School of Humanities

"The Teaching of English as a Foreign/International Language"

Postgraduate Dissertation

Investigating the cultural content of a Greek Junior High School textbook

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Abstract

Modern educational systems should prepare learners for communication within an increasingly globalised world. As indispensable constituents of language instruction, textbooks, too, should assist towards this direction by incorporating cultural elements in their content. Against this backdrop, this dissertation seeks to assess the cultural content of one of the textbooks used in the Greek State Junior High School, focusing on reading texts and the components accompanying them, namely reading tasks and visual images. The term 'task' is not to be confused with the definition of 'task' in the context of task-based learning. In this dissertation, the term is used in lieu of exercises or activities found in the pre- and post-reading sections in the textbook.

Qualitative content analysis is employed for the examination of reading texts and tasks. In the case of reading texts, it is employed to identify the type and depth of cultural content presented, and in the case of reading tasks to examine whether they expand on the cultural information provided in texts, thus affording opportunities for elaboration and deeper understanding. Since content analysis is qualitative, it was decided to use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) term 'trustworthiness' when examining issues of validity and reliability of the investigation. Visual images are examined using a semiotic approach to shed light on their functions, appropriateness and effectiveness in raising learners' cultural and intercultural awareness.

Regarding reading texts, the findings suggest that there is a disproportionate presentation of C3 cultural elements at the expense of C1 and C2. Additionally, texts abound in Large 'C' cultural themes at the expense of Small 'c' ones. In the case of tasks, the majority of the practise information acquisition and retrieval, leaving cultural elements unexplored. Finally, concerning visual images accompanying reading texts, the majority of them bear iconic and symbolic relations to their objects, which may promote the examination of culture. Conversely, visual images accompanying tasks incite denotational meaning, thus directing learners towards guided semiosis.

The findings highlight the necessity for textbook writers to engage in more thorough examination concerning the kind and depth of cultural information presented in textbooks in order to provide learners with holistic understanding of culture, raise their cultural and intercultural awareness and prepare them for global citizenship.

Key words

Intercultural education, cultural awareness, intercultural awareness, textbook evaluation, content analysis, semiotic analysis

Περίληψη

Τα σύγχρονα εκπαιδευτικά συστήματα πρέπει να προετοιμάζουν τους μαθητές για την επικοινωνία σε έναν ολοένα και πιο παγκοσμιοποιημένο κόσμο. Ως αναπόσπαστα συστατικά της γλωσσικής διδασκαλίας, τα σχολικά εγχειρίδια θα πρέπει επίσης να συμβάλλουν προς αυτή την κατεύθυνση, ενσωματώνοντας πολιτισμικά στοιχεία στο περιεχόμενό τους. Σε αυτό το πλαίσιο, η παρούσα διατριβή επιδιώκει να αξιολογήσει το πολιτισμικό περιεχόμενο ενός από τα σχολικά εγχειρίδια που χρησιμοποιούνται στο Ελληνικό Κρατικό Γυμνάσιο, εστιάζοντας στα κείμενα ανάγνωσης και στα στοιχεία που τα συνοδεύουν, δηλαδή τις αναγνωστικές εργασίες και τις οπτικές εικόνες. Ο όρος «εργασία» δεν πρέπει να συγχέεται με τον ορισμό της «εργασίας» στο πλαίσιο της μάθησης βάσει εργασιών. Στην παρούσα διατριβή, ο όρος χρησιμοποιείται αντί για τις ασκήσεις ή τις δραστηριότητες που βρίσκονται στις ενότητες πριν και μετά τα κείμενα ανάγνωσης στο σχολικό βιβλίο.

Η εξέταση των κειμένων και των εργασιών ανάγνωσης πραγματοποιείται χρησιμοποιώντας ποιοτική ανάλυση περιεχομένου. Στην περίπτωση των αναγνωστικών κειμένων, η ανάλυση περιεχομένου χρησιμοποιείται για τον προσδιορισμό του τύπου και του βάθους του πολιτιστικού περιεχομένου που παρουσιάζεται και στην περίπτωση των αναγνωστικών ασκήσεων για να εξεταστεί κατά πόσον επεκτείνουν τις πολιτιστικές πληροφορίες που παρέχονται στα κείμενα, παρέχοντας έτσι ευκαιρίες για επεξεργασία και βαθύτερη κατανόηση. Δεδομένου ότι η ανάλυση περιεχομένου είναι ποιοτική, αποφασίστηκε να χρησιμοποιηθεί ο όρος «αξιοπιστία» των Lincoln και Guba (1985) κατά την εξέταση των ζητημάτων εγκυρότητας και αξιοπιστίας της έρευνας. Οι οπτικές εικόνες εξετάζονται χρησιμοποιώντας μια σημειωτική προσέγγιση για να φωτιστούν οι λειτουργίες, η καταλληλότητα και η αποτελεσματικότητά τους στην αύξηση της πολιτισμικής και διαπολιτισμικής επίγνωσης των μαθητών.

Όσον αφορά τα κείμενα ανάγνωσης, τα ευρήματα υποδηλώνουν ότι υπάρχει δυσανάλογη παρουσίαση των πολιτισμικών στοιχείων C3 σε βάρος των C1 και C2. Επιπλέον, τα κείμενα αφθονούν σε πολιτιστικά θέματα του Large 'C' σε βάρος των Small 'c'. Όσον αφορά τις εργασίες, η πλειονότητα των ασκήσεων ασκεί την απόκτηση και ανάκτηση πληροφοριών, αφήνοντας ανέγγιχτα τα πολιτισμικά στοιχεία. Τέλος, όσον αφορά τις οπτικές εικόνες που συνοδεύουν τα κείμενα ανάγνωσης, η πλειονότητά

τους φέρει εικονικές και συμβολικές σχέσεις με τα αντικείμενά τους, γεγονός που μπορεί να προάγει την εξέταση του πολιτισμού. Αντίθετα, οι οπτικές εικόνες που συνοδεύουν εργασίες υποκινούν το δηλωτικό τους νόημα, κατευθύνοντας έτσι τους μαθητές προς την καθοδηγούμενη σημειοποίηση.

Τα ευρήματα υπογραμμίζουν την ανάγκη οι συγγραφείς σχολικών εγχειριδίων να προβούν σε πιο ενδελεχή εξέταση όσον αφορά το είδος και το βάθος των πολιτισμικών πληροφοριών που παρουσιάζονται στα σχολικά εγχειρίδια, εάν ο στόχος είναι να παρέχουν στους μαθητές μια ολιστική κατανόηση του πολιτισμού, να αυξήσουν την πολιτισμική και διαπολιτισμική τους επίγνωση και να τους προετοιμάσουν για την ιδιότητα του παγκόσμιου πολίτη.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση, πολιτισμική συνείδηση, διαπολιτισμική ευαισθητοποίηση, αξιολόγηση σχολικών εγχειριδίων, ανάλυση περιεχομένου, σημειωτική ανάλυση

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