English Teaching Materials and Identity Formation: Moroccan Students' Perception of the "Self" and the "Other"

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Abstract

It is widely agreed that properly learning a new language requires learning the culture associated with it as well. The culture of the target language is often new and intriguing. However, such extensive exposure to the "Other's" perspective of life may impact not only individuals' language learning but also their thinking styles, beliefs, and perceptions of the "Self." This paper, using a quantitative research design, investigates the effect that the materials used in teaching English at Moroccan high schools and universities have on students. Drawing on data collected from 50 Moroccan university students, it was found that while all participants had been exposed to locally designed textbooks during high school—which did not seem to harm their cultural identity—the materials used at the university level were significantly foreign. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the role that educational materials play in shaping students' identities and to advocate for the inclusion of more local content to help preserve the cultural identity of Moroccan students.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important elements in foreign language learning and teaching is the nature of the materials used. Whether textbooks, handouts, or other instructional resources, these materials serve as a primary source of linguistic knowledge for learners. However, they often transmit more than just language—they also carry cultural and ideological content. This may influence the way students perceive themselves and the "Other," particularly when the materials are globally designed rather than locally contextualized (Tamimi Sa'd & Hatam, 2017). Previous research has shown that some students develop a strong desire to identify with the "Other" while learning English at the university level (Razmeh & Davoodi, 2015). This suggests that language learning, in its entirety, can impact how students define and relate to their own identity. This paper, therefore, investigates the relationship between the materials used in Moroccan high schools and universities and students' perception of the "Self" and the "Other." Specifically, it examines to what extent Moroccan students of English believe that their learning materials have influenced their self-perception and worldview.

To address these questions, this study adopts a quantitative research design, using a Likert-scale survey to capture the attitudes of Moroccan university students in English departments. The survey targets students who have been exposed to English language materials throughout their academic journey. The findings are presented through descriptive analysis and structured within the IMRAD model (Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion). The paper

concludes with a discussion of key findings, practical recommendations for material designers, and a reflection on the study's limitations.

This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How are locally designed materials different from globally designed materials?
- Which category of students is more likely to be affected by materials that introduce Western culture?
- How does the glorification of the West affect students' perception of the Self and the Other?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on the relationship between foreign language learning and identity construction has long captured the attention of educators and scholars. This paper, which explores how English language teaching materials influence Moroccan students' perception of the "Self" and the "Other," seeks to contribute to that growing body of knowledge. However, it also attempts to fill a gap—one that concerns the specific context of Morocco and the cultural implications embedded in its English language curricula.

It is widely acknowledged that learning a new language influences how learners perceive the culture that language represents. As Tamimi Sa'd and Hatam (2017) argue, the way we teach a particular language can shape how students see themselves and how they see the Other— either positively or negatively. In fact, research conducted in Iran showed that first-year students studying English tended to become more attached to the culture they were newly exposed to, often more than their own (Razmeh & Davoodi, 2015). This brings us to an important question regarding Moroccan students: how do they negotiate their cultural identity as they begin their journey in English departments across the country?

At Moroccan universities, English majors are frequently introduced to the great thinkers, writers, and political figures of the Western world. While this is certainly valuable, the consistent absence of equivalent Arab or Moroccan figures can subtly shape students' perceptions, leading some to view themselves as culturally less significant—not because this is objectively true, but because of the educational materials they are given. It has already been declared that students' exposure to one side of the story may cause them to develop a limited view of their cultural identity (Numan & Ayaz, 2023) and thus reinforce feelings of cultural inferiority.

The importance of materials in shaping learners' identities has been stressed by researchers such as Sasan Baleghizadeh (2011), who analyzed English language textbooks and found that materials can either preserve or erode learners' cultural identity, depending on how they are designed. When local designers manage to balance target language content with culturally familiar material, the risk of identity dislocation decreases. In fact, schools that incorporate local content into their curricula help students appreciate their cultural heritage, as seen in Indonesia's independent curriculum, which allows for regional characteristics to be included (Ali & Mulasi, 2023). Localization of content, therefore, plays a key role in anchoring students to their heritage while engaging them with global perspectives

Another recurring theme in the literature is the potential for assimilation—when language learners begin to identify more with the culture and values of the target language than with

their own. As Ibn Khaldūn (1377/2015) observed in *The Muqaddimah*, nations that have been dominated often internalize a desire to imitate the dominator in thought, culture, and even dress. While this might sound historical, it is surprisingly relevant today. Language learning, particularly English, can expose students to a cultural framework that increasingly becomes more interesting than their own. In fact, Núñez-Pardo (2020) notes, "This cultural universalism portrayed in EFL textbooks advocates the idea of a unique predominant culture. It denies the cultural differences of the universe and, together with an organized predetermined knowledge system, harms the socio-political purpose of EFL materials as sociocultural mediations." (pp. 116). This is especially observed when students know more about Shakespeare than about *Al-Mutanabbi* for instance, or more about American politics than about Arab history.

2.1. Theoretical Framework and Operational Definitions

To engage meaningfully with this topic, it is necessary to define two key concepts: **Identity** and the **Other**.

Identity, as a theoretical construct, is complex and multi-layered. It encompasses how individuals define themselves and how they relate to their environment, culture, and society. John Edwards (2009), a scholar in sociolinguistics and psychology, notes that the essence of identity is similarity—people gravitate toward what feels familiar and reflective of themselves. Identity includes elements such as language, heritage, nationality, and worldview. However, these elements are not fixed. Language learning, as Darvin and Norton (2017) explain, can shift the hierarchy of identity markers and, in doing so, reshape the learner's perception of who they are.

The second key concept is the **"Other"**, a term deeply rooted in post-colonial theory. In general, the Other represents what is foreign, unfamiliar, or culturally distinct from the Self. Jean-François Staszak (2008) defines Otherness as a relationship shaped by dominant narratives—where the Self (often associated with power and familiarity) sees the Other as different or even inferior. Edward Said (2003), the cornerstone of post-colonial theory, adds that this dichotomy is often created through what he called "imaginative geography"—a mental mapping of the world in which the West and the East are constructed in opposition. In the context of this paper, the "Other" refers to the Western world as portrayed through English language teaching materials.

2.2. Rationale and Research Gap

Although many studies have addressed the link between language learning and identity, few have examined this relationship within the Moroccan context. This study seeks to "bring these conversations home" by examining how Moroccan students are impacted by materials that center the West while minimizing local culture. Through the lens of post-colonial thought and cultural identity theory, the paper investigates how the content of textbooks and classroom materials can subtly influence the construction of students' self-image. The added value of this study lies in its context-specific focus and its use of student voices to reflect on the long-term implications of curriculum design.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design, as it aims to measure the attitudes of Moroccan students enrolled in English Departments toward the language teaching materials they have encountered throughout their academic journey. To achieve this goal, the researcher designed

a structured survey that was distributed to a sample of 50 Moroccan university students from three different public universities.

3.1. The Survey

The researcher employed a simple random sampling technique to gather data from 50 Moroccan students attending three major public universities: Ibn Tofail University (Kenitra), Mohammed V University (Rabat), and Ibn Zohr University (Agadir). All participants were enrolled in the English Department and had either completed their Bachelor's degree (BA), Master's degree (MA), or were still pursuing their undergraduate studies. Their areas of specialization included Linguistics, Literature, and Cultural Studies.

The main data collection tool was an online questionnaire designed and distributed using the **Qualtrics** platform. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items:

- **7 multiple-choice questions** capturing demographic information, and

- **11 Likert-scale items** measuring students' exposure to and opinions on English teaching materials.

The survey was structured around four scales:

1. **High School Textbooks** (3 items) – gauging student reflections on the English textbooks used during secondary education.

2. **University Materials** (3 items) – measuring perceptions of course content at the tertiary level.

3. **Interest** (2 items) – assessing shifts in cultural and intellectual interest after beginning English studies.

4. **Comparatives** (3 items) – evaluating how often Arab and Western culture, linguistics, and literature were presented side by side in class.

To ensure the internal consistency of the scales, a **Cronbach's Alpha test** was conducted using SPSS (Version 25). The reliability results ranged from .69 to .88, indicating acceptable to high reliability for the scales used.

3.2. The Population

The final sample included 50 students representing different branches of English studies from the three universities mentioned. The group was demographically diverse in terms of age and gender:

- **58%** of participants were female, and **42%** were male.

- **78%** were between the ages of 20–30,

- **18%** were aged 30–40,

- and **4%** were above 40 years old.

Regarding specialization, **66%** of the students majored in Linguistics, **28%** in Literature, and **6%** in Cultural Studies. In terms of academic level, **54%** were BA graduates, **42%** held an MA, and **4%** were still pursuing undergraduate studies.

Since the study focuses on evaluating language teaching materials in Moroccan educational contexts, it was important to determine whether participants were exposed to public or private education. The data revealed that **100% of the students attended public universities**, and **98% completed their high school education in public institutions**. As for the materials used during high school, **54% studied using *Ticket 2 English***, while **46% used *Gateway to English 2***—both of which are locally designed Moroccan textbooks. These figures reflect a shared educational experience rooted in the public sector and shaped by national textbook policies. Table 1 below provides a demographic summary of the study participants.

Table 1

Demographic Summary of Participants

Category	Group	Percentage
Gender	Female	58%
	Male	42%
Age	20–30 years	78%
	30–40 years	18%
	40+ years	4%
University Major	Linguistics	66%
	Literature	28%
	Cultural Studies	6%
Academic Level	BA holders	54%
	MA holders	42%
	Current Undergrads	4%
High School Type	Public	98%
	Private	2%
University Type	Public (all students)	100%

3.3.The Data Collection Instrument

As noted earlier, the researcher created and administered the questionnaire specifically for this study. To verify its reliability, a Cronbach's Alpha test was applied to the three scales representing the independent variable. The results are summarized below:

Table 2

Reliability Test of the Survey Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Textbook	3 items	.69
Comparatives	3 items	.77
Glorification	3 items	.88

These values confirm the internal consistency of the instrument, supporting its use for statistical analysis and interpretation.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the survey data followed the treatment of Likert-scale items as interval variables, allowing for the calculation and interpretation of means. Three primary areas were investigated: the impact of high school textbooks, the perception of Western glorification at the university level, and the frequency of comparative studies between Western and Arab cultural references within English classes.

The results showed that the mean score for the effectiveness of high school textbooks was **3.07** (SD = 0.76), a value falling within the "Neutral" range. This suggests that participants neither strongly agreed nor strongly disagreed that their high school materials had significantly shaped their cultural perception. Similarly, the mean score for the perception of **Glorification of the West** in college courses was **2.64** (SD = 0.93), which, although still within the "Neutral" range, leaned closer toward "Agree." This indicates a slight tendency among students to perceive that their university English courses place a greater emphasis on Western cultural perspectives.

Regarding the **Comparative Studies** scale, the mean score was **2.97** (SD = 0.99), corresponding to "Occasionally." This suggests that comparisons between Western and Arab cultures, literatures, and linguistic traditions were present in class discussions but were not a major or regular feature. These findings are summarized in **Table 3** below:

Table 3

Mean Scores for Main Scales

Scale	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Textbook	50	1.00	5.00	3.07	0.76
Glorification	50	1.00	5.00	2.64	0.93
Comparative Studies	50	1.00	4.67	2.97	0.99

In addition to evaluating the materials themselves, the study investigated changes in students' cultural interests after starting their English studies. Students reported greater interest in English history, politics, and culture (M = 2.06, SD = 1.10), while their interest in Arab history, politics, and culture remained generally neutral (M = 3.26, SD = 1.14). These results are presented in **Table 4**:

Table 4

Interest in English vs. Arab Culture After Studying English

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Increased interest in English history, politics, culture	2.06	1.10
Decreased interest in Arab history, politics, culture	3.26	1.14

To further explore differences based on academic standing, an independent samples t-test was conducted comparing undergraduates and MA students. Undergraduate students displayed a lower mean score (**1.50**, SD = 0.71) regarding their increased interest in English culture, compared to MA students (**2.67**, SD = 0.66). This implies that students at earlier stages of their academic journey are more susceptible to cultural influence through their studies, while those at the graduate level appear somewhat more balanced in their cultural affiliations.

The comparative data is summarized in **Table 5**:

Table 5

Independent Samples T-Test: Academic Level and Cultural Interest

Group	N	Mean Interest Score	Standard Deviation
Undergraduate	2	1.50	0.71
MA Students	21	2.67	0.66

Finally, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the perception of Western glorification in college classes and students' increasing interest in Western culture. A statistically significant moderate positive correlation was found (r = 0.406, p = 0.003), suggesting that the more students perceived Western culture as being glorified, the more they reported growing interested in it. These findings are summarized in **Table 6**:

Table 6

Pearson Correlation between Glorification and Cultural Interest

	Glorification	Interest
Glorification	1	0.406**
Interest	0.406**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.003

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In short, the results show that while locally designed high school textbooks did not significantly affect students' cultural perceptions, college-level materials, through their portrayal and

glorification of Western culture, had a measurable impact on students' interests and identification processes, particularly among younger and less experienced students.

5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore whether the materials used in teaching English at Moroccan high schools and universities influence students' perceptions of the Self and the Other. Drawing on a postcolonial lens and theories of identity formation, the findings suggest that language learning is not a neutral act—it is, rather, a cultural encounter that may either preserve or reshape the learner's sense of self, especially when the content is not locally grounded.

The first finding—regarding high school textbooks—indicates that materials commonly used in Moroccan public schools, such as *Ticket to English* and *Gateway to English*, do not appear to affect students' cultural identities significantly. The mean scores fell within the "Neutral" range, suggesting that these locally produced textbooks may not pose a threat to the student's sense of cultural belonging. This finding aligns with Baleghizadeh's (2011) argument that when materials are designed within the learners' cultural context, their identity remains largely intact. However, it is important to note that this conclusion is provisional, as the study did not include a control group exposed to globally designed high school materials for comparison.

In contrast, the findings from the university level paint a more complex picture. Students reported a subtle but measurable perception that Western culture—its history, literature, and politics—is glorified in their college courses. While this perception remained statistically moderate, it correlated significantly with increased interest in Western culture and a decreased interest (though less pronounced) in Arab culture. This outcome is critical. It confirms what theorists such as Tamimi Sa'd and Hatam (2017) and Razmeh and Davoodi (2015) have warned about: when students are repeatedly exposed to the cultural output of the Other—without adequate representation of their own heritage—they may begin to identify with that Other more than with themselves.

This brings us back to the theoretical framework of the study. If, as John Edwards (2009) suggests, identity is rooted in similarity and recognition, then students who are only exposed to the achievements and intellectual histories of Western figures will find themselves increasingly drawn toward those narratives. At the same time, the postcolonial notion of the Other—described by Staszak (2008) and Edward Said (2003)—reminds us that this dynamic is not simply about admiration; it can evolve into internalized inferiority. As Ibn Khaldūn (1377/2015) warned centuries ago, the defeated tend to imitate their victors—not only in language but in behavior, thought, and cultural orientation.

It is particularly telling that undergraduate students, who are at the beginning of their academic journey, reported significantly more interest in Western culture than their MA-level peers. This finding supports the idea that early exposure is more formative and that identity can be reshaped when learners encounter new narratives at a vulnerable stage. This, again, reinforces the literature's assertion that language learning is deeply intertwined with the construction of the Self.

But the concern here is not about rejecting the Other. It is not about shutting students off from global cultures or denying them access to valuable Western intellectual traditions. Rather, the concern is about balance. As the data shows, the comparative dimension—the space where Arab and Western texts, theories, and histories could meet—was rarely present. This absence

is perhaps the most powerful result of the study. If the students' cultural identity is to be preserved and their engagement with the world enriched, then comparative thinking must be built into the curriculum. As the researcher behind this study, I firmly believe that the goal should not be to reduce access to Western culture but to contextualize it, frame it alongside local contributions, and build spaces where students can see both the Self and the Other without feeling the need to choose between them.

That is why this study calls for curricular reform that includes meaningful comparisons between figures like Poe and *Alf Layla wa Layla*, Chomsky and Sibawayh, the U.S. Constitution, and the diplomatic history of Morocco. Such pedagogical moves not only elevate the students' knowledge but also allow them to recognize the value of their intellectual and cultural heritage. It affirms what Weidman (2009) described as the continuous nature of identity building—one that doesn't have to erase the past in order to embrace the present.

This study mirrors Razmeh and Davoodi's (2019) findings with Iranian undergraduates—where sustained reliance on international ELT materials led to a significant decline in identification with native cultural practices—and aligns with Numan and Ayaz's (2023) Pakistani context, in which a uniform national curriculum marginalized regional voices in favor of Western figures; conversely, it also echoes Ali and Mulasi's (2023) analysis of Indonesia's independent curriculum, which integrates local traditions alongside global texts and, in turn, fosters sustained cultural pride. Our results extend this cross-cultural evidence by demonstrating that even at the tertiary level in Morocco, prolonged exposure to international ELT resources correlates with diminished cultural connectedness and motivation to engage with local literary heritage. These converging insights underscore the urgent need for curriculum designers and policymakers to balance global communicative goals with robust, localized content if we are to cultivate both linguistic proficiency and resilient cultural identity.

This study has its limitations that cannot go unnoticed. The sample was relatively small, limited to 50 students across three universities. Additionally, because we relied on students' self-reports, responses may be affected by self-reporting biases such as social desirability or selective recall. Moreover, the study did not include a direct, systematic content analysis of the teaching materials themselves, leaving the question of how specific texts, images, or activities might shape cultural identity unexplored. However, these limitations do not diminish the value of the findings. On the contrary, they open the door for future research: larger studies, mixed-method investigations combining surveys with interviews or focus groups, and rigorous textual or visual analyses of coursebooks and supplement materials are all needed to explore how materials either support or erode cultural identity in educational settings.

Yet even within its modest scope, this study affirms a powerful truth: the way we design and deliver educational content matters. Materials are not just tools for learning a language; they are mirrors—and sometimes windows—through which students construct their worldviews. The more we ensure those materials reflect who our students are and where they come from, the more confident and intellectually balanced they will become as they engage with the rest of the world.

6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how English language teaching materials used in Moroccan high schools and universities shape students' perceptions of the Self and the Other. Grounded in

postcolonial theory and identity studies, the research confirms that language learning is far more than the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary—it is a space where cultural meanings are transmitted, identities are negotiated, and worldviews are shaped.

The results indicate that while the high school textbooks—being locally designed—tend to have a neutral or non-threatening impact on students' cultural identities, university-level materials carry a stronger influence. Students reported a noticeable, though moderate, sense that Western culture is consistently glorified within their English courses. Importantly, this perception was significantly correlated with increased interest in Western politics, literature, and history, especially among undergraduates, whose academic identities are still being formed.

These findings echo the concerns raised in the literature and the theoretical framework of the study: identity is not static, and when learners are persistently exposed to one dominant narrative—especially one centered on the Other—they may begin to unconsciously drift away from their own cultural grounding. While the aim of English departments is, understandably, to familiarize students with Anglophone cultures and intellectual histories, this study cautions against doing so at the expense of comparative and locally grounded content.

Therefore, this research urges curriculum designers and policymakers in Moroccan higher education to rethink English instruction with intentional inclusivity. Instead of narrowing students' cultural horizons, curricula should expand them—placing Western authors and thinkers in meaningful dialogue with their Arab and Moroccan counterparts, and foregrounding the historical and intellectual contributions of the local context. By embedding comparative pedagogies that juxtapose global and indigenous perspectives, decision-makers can empower students intellectually while nurturing a deeper pride in their own heritage.

This study remains an initial step in what must become a broader academic conversation. The limited sample size and the reliance on student perceptions—rather than textual analysis of the materials themselves—mean that future research is both necessary and welcome. Expanding the scope to include more institutions, more varied disciplines, and direct content analysis of syllabi and textbooks could offer deeper insights into how identity is shaped in language classrooms.

Above all, this paper delivers an urgent reminder that our choice of materials carries significant weight for curriculum developers and policy architects. The texts we select—and the perspectives we omit—shape students' intellectual formation in lasting ways. When policymakers ensure that Moroccan learners engage not only with the richness of global thought but also with the depth of their own traditions, they do more than preserve cultural identity—they strengthen it, cultivating resilience, confidence, and genuine global engagement.

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