

Cultural Kaleidoscope: Scrutinizing and Unveiling the Cultural Content of the Algerian EFL Baccalaureate Examinations

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ABSTRACT: *The intersection of language and culture in educational practices, mainly testing, is a critical area of exploration. This study delves into the cultural manifestations within the English as Foreign Language (EFL) Baccalaureate (BAC) exam reading materials spanning from 2008 to 2023, focusing on literary and philosophy, as well as literary and foreign languages streams. The research aims to determine the extent of cultural representation and identify dominant cultural categories, as well as to analyze the prevailing themes in Big “C” and Small “c” culture across source, international, target, and culture-free contexts. To attain the set aims, a qualitative content analysis is employed. Particularly, the study involves analyzing 64 BAC exams from specified streams to discern patterns of cultural representation. Cortazzi and Jin’s (1999) cultural categories, Aliakbari’s (2004) concept of neutral culture, Xiao’s (2010) analysis criteria for cultural content form the analytical framework and guide the systematic examination of cultural references within the exam materials. For the process of organizing, coding, quantifying, and analyzing data to identify dominant cultural categories and prevalent cultural themes, NVivo software is used. The results reveal that international culture predominantly influences the content, followed respectively by target culture, source culture, and culture-free elements. Additionally, Big “C” culture themes are prevalent across the materials. These findings urge the need for a balanced representation of cultural content to foster a global perspective, contextualize language nuances, recognize cultural identity, and mitigate potential biases. Ultimately, this research contributes to curriculum development and teaching practices in EFL contexts, emphasizing the significance of cultural inclusivity and awareness in language education and testing.*

KEYWORDS: Cultural Content, Target Culture, Source Culture, International Culture, Culture-Free Content, English As A Foreign Language, EFL Reading Passages, Language Testing, High-Stakes Examination, BAC Exams, Content Analysis

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Introduction

In today's globalized world, the intersection of interculturality and language education has garnered significant attention among educators, researchers, and policymakers. According to Dema and Moeller (2012), in the field of language education, the importance of culture is reflected in the development of learners' both communicative and cultural competences. This convergence between language and culture underscores the key role of language education in fostering identity recognition, cultivating cultural literacy and knowledge, and promoting cross-cultural awareness. Particularly, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which has emerged as an optimal vehicle through which various categories and facets of culture, such as source culture, target culture, international culture, can be mirrored, unveiled, and comprehended, the nexus between language learning and cultural understanding has become paramount. In this token, the recognition of the status of English as an international language hinges upon its capacity to accommodate the representation of diverse cultures, a criterion that underlines its global functionality. Thus, contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT) practices are entrusted with the responsibility of molding learners' perceptions, beliefs, and interactions as well as equipping them with the ability to employ the language as a bridge for communication and engagement across an array of differing cultural contexts. Practically, the transition away from the native speaker norm is emblematic of a broader shift towards recognizing English as a dynamic tool that transcends linguistic boundaries and fosters cross-cultural connections. This acknowledgment stresses the need for English instructional and testing practices to not only impart linguistic competence but also to cultivate the cultural awareness and adaptability necessary for effective global communication. As such, the role of culture in language education becomes increasingly pronounced, calling for a reimagining of instructional methodologies and assessment frameworks. However, while a plethora of studies have delved into examining cultural content in teaching materials, especially EFL textbooks, there remains a notable gap concerning the role of testing materials in mirroring and accessing the cultural nuances embedded in the EFL curriculum. Precisely, within the arena of assessment and testing, the specific focus of this present study, relatively few inquiries have been undertaken despite the critical weight of language tests and assessments.

This oversight is particularly pronounced in regions like Algeria, where the emphasis has predominantly been on scrutinizing cultural content in teaching materials, thereby disregarding the equally crucial role of testing materials. This is especially true for high-stakes, standardized national examinations' materials, in reflecting the intricacies of the EFL curriculum. To elucidate, investigating the cultural content of tests is vital for a myriad of reasons. Primarily, it provides insights into the cultural dimensions that are deemed essential in the language learning process. Besides, it helps to ensure that the tests are culturally fair and do not disadvantage or privilege any group of test-takers. Additionally, it contributes to a more holistic understanding of the interplay between language learning and cultural understanding. Given the significance of this aspect, this study is undertaken to fill the existing research void. It aims to explore the cultural content of high-stakes standardized national examinations' materials, particularly the EFL BAC examination reading materials from 2008 to 2023, covering the literary and philosophy, and literary and foreign languages streams. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do cultures manifest themselves in the reading materials of the EFL BAC exam for the literary and philosophy, as well as the literary and foreign languages streams, specifically in the exams conducted from 2008 through 2023?
2. Which category of culture exerts the most influence on the content of these exams: source, international, target, or culture-free?
3. What predominant themes emerge in Big "C" culture and Small "c" culture within each of the specified categories in these testing materials?

By undertaking a systematic evaluation of the representation of various cultures in the Algerian EFL BAC examinations, potential disparities and biases might be unearthed. Thus, this scientific endeavor aspires to provide valuable insights that could inform future educational policies and practices in Algeria and potentially in

other similar contexts to ascertain a well-balanced inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives not only to ensure a fair and equitable evaluation process but also to align with the principles of global communication and intercultural competence that are integral in today's interconnected world (Byram, 1997). In a nutshell, this critical analysis is central to refining assessment practices and advancing a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to language education and evaluation.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Culture: A Multifaceted Concept

Culture is an ever-evolving notion that has been viewed through countless lenses and interpreted and delineated in numerous manners across various academic fields such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and linguistics (House, 2008; Yesil&Demiroz, 2017). In this regard, Geertz, a distinguished American anthropologist and cultural theorist, (1973) posits that a definitive explanation for culture, being an ambiguous concept, remains elusive to scholars due to the fact that it encompasses a wide array of human activities, from language and theology to philosophy and art. Consequently, any attempt to confine the quintessence of culture within a uniform, all-encompassing definition is prone to inadequacy and subject to scrutiny. However, throughout history, scholars have extensively endeavored to define the concept of culture. Tylor, a pioneer in anthropology, described culture as a complex entity that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, ethics, laws, customs, and other skills and habits developed by humans as societal members (Tylor, 1871). In consonance with this, Kramsch (1998) defined culture as being part of a community that communicates in a certain way, shares a common social environment and history, and has a unified system for understanding, believing and behaving.

From a different perspective, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) proposed another viewpoint, arguing that culture entails both overt and covert behavioral patterns that are learned and transmitted through symbols. They contended that these patterns represent the significant achievements of human groups, including their tangible expressions. In a parallel fashion, Geertz (1973) regarded culture as a complex web of shared meanings and practices that guide individuals within a society. He highlighted that culture comprises both tangible and intangible elements that contribute to a group's identity. Further, Hofstede (1984) perceived culture as the collective mental programming that gives each group its unique characteristics, which distinguish them from others. He further clarified that culture is distinct from both human nature and individual personality traits. The meaning is similar to Larson and Smalley's (1972) description of culture as a "blueprint," that

guides the behavior of people in a community and is incubated in family life. It governs our behaviors in groups, makes us sensitive to matters of status, and helps us know what others expect of us and what will happen if we do not live up to their expectations. (p.39)

Ultimately, synthesizing these definitions, culture can be understood as a multifaceted entity that includes shared knowledge, habits, beliefs, behaviors, and practices acquired and learned by members of the same community. It is characterized by the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that define a group of people in a specific time period. This system, which is historically transmitted and constructed by humans, allows them to communicate, develop, and perpetuate their understanding of the world.

1.1.1 Themes of Culture

Culture is a complex concept that has been subject to various interpretations, as accentuated by Eagleton (2016). It can be divided into two primary types: *Big "C"* culture, which is often, termed "Achievement Culture", and *Small "c"* culture, referred to as "Behavior Culture" (Tomalin&Stempleski, 1993). Similarly, Saville-Troike (1975) proposed that culture manifests in two forms: material (observable) and non-material (hard to perceive). Echoing the essence of this dichotomy, Peterson (2004) distinguishes between visible and invisible cultural elements.

Big “C” culture, also known as “Culture,” denotes the high culture of a society. Chen (2004) explained that *Big “C”* culture encapsulates broad themes like history, politics, music, economy, education, geography, social systems, literature, art, and architecture. Shakespeare’s works, Algeria’s Rai music, Egypt’s pyramids, or China’s Great Wall are all examples of *Big “C”* culture. These elements are often formally taught and are widely recognized both domestically and internationally. In contrast, *Small “c”* culture refers to the daily practices, customs, and lifestyles of specific groups. This encompasses traditions, rituals, holidays, social norms, beliefs, values, and behavioral patterns. While less conspicuous than *Big “C”* culture, *Small “c”* culture significantly influences people’s routines and interactions (Atkinson, 1999; Alptekin, 2002; Chen, 2004; Xiao, 2010; Krulatz & Christison, 2023). For instance, England’s afternoon tea tradition or Spain’s siesta practice are part of *Small “c”* culture.

Although *Big “C”* and *Small “c”* culture may appear distinct, they are closely interconnected. *Big “C”* culture often evolves from the aggregation and institutionalization of *Small “c”* culture elements over time. Conversely, *Big “C”* culture can shape *Small “c”* culture by influencing societal norms and values. For example, the works of a renowned author (*Big “C”* culture) can impact societal attitudes on various issues (*Small “c”* culture). Succinctly, comprehending both *Big “C”* and *Small “c”* culture offers a holistic view of a society’s cultural landscape.

1.1.2 Categories of Cultural Content

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) outlined three categories of cultural materials used in English teaching: source culture, target culture, and international culture:

- **Source Culture Content:** it pertains to the culture of teachers and learners, specifically focusing on Algerian culture in this context. Wijaya-Mahardika’s (2018) research underscored the significance of incorporating local cultural elements into teaching materials to improve English language learning. Prioritizing a student-centered methodology and taking into account students’ cultural backgrounds, the study revealed that materials featuring culturally familiar content can enhance students’ involvement and academic performance. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of developing inclusive and culturally sensitive language educational materials. It advocated also for more investigation into their efficacy across various educational settings and levels for the sake of enhancing language instruction practices.

- **Target Culture Content:** it encompasses the cultures of English-speaking countries. Khuwaileh (2000) argued that introducing students to the culture associated with the language they are learning improves their language skills and promotes a favorable view of the language and its speakers. This cultural immersion helps the students understand the social and cultural context in which the language is used and develops their ability to empathize and engage with different cultures.

- **International Culture Content:** it includes cultures outside of the source and target cultures. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, it is believed that educators, curriculum developers, textbook designers, and teachers need to acknowledge the global nature of English as a lingua franca in order to establish an inclusive and successful learning atmosphere. This perspective has been championed by Risager (2007), who argued for a transnational understanding of culture, departing from the conventional perception of culture as intertwined with language within a limited national framework. This approach emphasizes the intricate relationship between language and culture in an interconnected world characterized by transnational movements of people, commodities, and concepts.

Aliakbari (2004) introduced the concept of *neutral culture* in addition to the existing categories of culture: source, international, and target culture. The neutral culture or *cultural-free* content refers to materials that do not reference any specific culture, such as scientific explanations. In this study, the four categories of cultures serve as the framework for analyzing various cultural aspects depicted in the national Baccalaureate EFL exam materials.

1.2 The Nexus of Language, Culture, and Education in a Global Era

In the era of rapid globalization, the English language has emerged as an international lingua franca, transcending its origins as the sole domain of English-speaking communities. This shift in the role of English has spurred transformative changes in the arena of language education and intercultural learning. Today, as non-native speakers across the globe embrace English as a means of cross-cultural communication (Harumi, 2002), the field of education has witnessed a reevaluation of how the language is taught, learned, and integrated with diverse cultures. Crystal (2003), Jenkins (2009), and McKay (2003) acknowledged the international status of English, accentuating the need for a pedagogical approach that fosters intelligibility among its non-native speakers (Canagarajah, 2007). To this end, educational endeavors have increasingly focused on enhancing the teaching of English to ensure communicative effectiveness. This, hence, implies that the evolution of English as a global medium has led to a compelling call for the inclusion of non-native speaker characters and culturally significant themes in instructional materials, as argued by Matsuda (2003), Xiao (2010), and Setyono and Widodo (2019). In fact, this effort stems from the belief that by connecting language with personal cultural identities, teachers and learners can internalize the language more deeply and foster a genuine sense of ownership (Gong et al., 2021).

Further, it is worth to note that the ramifications of this linguistic transformation extend beyond mere pedagogical modifications. To illustrate, the ubiquity of English as a tool for global interaction has unraveled that its use is not confined to nor it is associated with a particular national identity, which allows it to become a shared resource accessible to individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In this vein, Nizegorodcew (2011) posited that this dissolution of traditional linguistic boundaries has prompted the integration of English with diverse cultures worldwide and compelled educators and language instructors to rethink their approaches to teaching culture within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts.

1.2.1 Language and Culture: EFL Context

The inseparable link between language and culture has been a central tenet of language education (Imai et al., 2016). In this regard, scholars such as Bennett et al. (2003), Jiang (2000), Rachmawati (2020) and Brown (2000) emphasized that language and culture are intrinsically intertwined, with the two elements mutually reinforcing each other, making a comprehensive understanding of cultural aspects integral to language mastery. In the same spirit, Kramsch (1993) expanded upon this idea, maintaining that language operates as a conduit for culture, for it influences how individuals perceive and interpret the world. This understanding, thus, necessitates an urged reevaluation of foreign language curricula, as culture emerges as a non-negotiable aspect of language instruction. Within this evolving landscape, the role of educational teaching and testing materials becomes paramount. These resources wield the power to convey cultural values, shape students' perceptions, and raise their cultural awareness (Cunningsworth, 1995; Azkiyah&Setiono, 2017). In respect with this, it is pivotal to point out that this realization has sparked an interest in scrutinizing how culture is portrayed in language textbooks (Alshenqeeti, 2019) in recognition of the potential for textbooks to either reinforce bias or encourage cultural diversity.

1.2.2 Language Testing and Culture

The inseparability of language and culture has noteworthy implications for the field of language testing and evaluation. As culture permeates language education curricula, it inherently influences the process of language testing. Put differently, the inclusion of cultural content in test items is crucial because language and culture are intertwined. Fundamentally, cultural factors influence how language is used, understood, and interpreted. Therefore, to accurately assess language proficiency, it is essential to understand the cultural context in which the language is used (Gass& Reed, 2011). This includes being aware of cultural norms, expectations, nuances, and conventions associated with language proficiency. Failure to address

these intercultural issues in language testing can lead to biased test results, and thus impact the validity and reliability of assessments.

Moreover, according to Gass and Reed (2011), test developers and assessors should be aware of cultural variations in language proficiency and avoid imposing a single cultural standard. To illustrate, a disproportionate distribution of cultural content in test reading passages can impede test-takers' optimal comprehension of the passages, as corroborated by Gass and Selinker (2008). When test-takers are unfamiliar with the cultural content included in the test materials, it can affect their comprehension and interpretation of the text. Additionally, the representation of cultures in tests can influence how test-takers perceive specific cultures (van de Vijver&Tanzer, 2004). This can potentially lead to cultural bias in the test, skewing the results and affecting the fairness of the assessment. Corresponding to this stance, Weir (2005) asserted that the cultural background and knowledge of test takers play a considerable role in how they approach and interact with a test.

To ensure the effectiveness of language tests, it is essential to design culturally sensitive tests that strike a balance between the representations of cultures (Gass&Reed, 2011). This includes incorporating elements of source culture to help learners recognize their identity and be familiar with the content they are exposed to. It also involves integrating aspects of target culture to enable learners to understand the context and cultural nuances associated with the foreign language they are learning. Furthermore, including elements of international culture in tests helps develop intercultural competence, high intercultural awareness, and recognition of English as an international language (EIL).

1.3 The Manifestation of Culture in Algerian EFL Textbooks: A Glimpse into Prior Research

The integration of cultural learning within EFL education has garnered recognition as an essential component of language proficiency, representing a language fifth skill, as expounded by Kramsch (1993). Acknowledging this, educators in Algeria strive to equip students with not only linguistic competence but also cultural insights. The learning of a foreign language inevitably entails an exploration of its cultural nuances so that to grant learners the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries (Yeganeh&Raeesi, 2015). The representation of culture within EFL textbooks has become a subject of intense scholarly inquiry among Algerian academics. The table below (**Table1.**) represents a comprehensive review that synthesizes the findings of several seminal research studies that have examined the cultural content and intercultural dynamics in Algerian EFL textbooks in both middle and high school settings.

Authors & Year of Publication	Title	Key Findings	Implications
Rouaghe and Bouguebs (2023)	The Cultural Content Represented in the Middle School EFL Course: Target, International, and Source?	The research reveals that there is a prevalence of source culture content, leading to minimal representation of the target culture, which results in an imbalance that directly affects intercultural competence.	The study hints at the importance of a balanced portrayal of cultures, with the underlying goal of advancing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).
Merdassi and Baghzou (2021)	Cultural Representation in EFL Textbooks: An Analysis of “My Book of English Year Four” for Middle Schools in Algeria	The study unveils a clear inclination toward the source culture, raising the possibility of skewed cultural perceptions. This underscores the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that encompasses a wide range of cultural aspects and involves the incorporation of tasks that facilitate comparisons between cultures.	The study stresses the need to enhance critical thinking and foster cross-cultural competence.
Dehda and Hocine (2020)	Evaluating The Cultural Content of Algerian EFL Textbooks: The Case of EFL Textbooks For Middle School Pupils	The paper highlights a disproportionate emphasis on the target culture, resulting in the neglect of learners’ own culture, leading to an imbalance that detrimentally affects Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and instructional objectives.	This study indicates a necessity for a broader spectrum of cultural representation, along with the integration of contemporary contexts, in order to enhance intercultural education effectively.
Selogui (2019)	The Cultural Content of Algerian EFL Textbooks: Stakeholders’ Perspectives	Diverse cultural emphasis is evident across different textbooks, with globalization exerting a notable influence on how culture is represented.	The findings of this research endeavor imply the significance of adopting a culturally inclusive approach and recognizing the role of globalization.
Messerehi (2014)	The Teaching of English Culture in Algerian Secondary Schools: The Case of Second Year Classes	The “Getting Through” textbook demonstrates restricted integration of cultural content, underscoring the significance of communicative competence and the pivotal role of educators.	The study suggests a pivot towards communicative competence and underscores the pivotal role of educators in promoting cultural integration and enriching language education.

Table 1. A Review of Algerian Research Studies Examining the Cultural Content and Intercultural Dynamics in EFL Textbooks of Middle and High Schools

The review critically assesses various studies to illuminate the nuances of cultural representation in Algerian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education, while also highlighting the dearth of research that addresses the relationship between language testing and cultural representation within this context.

1.4 High-Stakes Examinations: The Case of the Algerian Baccalaureate EFL Exam

In harmony with the principles of standards-based education, which strongly emphasizes the need of measuring the learners' academic performance as well as the importance of holding educational systems accountable, national-level examinations have gained widespread usage as a means of gauging the student achievement in many nations around the world, as contended by the American Psychological Association (2000) and further underscored by Azkiyah and Setiono (2017).

High-stakes testing or assessment can be defined as “national or state-wide standardized achievement” (Marchant, 2004, p.2). The examinations, for example, necessitate the students' successful completion to culminate their schooling, gain access to educational programs, enroll in universities, secure scholarships, or attain requisite proficiency for specific applications (Cizek, 2001). This kind of testing has got popularity owing to the spectrum range of valuable merits it comes with. One such advantage is its role in defining explicit and measurable educational standards, proving to be a valid source of support for students who may be grappling with academic challenges. Additionally, the data emanating from these examinations play a crucial role in not only identifying areas that require improvement but also in steering the complex process of making decisions about teaching methods, hence enhancing the overall teaching and learning practices (Muskin, 2015; Adow et al., 2015). In other words, the perceived benefits ascribed to these examinations primarily reside in their impartiality and objectivity, which serve as essential attributes in fulfilling the crucial societal function of evaluating students' knowledge and proficiencies, subsequently leading to consequential decisions. Corresponding to this, the significance of high-stakes public examinations mainly stems from their role as the basis for critical determinations concerning students' educational and professional trajectories along with their contribution to the cultivation of individual student learning and the enhancement of educational excellence.

In Algeria, the culmination of a high school student's educational journey is marked by a significant event known as the Algerian National High School Final Exam, commonly referred to as the Baccalaureate (BAC) exams. These high-stakes national exams, meticulously designed by the National Ministry of Education, determine whether learners are eligible to pursue university studies. This assessment is administered at the end of the students' third year in high school and holds immense importance in shaping their educational pathways. The Baccalaureate examinations conducted in Algeria primarily serve the purpose of evaluating the adeptness of students in fundamental academic disciplines. They adopt a predominantly textual format, bringing to the front the significance of adeptness in written articulation and cognitive analysis as opposed to an evaluation of spoken proficiencies. Notably, within the domain of English language appraisal, candidates are enabled to opt between two distinct thematic alternatives, i.e., two exam papers with dissimilar topics. Manifestly, the English language examination assumes a particularly pivotal role, discerningly evaluating the competencies of examinees across a spectrum of language dimensions and aspects, encompassing, but not confined to, discernment in textual interpretation, lexical utilization, syntactic exactitude, pragmatic comprehension, and composition proficiencies.

In the delineation of the English examination's structure, it comprises a dyadic framework. The inaugural part, captioned as “Reading,” manifests as a composite of two sections, namely “Reading Comprehension” and “Text Exploration.” Within the former subdivision, the “Reading Comprehension” section orchestrates challenges tailored to scrutinize the cognitive acumen of students through an array of tasks that find pertinence vis-à-vis the provided textual excerpt. Simultaneously, the ensuing segment, designated as “Text Exploration,” functions as an assessment instrument to gauge linguistic cognizance and its practical application, engendering exercises interwoven with the textual material. These exercises act as a conduit to the compositional task embedded within the subsequent portion of the examination. Evidently,

this facet of the examination plumbs a myriad of linguistic constituents, involving grammatical constructs, phonetic intricacies, morphological configurations, discursive dissections, and lexical deployment. The latter portion of the assessment, “Written Expression,” constitutes an axial component within the exam. This phase encapsulates a scenario, a situation of integration, strategically architected to be concurrently meaningful, communicative, and immersive. It is, indeed, intimately attuned to the linguistic capacities of learners, and contextualized within a communicative milieu. In this final part, candidates are proffered a choice to select from a pair of topics. The first topic is presented in a form of a guided writing task, harmonizing with the antecedent reading passage, while the alternative entails a free writing task that coalesce with one of the themes tackled previously in the classroom over the school year.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

According to Moretti et al. (2011), qualitative research offers the benefit of obtaining comprehensive and detailed data. However, this data must be interpreted and coded in a manner that ensures validity and reliability. Therefore, in this methodological framework, a descriptive qualitative study employing content analysis is proposed to examine the cultural content within BAC exams from 2008 to 2023. The study aims to determine the dominant type of culture (source culture, target culture, international culture, or culture-free) and ascertain the prevalence of either *Small “c”* culture or *Big “C”* culture aspects within the exam materials.

2.2 Data Collection Instrument

Content analysis is a systematic method for categorizing and interpreting content across various communication mediums, such as texts, images, or audios, to identify patterns, themes, and relationships (Kyngäs et al., 2020). The merits and utility of content analysis are manifold. Firstly, it offers an objective approach to data analysis, as posited by Schreier (2012). In other words, it ensures reliability and allows researchers to draw well-founded conclusions supported by evidence. Moreover, content analysis enables the identification of subtle patterns and trends that may not be evident through other research methods, for it provides insights into societal, cultural, or individual behaviors and attitudes. Additionally, this method facilitates the transformation of qualitative data into quantifiable entities; hence, it enables statistical analysis and data-driven decision-making (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Content analysis also contributes to theory development by offering empirical evidence that either supports or challenges existing theories. Thus, it aids in the generation of new hypotheses and the refinement of conceptual frameworks. Finally, by adhering to a systematic and rigorous process, content analysis enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings, guarantees transparency, and facilitates replicability in data analysis and interpretation.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

A selection of 64 EFL BAC exams from the Literary and Philosophy, and Literary and Foreign Languages streams has been made for analysis. These streams were specifically chosen due to their substantial and varied cultural content, which contrasts with the comparatively limited cultural content found in scientific streams. This deliberate selection ensures a robust foundation for conducting cultural analysis. It is crucial to note that the analysis exclusively focuses on the texts and reading passages contained within the English exams. This delineation implies that the examination do not encompass the reading comprehension questions, text exploration tasks, or the written expression prompts present in the exams.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analytical framework for this study is constructed based on well-established cultural categories and concepts from scholarly works. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) delineated cultural categories that form the foundation of our analysis and provide a structured approach to understanding cultural elements within the

examined materials; these categories include source culture, target culture, and international culture. Additionally, Aliakbari's (2004) concept of neutral culture will be added to the framework of analysis to cover the elements that do not fall within any cultural category. To further enhance the analysis, themes related to *Big "C"* and *Small "c"* cultures, as adapted from Chen (2004) and Lee (2009) respectively, are incorporated. This inclusion allows for a meticulous examination of both major cultural elements and subtle cultural nuances. Furthermore, it is worth to mention that as an attempt to comprehensively incorporate and integrate these varied yet complementary perspectives, and to establish a strong foundation for thoroughly exploring the cultural content in an insightful manner, this study will be guided by Xiao's (2010) analysis criteria for cultural content. This approach ensures a methodical and rigorous method for identifying and interpreting cultural references within the EFL BAC exams reading materials.

A checklist categorizes cultural references into four major types: international culture, source culture, target culture, and culture-free. Each type, except for culture-free, has subcategories based on:

- **Big "C" Culture Themes:** history, politics, geography, economy, literature/art, social norms, education, architectures, and music.
- **Small "c" Culture Themes:** food, lifestyle, holiday, customs, values, hobbies and gestures/ body languages.

Since the method employed is content analysis, this study involves selecting texts, determining the unit to be coded, developing content categories, and analyzing data. To fulfill these tasks, NVivo software is used. NVivo is a software tool designed for digitally coding texts or images, enabling users to synchronize evidence and create more analytically comprehensive intersections, as noted by Teixeira (2009). It is the most widely cited qualitative data analysis solutions in research publications (Lumivero, 2024). It is renowned for its comprehensive features that facilitate qualitative data management, analysis, and interpretation across various disciplines and research contexts. The selection of this software in specific is attributed to the fact that its resources align with the methodological principles of the present study and contribute to all steps of the analysis process, including information organization and systematization. Succinctly, it enables the effective performance of a plethora of tasks, such as coding, creating graphs and matrices, organizing and categorizing, and even quantifying data. With respect to this, it is essential to point out that frequency and percentages of each cultural reference is calculated to depict the cultural landscape in BAC exams EFL reading materials. This quantitative analysis aims to provide insights into the dominant type of culture and prevalent cultural aspects within the exam materials.

2.5 Data Presentation and Description

2.5.1 Categories of Culture

Categories of Culture	References Count	Percentage %
Source Culture	16	10.59
Target Culture	27	17.88
International Culture	96	63.57
Culture Free	12	07.94
Total	151	100

Table 2. Distribution of Cultural Categories in BAC Exam Reading Passages

The data presented in Table 2 indicates a clear predominance of *International Culture* references, accounting for 63.57% of the total. This suggests that the BAC exams' reading passages of both literary and philosophy and literary and foreign languages streams are significantly oriented towards providing a global perspective, likely with the intention of exposing students to a wide range of cultural contexts. In contrast, *Target Culture* and *Source Culture* references are less frequent, with 17.88% and 10.59%

respectively. This could imply that while there is some focus on the culture of the language being taught (target culture) and the students' own culture (source culture), the emphasis is not as strong as on international content. *Culture-Free* references, which likely pertain to universal concepts not tied to any specific culture, make up the smallest proportion at 7.94%. This is understandable given that language education often aims to engage with cultural content to some extent.

2.5.1.1 International Culture

International Culture							
<i>Big "C" Culture</i>				<i>Small "c" Culture</i>			
Cultural Content	Reference count	% (BCC)	% (Total)	Cultural Content	Reference count	% (ScC)	% (Total)
Architecture	03	04.05	03.125	Body language and Gestures	00	00	00
Economy	12	16.21	12.5	Customs	00	00	00
Education	13	17.56	13.5417	Food	00	00	00
Geography	02	2.70	2.0833	Hobbies	02	09.10	02.0833
History	26	35.13	27.0833	Holiday	00	00	00
Literature and Art	00	00	00	Lifestyles	03	13.63	03.125
Music	00	00	00	Values	17	77.27	17.7083
Politics	10	13.51	10.4167				
Social Norms	08	10.81	08.33				
Total	74	100	77.08	Total	22	100	22.92
International Culture							
Reference count	74			22			96
% (Total)	77.08			22.92			100

Table 3. Analysis of Cultural Content in International Culture: Big "C" Culture vs. Small "c" Culture

Table 3 above meticulously categorizes the international cultural references within the BAC exams' reading passages into two distinct groups: *Big "C"* culture and *Small "c"* culture, each with a set of subcategories that encompass various aspects of culture.

In the *Big "C"* culture group, references to Architecture are noted thrice, reflecting a modest representation of this category at 4.05% of *Big "C"* culture and 3.125% of the total. Economy and Education are more prominently featured, with twelve and thirteen references respectively, indicating a stronger emphasis on these areas at 16.21% and 17.56% of *Big "C"* culture, or 12.5% and 13.5417% of the total. Geography is mentioned twice, accounting for 2.70% of *Big "C"* culture and 2.0833% of the total, while History stands out as the most referenced category with twenty-six mentions, suggesting a significant focus on historical contexts at 35.13% of *Big "C"* culture and 27.0833% of the total. Politics and Social Norms also receive attention with ten and eight references respectively, comprising 13.51% and 10.81% of *Big "C"* culture, or 10.4167% and 8.33% of the total. Notably, there are no references to Literature and Art or Music, pointing to a minimal representation of these cultural facets.

The *Small "c"* culture group, which deals with the more nuanced, everyday aspects of culture, shows no references to Body Language and Gestures, Customs, Food, or Holidays, implying that these

areas are not highlighted in the passages. However, Hobbies and Lifestyles are touched upon with two and three references respectively, constituting 9.10% and 13.63% of *Small “c”* culture, or 2.0833% and 3.125% of the total. The category of Values is significantly represented with seventeen references. This crystallizes out its importance in the cultural context of the exams at 77.27% of *Small “c”* culture and 17.7083% of the total.

Overall, the table presents a total of seventy-four references for *Big “C”* culture, which is 77.08% of the overall cultural content, and twenty-two for *Small “c”* culture, making up 22.92%. The percentages provided further quantify the extent of representation of each cultural category, both within their respective groups and in the total cultural content of the BAC exams’ reading passages.

2.5.1.2 Target Culture

Table 4. Analysis of Cultural Content in Target Culture: Big “C” Culture vs. Small “c” Culture

The table above delineates the cultural references associated with *Target Culture* in the BAC exams’ reading passages, categorized under *Big “C”* culture and *Small “c”* culture. Each category is further

Target Culture							
Big “C” Culture				Small “c” Culture			
Cultural Content	Reference count	% (BCC)	% (Total)	Cultural Content	Reference Count	% (ScC)	% (Total)
Architecture	00	00	00	Body language and Gestures	00	00	00
Economy	01	04.34	03.70	Customs	00	00	00
Education	13	56.52	48.14	Food	00	00	00
Geography	00	00	00	Hobbies	00	00	00
History	01	04.34	03.70	Holiday	00	00	00
Literature and Art	00	00	00	Lifestyles	00	00	00
Music	00	00	00	Values	04	100	14.81
Politics	05	21.73	18.50				
Social Norms	03	13.04	11.11				
Total	23	100	85.18	Total	04	100	14.81
Target Culture							
Reference count	23			04			27
% (Total)	85.18			14.81			100

divided into subcategories that capture various cultural dimensions.

Within *Big “C”* Culture, Education emerges as the most prominent subcategory, with thirteen references, constituting 56.52% of *Big “C”* culture references and 48.14% of the total *Target Culture* references. This significant representation indicates a strong focus on educational aspects within the *Target Culture*. Politics also holds substantial weight, with five references that account for 21.73% of *Big “C”* culture and 18.50% of the total. Social Norms are noted three times, making up 13.04% of *Big “C”* culture and 11.11% of the total. Economy and History are minimally represented, each with a single reference, contributing 4.34% to *Big “C”* culture and 3.70% to the total, respectively. Notably, there are no references

to Architecture, Geography, Literature and Art, or Music, which means that these areas are not emphasized in the context of *Target Culture*.

In contrast, *Small “c”* culture is solely represented by the subcategory of Values, with four references that comprise 100% of *Small “c”* culture and 14.81% of the total. The absence of references to Body Language and Gestures, Customs, Food, Hobbies, and Holiday alludes to inadequate consideration of these everyday cultural expressions within the *Target Culture*.

Ultimately, the table presents a total of twenty-three references for *Big “C”* culture, which is 85.18% of the overall cultural content, and four references for *Small “c”* culture, making up 14.81%. This distribution reveals that there is a considerable emphasis on the structural and institutional aspects of *Target Culture*, while the nuances of daily cultural practices are less represented.

2.5.1.3 Source Culture

Source Culture							
<i>Big “C”</i> Culture				<i>Small “c”</i> Culture			
Cultural Content	Reference count	% (BCC)	% (Total)	Cultural Content	Reference Count	% (ScC)	% (Total)
Architecture	01	06.66	06.25	Body language and Gestures	00	00%	00
Economy	00	00	00	Customs	00	00	00
Education	00	00	00	Food	00	00	00
Geography	00	00	00	Hobbies	00	00	00
History	12	80	75	Holiday	00	00	00
Literature and Art	01	06.66	06.25	Lifestyles	00	00	00
Music	00	00	00	Values	01	100	06.25
Politics	01	06.66	06.25				
Social Norms	00	00	00				
Total	15	100	93.75	Total	01	100	06.25
Source Culture							
Reference count	15			01			16
% (Total)	93.75			06.25			100

Table 5. Analysis of Cultural Content in Source Culture: Big “C” Culture vs. Small “c” Culture

The table outlines the cultural references pertaining to *Source Culture* in the BAC exams’ reading passages, categorized into *Big “C”* culture and *Small “c”* culture, with further subdivisions into various cultural aspects.

In the *Big “C”* culture category, History is the most prominently featured subcategory with twelve references, accounting for 80% of *Big “C”* culture and 75% of the total *Source Culture* references. This substantial emphasis on history indicates a strong focus on the chronological events and developments that have shaped the *Source Culture*. Architecture and Literature and Art each have one reference, contributing 6.66% to *Big “C”* culture and 6.25% to the total, respectively. Politics is also represented with one

reference, making up 6.66% of *Big “C”* culture and 6.25% of the total. The categories of Economy, Education, Geography, Music, and Social Norms have no references.

Small “c” culture is represented by a single reference to Values, which constitutes 100% of *Small “c”* culture and 6.25% of the total. The absence of references to Body Language and Gestures, Customs, Food, Hobbies, and Holiday within *Small “c”* culture denotes a minimal focus on these day-to-day, non-material cultural expressions.

In short, the table presents fifteen references for *Big “C”* culture, equating to 93.75% of the overall cultural content, and one reference for *Small “c”* culture, accounting for 6.25%. Particularly, the percentages provided offer a clear quantification of the representation of each cultural dimension within the *Source Culture* category.

2.5.1.4 Culture-free

Culture-Free		
Cultural Content	Reference count	Percentage % (Total)
Culturally impartial content	12	07.94%

Table 6. The Analysis of Culture-Free Content

The “*Culture-Free*” category in the table refers to content that is considered neutral and not specific to any particular culture. It shows that there are 12 instances of culturally impartial content, which make up 7.94% of the total cultural content references. This indicates that a small but significant portion of the material is designed to be universally applicable, without cultural biases or specific cultural references.

2.6 Discussion of the Results

The gathered data provides a compelling overview of the cultural references in EFL BAC exams’ reading passages. They reveal a strong inclination towards *International Culture*. This focus is indicative of an educational strategy aimed at broadening students’ horizons and equipping them with a global perspective that transcends local and national boundaries. The predominance of *International Culture* at 63.57% suggests that the exams are designed to foster intercultural competence, a skill increasingly valued in this interconnected world. In fact, there is mounting evidence in the existing literature that the educational resources that encompass a global cultural spectrum are essential for enhancing students’ understanding of different nations. Given the global use of English, the content in English materials should cover a diverse array of themes and topics so as to reflect the varied cultural nuances that make up the international community. In this regard, Tomlinson (2005) contended that traditional native English standards should not be the sole benchmark for correctness and should not be maintained as the exclusive ideal for learners to strive for. While the predominance of *International Culture* in the BAC exams aims to instill global perspectives, it risks marginalizing local (source) and target cultures, both crucial for students’ cultural identity and language proficiency. Overemphasizing international themes may lead students to view English as a detached, globalized tool rather than a medium for expressing their own heritage or engaging deeply with English-speaking cultures. This uneven representation could result in a shallow understanding of cultural contexts, where students are exposed to global themes but experience a shortfall in depth to connect them to their lived experiences or the subtleties of the target culture. As Byram (1997) notes, intercultural competence requires not only global awareness but also a profound understanding of one’s own culture and the ability to mediate between cultures.

The detailed breakdown into *Big “C”* culture and *Small “c”* culture categories allows for a nuanced understanding of the cultural dimensions emphasized in the exams. The substantial representation of History within *Big “C”* culture, at 35.13%, underscores the importance of providing historical context,

which is crucial for comprehending the complexities of different cultures. Besides, the emphasis on Education and Economy further reflects the commitment to discussing the foundational structures of societies. However, the absence of references to Literature and Art or Music within *Big “C”* culture is noteworthy. This gap exposes a potential oversight in the testing materials’ cultural scope, as engagement with the arts is a vital component of comprehensive cultural education. To elucidate, the arts offer rich insights into the values, emotions, and creative expressions of societies, and their exclusion could mean a missed opportunity for students to explore these facets. In *Small “c”* culture, the dearth of references to everyday cultural expressions such as Body Language and Gestures, Customs, Food, and Holidays is striking. These elements play a significant role in the lived experience of culture and are often the most tangible for students. Their omission may limit students’ ability to relate to and fully appreciate the features of various cultures. By extension, the sidelining of these elements points to a narrow, institutionalized view of culture. This cultural outlook prioritizes formal knowledge over the lived, emotional, and creative aspects that make cultures vibrant and meaningful. Literature and art, for instance, serve as windows into societal values and identities, while music, food, and customs create tangible connections to cultural heritage. By excluding these elements, the exams risk leading to a fragmented, incomplete grasp of culture, where students learn about societies in theory but remain disconnected from their lived realities. As Kramsch (1993) argues, culture is not merely a set of facts but a dynamic, experiential phenomenon.

Additionally, the overwhelming representation of Values within Small “c” culture, at 77.27%, signifies an educational framework that places significant emphasis on imparting universal ethical principles such as honesty, integrity, transparency, fairness, justice, and accountability. While this approach is laudable, it is crucial to counterbalance it by providing students with exposure to the multifaceted manifestations of these values in the daily cultural practices observed across various societies and cultures.

The analysis of the *Target Culture* in the EFL BAC exams’ reading passages unveils a substantial emphasis placed on the formal and institutional dimensions of culture. The prevalence of Education within the *Big “C”* culture category, comprising more than half of the references, indicates a robust educational focus on the academic and pedagogical frameworks specific to the *Target Culture*. This includes topics such as educational systems, modes, and forms in countries like the UK, USA, and Australia. Additionally, the significant presence of Politics and Social Norms conveys an intention to acquaint students with the governance structures and societal norms prevalent in the culture associated with the language being taught. Whereas these elements provide important context, they fail to capture the lived, everyday experiences that define how individuals within these cultures interact and navigate their social worlds. For instance, students may learn about the British educational system or American political history but remain unaware of the informal norms, interpersonal dynamics, or daily rituals that shape these societies. This reductionist emphasis fosters a one-dimensional perception of culture, where students grasp structural frameworks but lack the empathy and adaptability needed for authentic intercultural engagement.

Further, the minimal representation of Economy and History with only one reference each, and the complete absence of Architecture, Geography, Literature and Art, or Music, points to a curriculum that may not fully explore the richness and diversity of the *Target Culture’s* creative and spatial heritage. Such an omission could lead to a skewed understanding of the culture, where students might not be exposed to the aesthetic and geographical uniqueness that contributes to the identity of a culture. In stark contrast, *Small “c”* culture is represented solely by Values, which, while crucial, leaves out the everyday cultural expressions that are integral to a culture’s vibrancy and resonance. The limited attention given to Body Language and Gestures, Customs, Food, Hobbies, and Holiday within *Small “c”* culture suggests a curriculum that may overlook the subtleties of interpersonal interactions and the lived experiences of individuals within the *Target Culture*.

Succinctly, the distribution of references, with a heavy lean towards *Big “C”* culture at 85.18%, reflects an educational system that is potentially more concerned with formal education and less with the cultural nuances that build a deeper, empathetic connection with the *Target Culture*. To cultivate a well-

rounded cultural understanding, it would be beneficial for the curriculum developers and BAC exam designers to integrate a broader spectrum of cultural aspects, especially those from *Small “c”* culture that reflect the day-to-day life and personal experiences of individuals within the *Target Culture*. This integration would not only enrich the students’ cultural awareness but also enhance their ability to engage with the culture on a more personal and meaningful level. In this context, Rajabi and Ketabi (2012) contended:

The positive implications of including cultural associations of the target language into instructional materials are largely known and accepted. This inclusion will nurture positive attitudes towards the target language, hence facilitating its acquisition. Generally, there is a tacit agreement that the assimilation of the target culture which results in acculturation will encourage communicative competence which in turn will enhance language learning. Therefore, cultural understanding should not be disregarded but should be in the heart of second language learning. (p, 705)

Referring to *Source Culture*, the information presented in the table reveals a lack of representation of its content, with only 16 references accounting for 10.59% of the total cultural content found in the texts. Within this type of culture, the data also shows a significant focus on *Big “C”* culture, especially highlighting History as the primary area of interest. This indicates an educational approach that prioritizes a broad understanding of Algerian culture and emphasizes important historical events and civilizations that have contributed to the nation’s identity. While there is limited coverage of topics like Architecture, Literature, Art, and Politics, these areas still provide valuable insights into both the tangible and intellectual accomplishments within the culture. Nevertheless, the limited representation of *Small “c”* culture elements, with only Values being addressed, reveals a gap in addressing everyday cultural expressions and practices essential for understanding the nuances of Algerian society, including aspects of communication and interaction in Algerian daily life. The underrepresentation of *Source Culture (Algerian)* in the BAC exams, particularly in *Small “c”* culture, undermines students’ connection to their heritage. When excluding everyday Algerian practices, the exams implicitly devalue local culture, positioning it as inferior to global or target cultures. This exclusion sends a troubling message: that Algerian culture is less relevant or worthy of study. Consequently, students may perceive English as an alien language, disconnected from their lived experiences, rather than a tool for expressing their identity. Worse still, this marginalization might forfeit a critical opportunity to cultivate authenticity and belonging, both of which are essential for motivating learners and fostering a genuine sense of cultural pride.

From an educational perspective, this distribution suggests a missed opportunity to cultivate a more comprehensive cultural competence among learners. While knowledge of significant historical and political events is crucial, understanding and appreciating the subtleties of daily life and interpersonal relations are equally important for effective cultural awareness. To this end, it is worth to note that the source culture plays a pivotal role in language teaching, evaluation, and assessment as it serves the purpose of imparting knowledge on how to understand and introduce learners’ identity through the medium of English. This significance arises from the understanding that the teaching of English, including its evaluation processes, should go beyond mere language proficiency and encompass the encouragement of learners to express their own identity and cultural background (Azkyah&Setiono, 2017). To illustrate, when incorporating source culture into language teaching and testing materials, teachers can help learners develop a sense of cultural identity and authenticity in their language use. In a similar vein, Yusniawati and Lestari (2021) conducted a theoretical review study affirming the advantageous aspects of integrating local culture-based materials in foreign language education. Her research findings illustrate that students who were exposed to such materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings showed significant enhancements in multiple language skills, encompassing reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Furthermore, the inclusion of local cultural content was observed to stimulate learners’ critical thinking abilities, foster a deeper appreciation for their cultural heritage, and bolster their overall confidence in mastering the English language. Aligned

with this perspective, Khan (2016) emphasized the essentiality of integrating local culture into the educational process, asserting that such integration can significantly improve the efficacy of foreign language teaching. However, he acknowledged that this approach is still in its early stages and necessitates additional investigation and refinement. Consequently, Khan advocated for teacher training aimed at seamlessly incorporating local materials into instructional strategies so as to proffer students a more relatable and immersive learning experience.

The obtained data from the last category, *Culture-Free*, suggests that while a relatively small portion, the inclusion of culture-free material in the BAC EFL exams' reading passages is significant. Analyzing this data further reveals that the presence of culture-free content indicates an effort to incorporate materials that can be universally applicable and free from cultural biases. This approach aligns with the goal of providing a fair and equitable assessment environment for all students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the inclusion of culture-free content acknowledges the diverse student population and promotes inclusivity in language education. Furthermore, the relatively low percentage of culture-free content compared to other cultural categories like source, target, and international cultures denotes that the exams predominantly feature culturally specific materials. This underscores the importance of cultural awareness and understanding in language education and evaluation practices, as students are exposed to a wide range of cultural references through these reading passages.

Conclusion

This study has proffered valuable insights into the intersection of culture and language education, particularly focusing on the cultural content of high-stakes standardized national English as a Foreign Language (EFL) examinations within the Algerian context. Through an extensive analysis of both literary and philosophy, as well as literary and foreign languages EFL examinations' reading materials from the period spanning 2008 to 2023, an abundance of significant findings have come to light.

One of the major findings pertains to the influence of different categories of culture on the content of these examinations. The analysis revealed that international cultural content exerts the most dominant influence as it is prevalently manifested, followed by target culture, source culture, and finally, culture-free content. This hierarchy of cultural influence underscores the globalized nature of English language education and the importance of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into assessment materials. Furthermore, the study identified predominant themes in both *Big "C"* culture and *Small "c"* culture within each of the specified categories. Yet, across all categories, *Big "C"* cultural themes were pervasive and overriding. These themes, which encompass broader, visible cultural particularities that are commonly associated with each cultural category, contribute to a rich and nuanced representation of cultural content in the examination materials.

Ultimately, the implications of these findings emphasize the crucial need to create a balanced representation of cultural manifestations in high-stakes examinations like the Baccalaureate (BAC) exams so as to cultivate more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments that foster learners' cross-cultural awareness, develop their intercultural competence, enhance their cultural literacy, and, most importantly, prompt them to recognize and value their cultural identity. To this end, it is particularly vital to include a considerable amount of content that reflects the source culture, not solely for test takers to appreciate their heritage and recognize their identity but also to ensure they are familiar with the content being assessed. This approach can lead to a more relaxed and less stressed testing environment; consequently, it can result in better performance outcomes. Put differently, when students get exposed to their culture represented in exam materials, they are more likely to feel a sense of connection and confidence, which can positively impact their ability to demonstrate their knowledge and skills effectively. Thus, creating equilibrium between cultural manifestations in BAC examinations not only promotes cultural appreciation and identity recognition, yet it also enhances students' comfort and performance during assessments.

In essence, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on fostering cultural understanding through foreign language education. Indeed, through the identification of dominant cultural influences and themes in examination materials, it provides a foundation for informed decision-making in curriculum development and assessment practices. Ergo, this benefits language learners in Algeria and beyond. That said, future research could expand the scope to include a broader range of assessments and explore longitudinal trends in cultural representation to further contribute to scholarship on the synergy between interculturality and language education. To advance inquiry in this area, subsequent studies should adopt mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative tools like interviews or focus groups, to explore students' perceptions of the cultural content in the BAC exams. For instance, how does the predominance of international culture shape their sense of cultural identity? Longitudinal studies could also investigate how exposure to varied cultural content impacts language acquisition and intercultural competence over time. Do students with balanced cultural exposure develop greater cultural awareness and proficiency? Additionally, experimental studies could test the integration of diverse cultural elements (e.g., literature, art, everyday practices) into the curriculum, evaluating their effects on engagement and learning outcomes.

In the end, it is worth remembering that assessments are more than just a measure of language proficiency; they shape how students perceive culture, identity, and their place in the world. If language education is to truly bridge cultures, then its assessments must do more than test proficiency; they must challenge students to see themselves as both products of their own culture and participants in a larger, interwoven world.

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