogy, Technology, EFL, Essentialism

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is home to over 200 nationalities with Arabic as the official language of the country and English as the main language of communication amongst the large expatriate community (UAE Fact Sheet, 2020). While state schools educate Emirati students in Arabic, tertiary education is delivered in English and for students to enter undergraduate programmes in universities, they have to pass an English examination (Al Hussein and Gitsaki, 2018). In addition to the state exam, other internationally recognised English language proficiency tests can also be used for university



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Learning and Teaching in Higher
Education: Gulf Perspectives
Vol. 17 No. 1, 2021
pp. 41-53
Emerald Publishing Limited
2077-5504
DOI 10.1108/LTHE-10-2020-0053

entry, of which the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is the most commonly used.

As with most tests of its kind, IELTS benchmarks are based on “native-speaker” models of communication and the teaching materials used to prepare students for this test are developed by authors based in what [Kachru \(1992\)](#) terms as *inner circle* countries (i.e. North America, UK, Australia and New Zealand). This means that this teaching material along with the implied *inner circle* inherited pedagogy (evident within the language skills activities in the materials) may be detached from or even irrelevant to the cultural contexts of the target students ([Bax, 2003](#)). A more sinister view is that *inner circle* culture(s) and ideologies are deliberately promoted through English language education materials and policies as superior, perpetrating an aura of imperialism over other cultures ([Canagarajah, 1999](#); [Phillipson, 1992, 2009](#)). This is especially pertinent, if one considers that the majority of interactions today are between speakers who require a globalised form of English ([Graddol, 2006](#)) or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) ([Hopkyns, 2020](#); [McKay, 2000](#); [Seidlhofer, 2011](#)) rather than a variety culturally attached to an inner-circle country.

While the discussions around linguistic imperialism and English hegemony are not new in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the provision of ubiquitous technology has added another dimension to these issues. Using technologies, teachers in localised EFL contexts have the opportunity not only to create their own content but to share it very easily with other teachers on a global scale. Publishing houses are no longer alone in providing content; millions of teachers can now do the same. Viewed positively, teachers now have the opportunity to create materials and use pedagogies that are highly contextualised, avoiding the “one size fits all” approach to language learning previously propagated in commercially produced teaching materials. However, as this is a relatively recent phenomenon, more research is needed in how teachers’ beliefs affect the choices they make in designing materials for their own teaching context. To this end, the present study aimed to explore the cultural determinants influencing the design of bespoke teaching materials in an intensive English language programme. The low English language proficiency level of the undergraduate students in the context of this study necessitated the creation of custom-built resources designed in-house by teacher content creators (TCCs). The main aim of the programme was to use an inquiry-based approach to empower students to undertake an authentic research project while using edited English text and media as sources; that is, material that is factually accurate but has been created at a level of English more suitable for lower proficiency learners.

The study hypothesised that many of the decisions made by the western TCCs, would be culturally linked to their own backgrounds; embedded in a belief system that has roots in linguistic imperialism and dominant *inner-circle* pedagogical principles. This view stems from a neo-Vygotskian socio-cultural paradigm and more specifically from the work of [Mercer and Fisher \(1997\)](#) who understand learning and the development of cognition as something that is heavily influenced by culture and that it is socially constructed. With that in mind, ideas about learning and teaching differ from one culture to another and when two or more cultural entities overlap a “culture of dealing” ([Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2004](#)) is established. This means that one’s perception of the other culture(s) is based on established beliefs from their own culture but is also inclusive of the context in which they encounter the other culture, in this case, the language classroom.

Thus, this exploratory research study aimed to investigate the cultural determinants the TCCs were driven by when making pedagogical decisions on content. To do so, a case study was drafted from three semi-structured interviews with TCCs to answer the following research question:

What cultural determinants affect TCCs' decisions on what is valuable or worth learning when designing materials for undergraduate students on an intensive English language programme?

Literature review

Towards an understanding of culture

One of the main obstacles in the study of cultural determinants is defining culture itself. It would seem that the very notion of culture is fluid. Indeed, in their book *Redefining Culture* Baldwin *et al.* (2008) have drafted just under 90 pages of definitions of culture, all of which are equally valid across disciplines in academia. For the purposes of defining culture within the context of this study, it is more worthwhile adopting a notion of culture within the realms of applied linguistics and language learning. To that end, Holliday *et al.* (2004) provide the distinction between two paradigms which can be used to differentiate essentialist from non-essentialist notions of culture. Their *small culture* lens allows researchers the liberty of not engaging in “hard” superficial divides such as ethnic or national identities, but rather prefers to see “softer” culture(s) within social groups. *Small culture* is composed of factors like events, interactions, rituals that a specific group of people “habitually engage” in. *Small cultures* are, therefore, context specific and not generalist in nature (Holliday, 1999). Understanding small cultures allows teachers (and researchers) a better understanding of their classroom without making overarching sweeping assumptions based on ethnic stereotypes. Therefore, this view of culture is more useful in the context of the present study.

Taking on a non-essentialist perspective on culture means authors like Hudson (2012) deconstruct social groups within EFL in the UAE. His rhetoric not only includes condemnation of discriminatory hiring practices of *inner circle* teachers over teachers more attuned to local cultures, but, also, he begins to paint a picture of the highly complex nature of students in the UAE; how rules like females wearing the *niqaab* (a veil covering the face worn by some Muslim women, especially in the Gulf region) in front of male teachers from inner circle countries are on occasion discarded, if that teacher is trusted. For Hudson, the dichotomy lies in the need for (self-) censorship, on the one hand, and the risk of losing one’s job for unacceptable “cultural” attitudes on the other. Indeed the complexity of linguistic and cultural dualism in higher education in the Gulf region is something that Findlow (2006) discusses. In recognising the compulsory and potentially hegemonic and imperialistic oriented studying of English in the UAE (Phillipson, 1992; Salem, 2012; Weber, 2011; Zughoul, 2003), Findlow (2006) allows us to understand the conflict (or balance depending on one’s perspective) between traditional “Arab-Islamic correctness” and English, the language of modernity and high social status (at least as viewed by some social groups in the UAE). The convoluted nature of cultural interactions within the UAE are difficult to describe homogeneously. Which in turn means that the application of hegemonic language teaching practices from the West are not equal in all contexts within the UAE, while they affect curriculum, material development and pedagogy enormously (Mazawi, 2003) making this case study all the more significant.

Transferring pedagogy as a product of culture

The dangers of bequeathing a cultural product, such as pedagogy, into another culture are evident in the field of EFL in the teaching materials and implied pedagogies of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). CLT is synonymous with notions of student-centred, reflective and minimally guided learning. It has been at the forefront of EFL for over thirty years and this is despite being criticised, most prominently by Bax (2003) and his call to a context-based approach to language teaching, but also Canagarajah (1999) and Phillipson (1992 and 2001) who both highlight a more ominous side to CLT and its role in propagating linguistic and cultural imperialism.

Similarly, in the field of medical education, [Frambach et al. \(2012\)](#) question the applicability of inquiry-based approaches to teaching like problem-based learning (PBL), steeped in Western constructivist tradition, for the fostering of self-directed learning (SDL) in Middle Eastern students. The study found that the “cultural factors of *uncertainty* and *tradition* [...] [pose a challenge] to Middle Eastern students” ([Frambach et al., 2012](#), p. 738). This is not to say that successful implementation of such constructivist approaches to teaching and learning are not possible but rather that cultural alternatives may emerge ([Frambach et al., 2012](#)) or that teachers may exercise “informed eclecticism” ([Sowden, 2007](#)) when deciding what methodologies work best in their contexts.

Informed decision-making is indeed critical when deciding on content and pedagogy in intensive English foundational programmes, especially understanding what students go through when they transition from state secondary schools to tertiary education in the UAE. For twelve years, Emirati students attend state primary and secondary education where “Arabic supplies all or most communication needs [...] [while in tertiary education, the transition to] learning in English requires a substantially changed cultural mindset” ([Findlow, 2006](#), p. 27). Students are suddenly expected not only to understand content in English but to learn through the medium of English and adopt learning strategies, note-taking skills, role-playing, “foreign” notions of critical thinking and Western concepts of collaboration leading to *learning shock* ([Griffiths, Winstanley and Gabriel, 2005](#)). This is not to say that they are unable to engage in these activities. Rather the question remains as to whether these should be imposed on them.

Compounding this problem, are some teachers in EFL, predominantly from inner-circle countries ([Kachru, 1992](#)), who live in “expat” *bubbles or sub-cultures*. In other words, there are social groupings of teachers who recreate their own *inner circle* reality within the UAE host culture, which means that regardless of how long they “experience” the Gulf, they are predominantly culturally isolated from their students. [Woods’s \(1996\)](#) notion of foreign language teachers’ *Beliefs, Assumptions and Knowledge* (BAK) explains that teachers realise these three constructs as a continuum and in many cases they are undeniably linked and often indistinguishable from each other. [Zheng \(2013, p. 398\)](#) defines beliefs as “study-bound, culture-based, context-emergent and even person-bound”. Thus, in combination with “expat” bubble culture, it is not difficult to see a lack of awareness or cultural sensitivity on behalf of EFL teachers, especially when there are established belief systems in place. In addition, [Riley’s \(2009\)](#) synthesis of [Pajares’s \(1992\)](#) fundamental assumptions about beliefs (which are equally applicable to students as well as teachers) highlight that beliefs are a result of culture and these are formed early on and they are difficult to change in adulthood. The issue of whether new background awareness of cultural interactions can ultimately change behaviour is, therefore, questionable. This can only be considerably worse when content creators employed by commercial publishers are working within inner-circle countries without any contact with the spectrum of contexts they are expecting to apply their version of EFL to.

Given these concerns, the current study sought to identify influences on content-creation decision making and the extent to which these influences are driven by culture. More specifically, the study was guided by the following questions:

- RQ1. What guides TCCs when they select content for their materials?
- RQ2. What assumptions are TCCs making about their students when considering content and pedagogy?
- RQ3. To what extent the factors affecting the TCCs’ decisions are culturally driven?

Study

Participants and context

This qualitative case study focussed on the English language teachers who were involved in creating content for a pilot English language course for undergraduate EFL students in a university in the UAE. The course used a scaffolded inquiry-based approach to language learning, shifting the focus from English language learning to English as a means of addressing a challenge. To that end, a specialised library of bespoke designed resources was developed by the TCCs.

The pool of teachers who had worked on the pilot course was limited in number and so convenience sampling was used. In addition, teachers from *inner circle* countries were selected to participate in this study because they not only made up the majority of the TCCs but also the main teaching body in the English language programme of the target university. The TCCs' experience working on the pilot course and their intimate knowledge of it meant that they were able to provide rich data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

Out of 11 TCCs, three were selected to participate in the study. They were interviewed using individual semi-structured interviews. To maintain anonymity, interviewee names were replaced with pseudonyms (Alex, Charles and Ben). Table 1 provides short profiles for each of the teacher participants.

Data collection and procedures

Once the three teachers were selected from among the TCCs, they were approached and asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. They were given an information letter detailing the research and were asked to sign consent forms. They were assured of their privacy and the confidentiality of the data and reporting procedures and they were informed of their ability to withdraw their consent at any time without prejudice.

Alex	Alex was an older teacher with over twenty years' experience teaching in EFL settings. Like many of the teachers in the English programme, he had taught English in the Far East as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) in his inner circle home country. He had spent over half his years of experience in the Gulf area and taught in Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Alex taught male students exclusively while serving on the programme. Despite the extensive time he spent living and working in the Gulf, he did not speak Arabic
Charles	Charles was a teacher that started working in the UAE directly from grad school. He had over ten years' experience and had moved from emirate to emirate building his knowledge of the region. Despite being from an inner circle country, he was fluent in Arabic and also had many Arab friends, mainly from the Levantine area. He said that the English project was the first time he had really felt that things were changing for the better
Ben	Ben had worked in Qatar and Saudi Arabia for twelve years before coming to the UAE. He said he was glad to be teaching in the UAE where things were more liberal. Ben had experience teaching students in his own inner circle country and said that the students there acted differently. He was not approached to write content for the English program but rather selected the project himself because he felt that it was something he was interested in developing. Ben did not speak Arabic

Table 1.
Participant profiles

The semi-structured interview protocol was prepared using an interview evaluation grid (Gillham, 2000; Kvale, 1996) and was piloted on a TCC on the English program but not included in the data. After the pilot, a second version of the interview protocol was drafted (Appendix) and the researcher proceeded to interview the TCCs. Each of the individual semi-structured interviews lasted for approximately 30 min and they all took place within a week. Interviews took place in each of the TCCs' classrooms and they were audio recorded with the participants' permission.

Data analysis

The data from the interviews were manually transcribed and the transcripts were shared with each of the participants to ensure they had no objections with any of the interview contents. Following that, thematic analysis was used and the data went through two coding cycles. Initially this included values coding and then an iteration of pattern coding to enable the researcher to identify specific themes within the data (Saldaña, 2009). The data was then processed using the six-phase structure developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved the following steps: familiarisation with data; generation of codes; searching of themes; reviewing of themes; defining and naming themes; and finally, the case study report. This method allowed for a more holistic and systematic approach in analysing the interview data.

Results and discussion

The impetus for the bespoke English course was to address the low student motivation and engagement when learning with commercially produced textbooks for IELTS preparation. The existing teaching materials tended to be extremely *inner circle* in their approach and style disregarding the local culture. For example, the textbooks would cite famous historical figures, concepts or ideologies from the West, such as Fibonacci, Archimedes and Chomsky rather than historical figures that Emirati students would recognise and relate to; they would make references to British, American or Australian English rather than Indian, or Filipino English which are more common in the UAE; they would ask students to debate about student debt which is not a major problem in the UAE or whether people should have fewer children because of overpopulation, suggesting that having large families is wrong although it is considered a blessing by many in the UAE. These topics exemplify some of the shortcomings of commercially supplied teaching materials especially considering that many students may want to learn English but may not be willing to "receive the cultural load of the target language" (Alptekin and Alptekin, 1984, p. 17). During the interviews, the TCCs reported that the existing materials were responsible for the low student motivation and engagement in the classroom and that rethinking the topics in the new course materials was imperative.

In choosing the topics for the new materials, the TCCs held very firm views about what was necessary for students to learn, outside their remit as English language instructors. There was strong evidence to suggest a genuine sense of duty or what was considered "right" by the TCCs, and this was reflected in their rationale in choosing topics. However, all three teachers were concerned about "censorship" on the project and not being able to give students a "complete" education. There was no doubt among teachers as to whether they should teach certain subject areas but rather they felt compelled to "enlighten" their students on topics they believed they should know about. For example, Alex held a very strong view on promoting the theme of immigration and human trafficking within the new language course, stating, "[. . .]they [students] need to know about the world outside [. . .]" He felt frustrated, thinking that he was not able to talk about themes such as human trafficking

saying, “I was quite upset about not being able to put these into the library [. . .] Come on, the students all know it happens, why are we hiding it from them?” (Alex, lines 66–69). While there are topics that are considered culturally sensitive and, therefore, best avoided, Alex’s decision on what to include in course materials is driven by his personal belief on what is considered taboo within this cultural context. In reality, human trafficking is openly discussed in the UAE and there are government portals, policies and public websites that inform the public of this crime. The fact that his personal misconceptions override the reality of what is and is not acceptable, led him to limit the range of topics in the materials he designed depriving students of the opportunity to engage in rich discussions on global issues like human trafficking and practise their language skills.

Remarkably, even though some topics were considered taboo by the TCCs, they still felt it necessary to protest their dissatisfaction with the status quo as they perceived it. To that effect, Ben stated:

“That’s what I like about the new course [. . .] it goes some way at tackling global issues [. . .] OK we leave the ones out that are taboo here [. . .] although I have to say I don’t agree”. (Ben, lines 153-159)

Alex went so far as to say:

“Look there are other ways you can look at human trafficking with the students [. . .] You can start off with immigration, give them some pointers and let the students develop the conversation from there [. . .] this way the students have brought it up [. . .] it’s not direct then”. (Alex, lines 162–170)

This suggests that because of their inner circle country culture, TCCs felt duty-bound to expose students to topics implicitly even when they believed topics were considered taboo and should not be explored.

When thinking about the topics and learning activities of the new course, the TCC beliefs on student preferences were based on what TCCs thought students were capable of. These beliefs were not based on actual student language ability, but, instead, they were motivated by their own cultural preconceptions of what students could and could not do based on gender. A good case in point is Ben, who thought that male students would do best at topics related to enterprise such as running a business for a day. To be more specific he said:

“I don’t know about the girls, but I think the Shabab [laddish culture found among young male Emirati adults] would prefer running a business. It’s more down their alley. They all want to become businessmen, don’t they? [. . .] or managers [. . .]”. (Ben, lines 53–56)

Similarly, the other two teachers were also influenced by such essentialist beliefs when making decisions about content creation. For example, during the interview, Charles stated:

“[. . .] well, it doesn’t matter how much homework you give them does it? They still come back empty-handed. I even try and make it easy for them. They can just hand it in online [. . .]”. (Charles, lines 74–77)

and when asked why he thought this, he responded:

“Dunno [. . .] I think [. . .] I guess it’s not in their nature” (Charles, line 81). He went on to say, “They’re not all like that, you know there are the girls that sit up the front, you know, the ones that always wave their hands in the air when you ask a question [. . .] they really are the exception to the rule”. (Charles, lines 112–116)

These excerpts demonstrate TCCs’ beliefs that student interests and motivation are tied down to gender-based and cultural perspectives, as though by being part of a certain genre makes your willingness or unwillingness to learn *inherent*.

The analysis of the interview data also showed that the TCCs held strong views about how students should learn. They considered the inquiry-based approach of the new materials, the right way to learn. Charles went so far as to say that:

“They need to learn how to learn [...] they’re not used to deep learning are they? [...] We need to teach them how to collaborate and be critical thinkers, that’s what being in today’s world means”. (Charles, lines 45–47)

This attitude expressed by Charles is indicative of the cultural imperialism that [Bax \(2003\)](#), [Canagarajah \(1999\)](#) and [Phillipson \(1992, 2001 and 2009\)](#) refer to and demonstrates widely held views by Western teachers that their educational system is superior to that of their students and, therefore, they know best how a group of students should learn.

Not only did the TCCs have preconceived ideas of how students learn but also what students expected of them in the classroom. Even though the content that was created was supposed to follow an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, all three teachers believed that there should be an element of *structured learning* following a traditional teacher-centred approach in combination with the experiential learning approach that the course aimed to use. For example, Alex thought that the mixture of structured learning combined with inquiry-based learning created the best environment for the students. This excerpt from the interview with Charles best illustrates this point:

“Look [...] you can’t expect students to make the switch for their teacher to be the ‘guide on the side’ when at high school they have been used to them being the ‘sage on the stage’”. (Charles, lines 31–34)

This shows cultural understanding from one teacher in particular and is reminiscent of [Holliday’s \(2006, p. 385\)](#) “othering” of students, especially students that have difficulty “with the specific types of active, collaborative, and self-directed “learner-centred” teaching–learning techniques[...] [considered] superior within the English speaking West”. The TCCs’ beliefs of what is best practice was tainted by their preconceptions of what *they* thought students expect from teachers in the classroom. This in turn affected their teaching approach when designing the content and the related learning activities.

Summary

The pilot English course aimed at establishing a library of materials at the appropriate language proficiency level for the target students to involve them in an inquiry-based learning experience that would address issues of student motivation and engagement. From the limited data that this study obtained, it is evident that there are several cultural determinants that restricted the range of topics, teaching approaches and types of activities included in the materials. While the materials aimed for active student engagement in the classroom, the TCCs’ predetermined ideas of what students expected them to do resulted in a preference for a hybrid of inquiry-based learning and structured learning based on a traditional teacher-centred approach. In many ways, this echoes what [Frambach et al. \(2012\)](#) referred to when they described cultural alternatives – in this case more prescriptive teaching approaches to scaffold the inquiry-based activities. The difference here is that the TCCs’ decisions were based on misguided notions of student abilities and preferences. In the end, TCCs exercised what [Sowden \(2007\)](#) referred to as “informed eclecticism” when it came to the approaches they used, albeit influenced by their own cultural biases. When it came to learning, the TCCs adopted the view that they knew best about how students learn driven by a sense of cultural imperialism. This confirms an earlier study by [Mazawi \(2003\)](#) which showed how western teachers’ hegemonic teaching practices greatly affect curriculum, material

development and pedagogy. This point was further compounded by TCCs' predetermined beliefs and assumptions of what students were able to do based on their gender. Finally, this project wanted to address the insufficiency of commercially produced materials with regards to the topics which tended to be influenced by inner-circle biases with little or no relevance to the local student experience. However, even the TCCs' decisions on what topics to include in the materials were culturally biased. They felt that it was their duty to determine what was right for students to learn but their beliefs about what was taboo and their personal misconceptions limited what topics were included in the materials and how they were approached. Western teachers exercising self-censorship is something [Hudson \(2012\)](#) also observed in his study where he mentioned that this was done by western teachers working in the Middle East to preserve their jobs. In the present study, TCCs exercising self-censorship led them to overcompensate and restrict the range of topics in the new course. Additionally, TCCs felt so strongly about what their students should learn that they resorted to subversive methods to expose their students to certain topics they felt to be important but considered inappropriate for the local culture. This is in line with [Woods's \(1996\)](#) BAK model that stipulates that foreign teachers hold beliefs, assumptions and knowledge that are inextricably linked to each other and not easily changeable (see [Pajares, 1992](#)).

Conclusion

This was an exploratory case study that sought to investigate the cultural determinants governing decisions on pedagogy and content in teachers creating EFL materials in-house and the extent to which these mirrored those of commercially produced materials. Convenience sampling was used to select TCCs from inner-circle countries working in the Gulf. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data on the cultural determinants that influenced their decision-making process. The data analysis showed that the TCCs picked topics based on their own cultural biases, made assumptions about student motivation based on gender and presumed that certain topics were taboo. Even when topics were considered taboo, there was an implied suggestion that students should be exposed to them indirectly, allowing them to reach the disputed topics naturally on their own, essentially circumventing the need for the inclusion of those topics in the materials. By and large, this small-scale qualitative study indicated that participants had, on the whole, an essentialist view of the local culture and in doing so they exhibited attitudes consistent with the view that Western educational ideologies are superior.

The present study highlights the need for raising awareness among teachers engaging in localising and designing EFL materials in what [Holliday \(1999\)](#) refers to as *small cultures*. Such professional development would help in closing cultural gaps (affecting subsequent decision-making) between *inner circle* teachers and local cultures. This would aid teachers' understanding of their students and their needs, untethered from their own cultural bias. A more eclectic approach when considering pedagogy and alternative language learning methodologies would also be useful but only when this is guided by a non-essentialist cultural understanding. This would also help materials developers to understand that Western pedagogical approaches are not always ideal in all contexts.

This project was based on the premise that teachers who lived within the local culture would create materials more suitable for their students compared to "one size fits all" commercially produced materials. In contrast, the study showed that even those teachers creating materials for their own students are (mis)guided by essentialist cultural understandings. The significance of the study findings is amplified when considering how the use of ubiquitous technology facilitates not only the design of localised materials but also the sharing of those materials with the wider professional community through a plethora of online platforms. The global spread of digital material has the potential to carry

with its messages, assumptions, ideologies and paradigms which can impact teaching and learning on a much grander scale than before.

This study would have benefitted from more in-depth textual analysis on the materials produced by the TCCs as this would have provided further evidence to corroborate the findings from the interviews. Furthermore, a larger sample of TCCs would have increased the generalisability of the results. However, time constraints prohibited the inclusion of more subjects in the study. Future studies should also consider including Arab background TCCs in the sample as this would provide the opportunity to compare results outside inner circle teacher groups.

Despite its limitations, this exploratory case study does raise important points that need to be considered when teachers create their own materials, especially now more than ever. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented need for teacher-curated digital content for remote, online teaching and learning. With modern digital devices, teachers have an opportunity as educators to develop highly contextualised, personalised approaches to learning. In doing so, teachers need to consider their students and their learning needs without grouping them into essentialist categories.

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Phase	Research objective	Question
Introduction	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform the participant of the interview being recorded • Start recording device • Ask them to confirm that they are happy for the audio recording to take place • State Participant ID number for the record • Aim of the Interview: To understand your pedagogical and digital content choice when developing the project for Emirati students • Ask participant to confirm on the audio recording that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have read and understood the information sheet and understand what will happen to the data • They have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily • They are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason • They understand that any information apart from their personal details may be used in future reports, articles, publications or presentations by the researcher • They agree to take part in the study • Ask the participant if they have any questions prior to the interview 	
Opening	Warm up	<p>Can you tell me a little about what interested you about the project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you had any experience working on a project like this before • Are there any aspects of the project you think will work particularly well? • Are there other aspects you do not think will work well in the project? • What are your main motivations for working on a project like this?
Core	To understand values-driven motivations for content selection	<p>What content did you create on the project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What model of English have you used to create the materials on the project? • Why did you feel that students in this context needed to know about these items? • What content do you think it is important for students to learn on a course like this? • How much of what you have selected is driven by your knowledge of the students?

Table A1.
Interview protocol

(continued)

Phase	Research objective	Question
	To understand values-driven motivations for pedagogical choices	In what ways do you think students in this region learn best? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of teaching style / strategies best work with these students?
	To understand assumptions teachers are making about the students they are producing content for	How would you best describe the students you think this course is designed for? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much do you know about the culture of your students? • What do you think your students best enjoy about learning English? • What do you think your students most dislike about learning English?
Closure	Reflection	Moving on to the final part of the interview... How much influence do you think your culture influences the way you teach? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe the learning culture? • How well suited do you think this is to the needs of your students? • What qualities do teachers need to best teach this course?
	Thank the participant for taking part in the interview	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform them that the data will be transcribed and the researcher will be in contact with them to provide them with the opportunity to destroy the audio recording • Inform them that they will have the opportunity to check through the transcription and omit any or all of the data • Inform them that you will be in contact with them to schedule an observation 	
Additional prompts which may be used to help participants expand on their responses	What did you mean...? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give me more detail...? • Do you have any examples? • Could you say more about...? • Do you mean that...? • Is it correct that...? 	

Table A1.

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