



EVALUATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS IN BOSNIAN PRIMARY EDUCATION: STRUCTURE, LEARNER ENGAGEMENT, CULTURE, AND CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

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Abstract:

This study offers a comprehensive evaluation of two English language textbooks, *Way to Go 8* and *Challenges 4*, widely used in primary schools in the Canton of Central Bosnia. Utilizing Littlejohn's analytical framework for material analysis and Xiao's model of cultural categorization, the research investigates the structural design, learner engagement strategies, curriculum alignment, and cultural content integration in both textbooks. The findings reveal that *Challenges 4* exhibits greater coherence in design and organization, while *Way to Go 8* demonstrates a fragmented presentation of topics and grammar. Both textbooks predominantly emphasize individual written exercises, focusing on information decoding and selection, while offering limited opportunities for developing functional skills such as problem-solving, communication, and critical thinking. Although both textbooks align with the official curriculum regarding topics, grammar, and vocabulary, the integration of cultural content is minimal and lacks depth, with cultural references being sporadic and not thoroughly embedded within the learning material. The study suggests that enhancing the incorporation of functional skill development activities and more substantial cultural content could improve the effectiveness of these textbooks in fostering comprehensive language proficiency among learners.

Keywords: textbook assessment, curriculum alignment, culture-based material, textbook comparison, primary school

1. Background of the Problem

Regardless of the teaching approach, institutional setting, student proficiency level, or the teacher's instructional role, textbooks have long been regarded as a central

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component of English language classrooms. Different pedagogical methods address varying learner needs and require distinct teacher roles, classroom arrangements, and supplementary materials (Bureković et al., 2023). Despite this diversity, textbooks often provide consistency across lessons, offer clear examples, support structured teaching and learning, and serve as a point of reference for revision and further exploration. They also function as a form of academic portfolio, enabling students to track progress and consolidate knowledge during exam preparation (Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2023). Although it is difficult to determine precisely when textbooks first became integral to language instruction, their prominent role can be traced to the rise of modern language teaching practices, particularly with the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the mid-1970s. Scholars and practitioners of the period often emphasized the benefits of textbooks as stable and accessible classroom resources. For example, Grant (1987) highlights their instructional value and provides practical guidance for their effective use. Harmer (1998) describes them as reassuring tools for learners (p. 117), while Sheldon (1998) refers to textbooks as the 'heart' of English language teaching (ELT) programs. Similarly, O'Neill (1982) argues that textbooks can have a positive impact on both teachers and learners, highlighting features such as a consistent syllabus, controlled vocabulary input, sequenced instruction, and pedagogical reliability.

The early 2000s saw the rapid integration of digital technologies into language education. Interactive platforms, smartboards, learner-friendly applications, and access to digital corpora have reshaped many aspects of language instruction. Despite these advances, textbooks have remained an essential element in English language classrooms. Richard (2001) identifies them as efficient teaching tools, and Henderson (2012) notes that they continue to be the most widely used resource among EFL teachers. Sobkowiak (2012) similarly affirms their dominant presence in English language education. In a 2002 survey, McGrath reported that teachers described textbooks using metaphors such as a 'crutch' or even a 'holly book', reflecting their perceived indispensability. Given their enduring role in language education, the evaluation and analysis of textbooks remain an important area of inquiry within applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Understanding how textbooks function, what they prioritize, and how they align with contemporary educational goals continues to be of critical relevance in both research and classroom practice.

2. Which textbook to choose and how?

Selecting an appropriate textbook for a specific course, classroom context, or educational program is a complex and highly contextualized process. Established publishers from English-speaking countries such as *Oxford*, *Cambridge*, *Longman*, *Pearson*, *McGraw-Hill*, and *Collins* offer a wide range of level-specific materials. In parallel, the global role of English as a lingua franca has prompted many non-native English-speaking countries to develop their own localized English language textbooks tailored to national curricula. To navigate this extensive selection, educators must begin by identifying key parameters

aligned with their institutional goals. Factors such as student age, language proficiency, course objectives, and syllabus requirements serve as essential criteria for narrowing textbook choices. In addition to linguistic coverage and curriculum alignment, recent educational policies and frameworks emphasize the importance of developing functional learner skills, including problem-solving, critical thinking, and intercultural communication (Council of Europe, 2020; OECD, 2019). As a result, textbooks are now expected not only to support language acquisition but also to contribute to broader educational outcomes.

Despite applying these pedagogical filters, the range of available materials often remains overwhelming. As Grave (2000) noted, what may be considered a pedagogical advantage by one teacher might be seen as a limitation by another. To facilitate more informed selection, textbook evaluation has emerged as a practical tool for identifying pedagogical, structural, and cultural aspects of published materials. Radić-Bojanić and Topalov (2016) distinguished between predictive evaluation, focused on assessing a textbook's potential for use in a particular setting and retrospective evaluation, a framework previously described by Cunningsworth (1995) as assessing the actual suitability and effectiveness of the material.

Over the years, various scholars have developed textbook evaluation frameworks. Harmer (2000, 2007) proposes a three-stage model based on teacher-defined criteria. This approach involves identifying relevant evaluation areas, formulating statements based on those areas, and using the statements to generate a practical checklist. Cunningsworth (1995) offers a more comprehensible instrument that covers categories such as methodology, learning outcomes, language skills, phonology, and thematic coherence. McGrath (2002) introduces a layered model that combines subjective impressions and objective criteria, moving from surface-level examination to detailed analysis. Garinger (2002) proposes a similarly structured checklist that progresses from general to specific features. Other contributions (e.g., Byrd, 2001; Ur, 1996) further extend these efforts by offering criteria-based guidelines for systematic textbook appraisal.

While these frameworks provide valuable tools for critical textbook selection, there is still a lack of applied studies that examine how widely used English textbooks meet the curricular and pedagogical demands within specific educational contexts, such as those in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Conducting such context-sensitive analysis is essential not only for effective textbook selection but also for ensuring that materials support the development of communicative competence, critical thinking skills, and intercultural awareness among students (Council of Europe, 2020; OECD, 2019). In response to this gap, the present study undertakes a comparative evaluation of two English textbooks commonly used in the Canton of Central Bosnia. The analysis focuses on publication quality, cultural content, and curricular compliance guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What is the quality of both textbooks in terms of publication and design?
- 2) What similarities and differences can be identified between the two textbooks?
- 3) To what extent do the textbooks incorporate culture-based content?

- 4) Are the textbooks aligned with the designated curriculum and appropriate for the target age group?

3. Methodology

This study adopts the analytical framework developed by Littlejohn (2011), which facilitates an objective analysis of educational materials by allowing them to ‘speak for themselves’ (p. 182). This approach enables researchers to assess materials independently of personal biases, while also providing opportunities to relate findings to specific teaching contexts.

Littlejohn’s framework comprises three levels of analysis:

- a) What is there (objective analysis),
- b) What is required of users (subjective analysis),
- c) What is implied (subjective inference).

This structured approach allows for a comprehensible examination of the materials, focusing on their content, the demands they place on users, and the underlying assumptions they convey. The framework is adaptable and can be expanded with additional criteria relevant to the specific aims of the research.

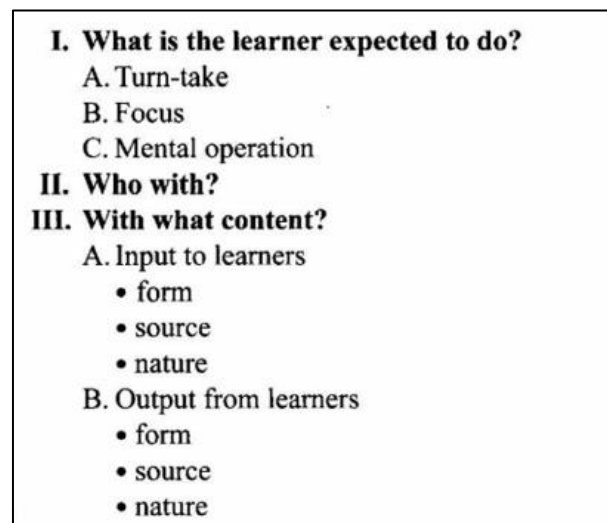


Figure 1: Littlejohn's questions for the analysis of the task

In this study, the model was extended to incorporate two additional areas of focus, the alignment of the textbooks with curriculum goals and learner age, and the presence and classification of culture-related content. The latter was analyzed using the conceptual distinction between Big ‘C’ and small ‘c’ culture, introduced by Paige et al. (1999), which has become widely accepted in the field of intercultural education. Big ‘C’ is often associated with the national identity of a particular country, small ‘c’ culture promotes cultural relatability and supports the development of communicative competence in real-world contexts (Paige et al., 1999). The distinction was operationalized through the framework proposed by Xiao (2010), who developed a comprehensive model for

textbook evaluation by integrating the Big 'C'/small 'c' concepts into sixteen cultural themes. According to Xiao, Big 'C' culture comprises nine thematic areas: geography, politics, education, history, social norms, economy, music, literature and art, and architecture. Small 'c' culture includes seven themes: customs, food, hobbies, holidays, gestures and body language, lifestyle, and values. Xiao's model, adapted from earlier checklists by Chen (2004) and Lee (2009), offers a robust foundation for both qualitative and quantitative analysis of cultural content in textbooks. This study applied Xiao's classification to identify, categorize, and quantify the presence of culture-related material in the selected textbooks.

In addition to the thematic analysis, the cultural origin of the material was assessed following the typology proposed by McKay (2000), who distinguishes three categories of cultural reference: target culture, source culture, and international culture. Target culture refers to material drawn from countries where English is spoken as a first language, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, or Australia. Source culture encompasses content related to the learner's own national or regional context, in this case, Bosnia and Herzegovina. International culture includes references to global contexts beyond both the learner's country and traditional English-speaking regions, typically reflecting intercultural or multilingual environments. This classification is instrumental in understanding whether English language teaching materials promote local engagement, global awareness, or primarily reinforce Anglophone norms (McKay, 2000).

The textbooks selected for analysis are *Way to Go 8* published by Sarajevo Publishing in Sarajevo, and *Challenges 4*, published by Longman in London. Both textbooks have received approval from the Ministry of Education in the Canton of Central Bosniaⁱⁱ. A survey, conducted by the authors, among English teachers in the canton revealed that 26 out of 37 schools (approximately 70%) have adopted *Way to Go 8* as their primary textbook for 8th-grade English instruction. Notably, *Challenges 4* is the sole approved textbook for 9th-grade English in the canton, resulting in its use across all 37 schools. Considering the number of primary schools in the Canton of Central Bosnia, these two textbooks are used by an estimated 2500 students in the 8th and 9th grades. Given their widespread use and the similarity in the target age groups, this study undertakes a comparative analysis of the two textbooks, focusing on publication quality, cultural content, and curricular alignment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Structural Coherence

According to Littlejohn's (2011) framework, the first level of analysis concerns the tangible and observable features of the textbook, namely, the way the material is organized, the physical format of the book, the structure of units and sub-units, and the accompanying supplementary resources. This stage allows for an objective overview of

ⁱⁱ The list of officially approved textbooks can be found on the official website of the Ministry:
<http://www.fmon.gov.ba/Obavjest/Pregled?id=913>

publication quality and structural design, both of which contribute significantly to the textbook's usability and classroom applicability.

Way to go 8 textbook is a semi-consumable A4-format textbook (210 x 270 mm), containing fill-in-the-gap activities in the main volume. It is supplemented by a consumable workbook, an audio CD, and online access to a limited set of three interactive exercises. The cover features a vibrant group of teenagers positioned against a contrasting dark and light purple background. The textbook is divided into four primary units, each comprising approximately seven lessons, which are structured into three recurring sections, vocabulary, grammar, and skills, with all four language skills presented individually. Visually, each unit is color-coded, and lesson titles are clearly demarcated. However, the sequence of lessons does not always follow a coherent thematic or grammatical progression. Apart from vocabulary revision sections, the textbook lacks consistent scaffolding between lessons. Grammar is often introduced in isolation, without clear contextual linkage to the texts or tasks preceding it. The main volume consists of 196 pages and concludes with a tapescript of audio materials and a bilingual word list. The teacher's support package includes a CD with testing materials, a proposed syllabus, and individual lesson plans.

In contrast, *Challenges 4* is a non-consumable, wider-format textbook (210x300 mm) that does not contain exercises to be completed within the main text. It includes an additional workbook, teacher's handbook, test pack, dedicated test book, class audio CDs, video DVDs, and a companion website offering interactive exercises and teaching suggestions. Its cover design features four central images related to textbook topics, framed against a subdued backdrop and featuring the book's four main fictional protagonists. The internal structure comprises ten core units, each divided into four lessons with a revision section at the end. An additional culture-focused lesson appears at the end of each unit under the label 'Culture Bank'. Each unit follows a consistent pedagogical model, beginning with warm-up activities and continuing with lessons thematically linked to the recurring teenage protagonists. Similarly to *Way to Go 8*, units are divided into grammar, vocabulary, and the four skills, but the organization is more systematic. The visual and typographic layout is clear, appealing, and professionally executed. The final pages contain a grammar reference section, a 15-page magazine-style reading segment targeting adolescent interests, a list of irregular verbs, a monolingual word list, and a phonetic chart. The total length is 152 pages.

Overall, the two textbooks differ significantly in terms of design, organization, and supplementary resources. *Challenges 4* offers a more cohesive and visually polished product, with additional classroom materials that support flexible and differentiated instruction. In contrast, *Way to Go 8* exhibits some degree of structure and visual organization but lacks consistency in lesson progression and thematic coherence. The aesthetics of textbook design remain partially subjective, however, from a structural and pedagogical standpoint, *Challenges 4* demonstrates a more deliberate and consistent approach to layout and publication planning.

4.2 Learner engagement

To examine the expectations placed on learners, representative units from both textbooks were selected, following Littlejohn's (2011) recommendation to analyze approximately 15% of the total material. Unit 2 from *Way to go 8*, comprising 22 pages and 62 activities, was selected for analysis. In the case of *Challenges 4*, Units 3 and 4 were chosen, together encompassing 20 pages and 97 tasks. These units were examined in detail using Littlejohn's evaluative framework to identify the types of learner engagement the materials promote. The findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Learner engagement and task characteristics
 in selected units of *Way to Go 8* and *Challenges 4*

Textbook	<i>Way to go 8</i>		<i>Challenges 4</i>	
	N	%	N	%
I. WHAT IS THE LEARNER EXPECTED TO DO?				
A. TURN-TAKE				
Initiate	19	30%	26	26%
Scripted response	22	35%	9	10%
Not required	24	38%	62	64%
B. FOCUS ON				
Meaning	29	46%	33	34%
Language system (rules or form)	11	18%	24	25%
Meaning/system/form relationship	22	36%	40	41%
C. MENTAL OPERATION				
Decode semantic meaning	46	74%	41	42%
Select information	33	53%	45	46%
Hypothesize	9	14%	14	14%
Retrieve from LTM	6	10%	16	16%
Repeat identically	16	25%	17	17%
Apply general knowledge	6	10%	18	18%
Research	2	3%	1	1%
Express own ideas/information	19	30%	29	29%
II. WHO WITH?				
Learners individually simultaneously	39	62%	58	60%
Learner to whole class	15	24%	24	25%
Learner individually outside the class	-		-	
Pair work	9	14%	8	8%
Group work	-		7	7%
III. WITH WHAT CONTENT?				
A. INPUT TO LEARNERS				
a. Form				
Extended discourse: written	10	22%	15	16%
Extended discourse: aural	6	10%	7	7%
Words/phrases/sentences: written	31	45%	63	66%
Words/phrases/sentences: aural	10	13%	5	5%
Graphic	5	10%	7	6%
b. Source				
Materials	45	72%	69	71%
Learners	12	19%	20	20%
Outside the course/lesson	5	9%	8	9%
c. Nature				
Fiction	27	43%	46	47%

Non-fiction	35	57%	51	53%
Song	-		-	
B. EXPECTED OUTPUT FROM LEARNERS				
a. Form				
Words/phrases/sentences: oral	23	37%	31	32%
Words/phrases/sentences: written	39	63%	66	68%
b. Source				
Materials	35	57%	68	70%
Learners	27	43%	29	30%
c. Nature				
Fiction	20	32%	43	44%
Non-fiction	42	68%	54	56%
Song	-		-	

The most immediately noticeable difference between the two textbooks is the number of exercises. *Challenges 4* includes 97 exercises across 20 pages, averaging approximately five exercises per page. In contrast, *Way to Go 8* contains 62 exercises over 22 pages, equating to roughly three exercises per page. When considering the overall page counts of both textbooks, *Challenges 4* contains approximately 200 more exercises in total, which is a substantial disparity given that both textbooks are intended for the same instructional context (i.e., two classes per week). In terms of learner expectations regarding turn-taking, *Way to Go 8* displays a balanced distribution across the three identified types, initiation, scripted response, and no turn-taking, each accounting for roughly one-third of the task. In *Challenges 4*, by contrast, a significantly larger proportion of exercises (64%) do not require any turn-taking. While the share of tasks requiring student initiation is comparable to that in *Way to Go 8*, scripted responses appear less frequently. Notably, both textbooks demonstrate a relatively low emphasis on learner initiation, which suggests limited opportunities for open-ended or unscripted interaction.

With respect to the focus of tasks, *Way to Go 8* primarily emphasizes meaning, whereas *Challenges 4* provides a more balanced distribution, placing slightly greater emphasis on form and the relationship between meaning and language structure. Exercises that target purely grammatical content are infrequent in both textbooks, accounting for 18% in *Way to go 8* and 25% in *Challenges 4*. The latter, however, shows a modestly higher proportion of activities integrating stylistic or formal elements.

The category of mental operations is the most complex to quantify, as individual exercises often involve multiple cognitive processes. Nevertheless, discernible trends emerge. Both textbooks heavily rely on two main processes, decoding semantic meaning and selecting information, which together comprise approximately 60% of the exercises in both textbooks. *Way to Go 8* includes a notable proportion of repetition-based exercises (25%), while activities that require retrieval from long-term memory or the application of general knowledge are relatively rare (10% each). *Challenges 4* offers a slightly broader cognitive scope in this regard, with these figures increasing to 16% and 18%, respectively. Both textbooks assign 14% of tasks to hypothesizing, and the proportion of exercises involving research is negligible. Approximately one-third of the exercises in both materials allow learners to express their own ideas and information.

Regarding modes of classroom interaction, both textbooks are predominantly designed for individual work, whether performed simultaneously or directed toward the whole class. Together, these formats account for over 80% of tasks. Pair work is infrequent, and group work is entirely absent in the *Way to Go 8* sample and minimally represented (7%) in *Challenges 4*. In terms of content input, both textbooks overwhelmingly prioritize written forms, either extended texts or isolated words, phrases, and sentences, comprising approximately 80% of input types. Aural input is limited, and the use of visual or graphic materials is marginal. The majority of input originates from the textbooks themselves (around 70%), with the remainder deriving from learners or, to a limited extent, external sources. The distribution of content type is relatively even between fiction and non-fiction in both cases, and notably, neither sample includes songs.

Expected learner output is also predominantly written in both textbooks, with oral output comprising about one-third of responses. As with input, learner output largely depends on the material provided in the textbook (approximately 70%), with a smaller proportion generated independently by learners. In terms of content nature, *Challenges 4* maintains a balanced division between fiction and non-fiction, while *Way to Go 8* exhibits a greater emphasis on non-fictional tasks (67%).

4.3 Culture-based activities

Language learning and target language culture are closely associated. Cultural awareness is becoming one of the most talked about parts of language learning in recent years. CEFR guidelines include the notion that cultural understanding can elevate language learning and understanding (Hakander, 2018). Many authors (Soni, 2020; Rafidah, Emaliana, 2023) have written about cultural items found in different English textbooks. The classification and analysis of culture-related content in the two selected textbooks were conducted using the combined frameworks of Xiao (2010) and McKay (2000), as introduced in the methodology. Cultural references were first coded according to Xiao's thematic categorization of Big 'C' and small 'c' culture and then further classified based on their cultural origin following McKay's three-part typology (source culture, target culture, and international culture).

As shown in Table 2, both textbooks include a limited number of culture-related lessons, though the scope and integration of these materials vary. *Way to go 8* contains thirteen lessons with identifiable cultural content. Two lessons are devoted to the history, music and literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina and are categorized as Big 'C' culture within the source culture category. Seven lessons focus on the United States and fall under the target culture. Of these, four deal with historical and geographic topics and two cover the topic of literature and are classified as Big 'C' culture, while one lesson addressing Thanksgiving is categorized as small small 'c' culture. Only one lesson in *Way to go 8* includes a reference to international culture, also under the small 'c' classification. *Challenges 4* includes nineteen lessons containing cultural elements. Of these, thirteen are categorized as small 'c' culture, covering topics such as lifestyle and local customs in

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Six lessons qualify as Big ‘C’ culture and focus on the geographic, historic, and similar themes mostly in the source culture category. Target culture references are minimal, with only a handful of lessons addressing cultural content from an English-speaking country. In contrast, two lessons present content from countries outside the Anglophone world, specifically, Chile and New Zealand, and are therefore categorized as international culture.

Table 2: Overview of lessons related to culture in both textbooks

		Source culture		Target culture		International culture	
		<i>Way to go 8</i>	<i>Challenges 4</i>	<i>Way to go 8</i>	<i>Challenges 4</i>	<i>Way to go 8</i>	<i>Challenges 4</i>
Big C culture	Politics						
	Society's norms				1		
	Education						
	Architecture						
	Music	1			1		
	Economy, business, industry						
	History	1		2			1
	Geography		2	2			1
	Literature, art, film	1		2			
Small c culture	Food						
	Holiday, celebrations	1	1	1	1	1	
	Lifestyle		1		2		
	Customs, behavior		2			1	1
	Values, beliefs, attitudes		2				1
	Hobbies, leisure		1		1		
	Gesture/Body language						

(adapted version from Xiao, 2010)

A notable observation concerns the placement and pedagogical treatment of these culture-based lessons. In both textbooks, cultural content is rarely integrated into the main thematic structure of units. In *Way to Go 8*, such content is labeled as ‘Page Plus’ or ‘Extra’, suggesting its status as supplementary material rather than core curriculum. In *Challenges 4*, cultural lessons are positioned at the back of the textbook, following the final module, and are not explicitly linked to the central instructional content. This peripheral positioning diminished the potential impact of cultural instruction and undermines the role of culture as an essential component of language learning. While the number of culture-related exercises might appear modest, quantity alone is not an adequate indicator of pedagogical value, particularly when the activities are not meaningfully integrated into broader learning objectives. In both textbooks, cultural topics are often disconnected from the linguistic or communicative goals of the accompanying units and

are presented in isolation. This disjointed approach limits opportunities for learners to engage with culture as part of an authentic and contextualized language experience.

4.4 Alignment with curriculum and age

All textbooks used in the Canton of Central Bosnia must comply with the Curriculum published by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of the Canton. The current version of the curriculum, which can be found on the official website of the Ministryⁱⁱⁱ, was published in May 2014 and remains in use, now in its eleventh year. Although the need for revision is evident, such discussion lies outside the scope of this analysis. The curriculum provides comprehensive guidelines concerning the thematic content, vocabulary, and grammatical structures appropriate for each grade level. It also offers general pedagogical recommendations and emphasizes the importance of age-appropriate and cognitively suitable material.

For the eighth grade, the prescribed topics include school, friendship, health, culture, tradition and art, holidays, and modern technology. *Way to Go 8* successfully incorporates all these thematic areas. Topics such as school and friendship recur across multiple texts, while health-related content is distributed throughout all four units. Although cultural elements are present, often in the form of ‘culture spots’, they are not consistently integrated into the thematic flow of the textbook. This lack of systematic integration diminishes their pedagogical value, a concern addressed in further detail below. Vocabulary coverage aligns with the thematic scope, as prescribed vocabulary is closely tied to the stated topics. Furthermore, the textbook’s grammar reference confirms that all curriculum-mandated grammar items are included, along with several additional structures, thereby extending beyond the minimum requirements.

The ninth-grade curriculum outlines the following themes: schooling, travel, free time and hobbies, myths and legends, people from the past, my country, jobs, and future. A comparison with the thematic content in *Challenges 4* reveals substantial alignment. The textbook includes extensive coverage of travel, leisure activities, and historical figures. Each of its ten units is followed by a supplementary story with origins in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus supporting local cultural relevance. The topic of employment and future planning is also well-represented. Additional units, such as *News*, *Cash*, *Imagination*, and *Sports*, introduce themes that resonate with adolescent learners and are consistent with their cognitive and emotional development. Vocabulary items suggested by the curriculum are adequately covered, and the textbook offers a considerably broader range of grammar content than officially required.

Despite this strong general alignment with curricular content and age appropriateness, one critical area remains insufficiently addressed: the integration of intercultural content. The curriculum mandates, under the section titled *Intercultural Skills*, that learners in both the eighth and ninth grades become familiar with the history, customs, and social practices of English-speaking countries. This goal is only partially

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://mozks-ksb.ba/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Nastavni-plan-i-program-od-VI-do-IX-razreda-devetogodisnje-osnovne-skole-za-skole-koje-realiziraju-nastavu-na-bosanskom-jeziku.pdf>

realized in both textbooks. The underrepresentation of cultural categories, including source, target, and international cultures, as well as the inconsistent inclusion of both Big 'C' (formal institutions, history, art) and small 'c' (daily life, social norms) cultural elements, reveals a misalignment between curricular expectations and textbook content. Although some cultural references are present, they are often peripheral and lack thematic or pedagogical coherence. As a result, culture remains a marginal component rather than an integrated part of the instructional framework. To address this, cultural themes should be more thoroughly embedded within the core units of instruction, in alignment with both best practices in language education and national policy guidelines. In summary, both textbooks are generally well-aligned with the official curriculum in terms of topics, vocabulary, and grammar, and are suitable for the included learner age group. The thematic content corresponds closely to the cognitive and developmental levels of the students, and the inclusion of additional grammar items offers extended learning opportunities. However, the limited and inconsistent treatment of intercultural content highlights a notable shortcoming. While age-appropriateness has been ensured through the official approval process, greater attention should be directed toward the pedagogical integration of cultural objectives outlined in the curriculum.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined two English language textbooks, *Way to go 8* and *Challenges 4*, through a detailed analysis of their structural design, pedagogical organization, learner engagement, cultural content, and alignment with the official curriculum of the Canton of Central Bosnia. Drawing on Littlejohn's (2011) evaluative framework for material evaluation and Xiao's (2010) categorization of cultural elements, the findings reveal notable differences between the two textbooks in terms of both design coherence and instructional support. *Challenges 4* presents a more systematic and visually cohesive structure, with consistent lesson organization, a balanced integration of language skills, and a broader range of supplementary resources. In contrast, *Way to go 8* displays a less consistent pedagogical sequence, limited scaffolding across lessons, and a reduced emphasis on cohesive progression in grammar and thematic content. The disparity in the quantity and variety of exercise is also significant, with *Challenges 4* offering a greater number of tasks that, while often repetitive in cognitive demand, provide more opportunities for structured practice.

Both textbooks prioritize individual written work and favor lower-order cognitive operations, such as decoding and information selection, while offering limited scope for the development of communicative, problem-solving, or critical thinking skills. Pair and group work are minimally represented, and learner-initiated responses remain infrequent, limiting the potential for meaningful interaction. Similarly, the analysis of input and output types confirms a predominant reliance on textbook-based written content, with minimal inclusion of visual, aural, or student-generated material. Cultural content, though present in both textbooks, remains marginal and insufficiently integrated

into the broader instructional framework. Lessons with cultural references are often isolated and labeled as supplementary, reducing their pedagogical value. Furthermore, the representation of target and international cultures, as stipulated in the curriculum under the domain of intercultural competence, is limited in both scope and depth. This shortcoming is especially salient given the explicit curricular mandate to foster familiarity with the customs, practices, and histories of English-speaking countries.

Despite these limitations, both textbooks generally align with the prescribed curriculum regarding thematic topics, grammar, and vocabulary, and are appropriate for the intended age group. However, the findings indicate that current textbook practices fall short in supporting the holistic development of language proficiency. Greater emphasis on the integration of cultural content within core instructional units, along with the inclusion of tasks that promote higher-order thinking and collaborative learning, is essential if textbooks are to serve not only as linguistic tools but also as instruments for intercultural understanding and learner autonomy. Future textbook development and teacher-mediated adaptation should address these gaps to ensure a more balanced and pedagogically robust learning experience.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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