

An investigation of the intercultural and social potentials of the 4th grade English textbook

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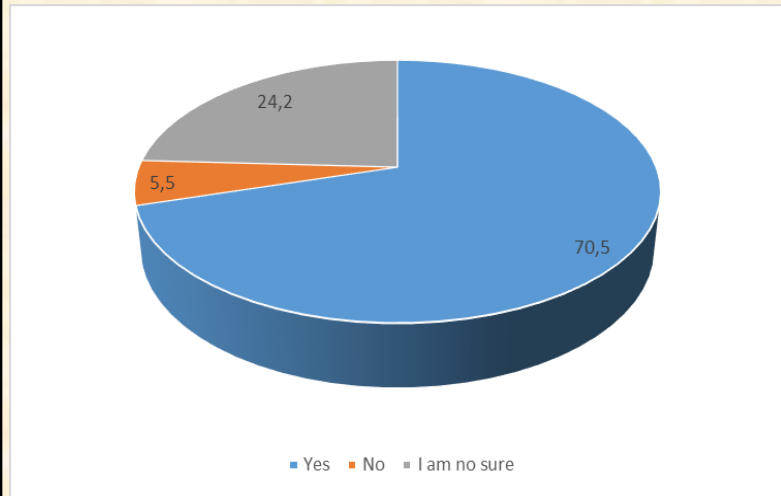


Figure 1: Greek EL teachers' familiarity with the term ICC

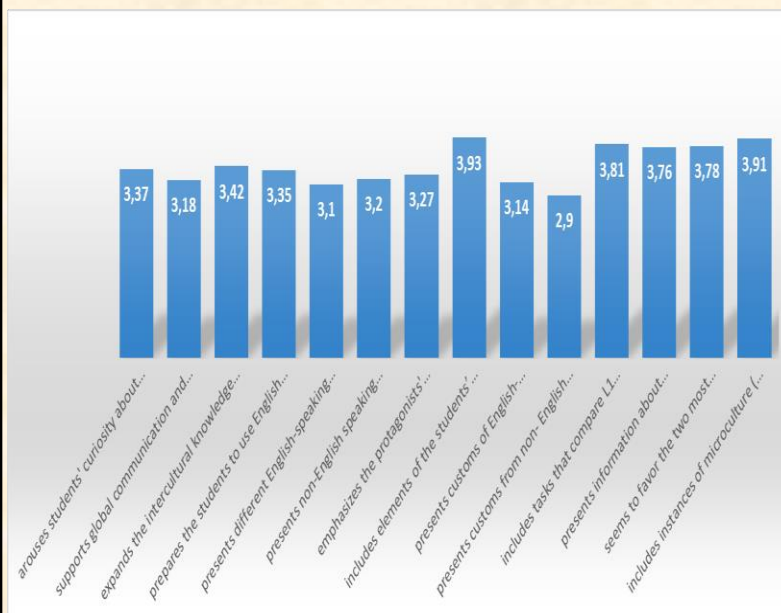


Figure 2: Teachers' beliefs about the intercultural features of the 4th grade textbook

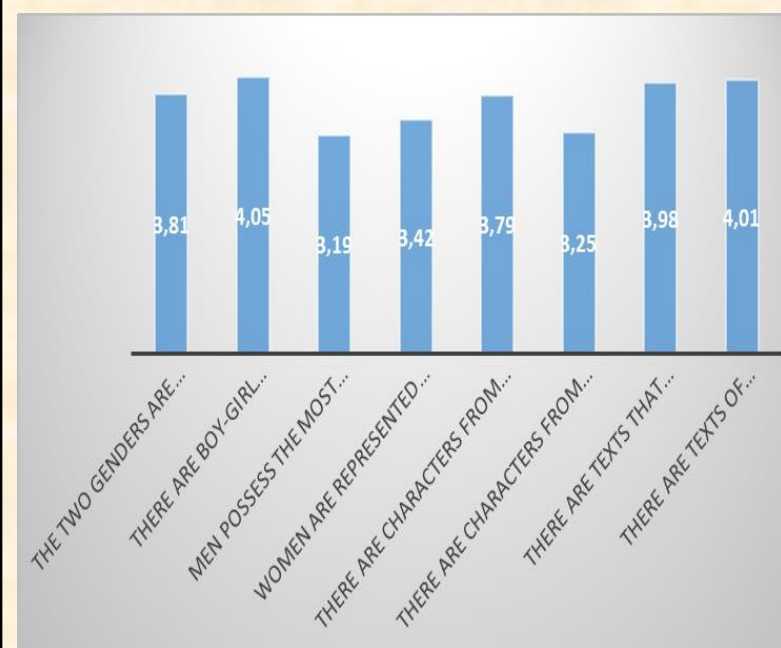


Figure 3: Teachers' beliefs concerning the sociocultural features of the 4th grade textbook

Abstract

Nowadays, the intercultural and social dimension of education is widely recognized, raising voices that claim that “if education is not intercultural, it is probably not education” (Coulby, 2006, p. 246). Greece, as part of the European Union (EU), but also as an increasingly multicultural society, has gradually shifted its attention to a type of education promoting tolerance, equal opportunities and social justice (Paleologou, 2004). Despite the fact that research data provide solid evidence for the positive effects of *Intercultural Teaching* (IT), the English language (EL) state school environment is neglected as an area of study. The researcher explored thus the social and cultural potentials of English 4th grade (Bratsoli & Diamantidou, 2009) and whether it facilitates the implementation of an *intercultural approach* to teaching, by promoting *tolerance* for difference, *gender equality* and *global cultural understanding*. An online teachers' questionnaire, a students' questionnaire and an evaluation checklist revealed that Greek EL teachers are familiar with the term *Intercultural Communicative Competence* (ICC) and recognize its humanistic and equalitarian dimensions. They also identify the fourth grade textbook as a teaching manual that can foster ICC, since it comprises adequate sociocultural elements and is gender neutral.

Research findings

The teachers' questionnaire revealed that Greek EL teachers are familiar with ICC (Figure 1) and are therefore able to recognize its intercultural, social and gender features in the 4th grade textbook. More specifically (Figures 2 and 3):

- 54.6% agrees that the textbook arouses students' curiosity about other cultures.
 - 52.3% believe that the book expands students' intercultural knowledge
 - 60.4% agree that the book includes characters from different ethnic backgrounds
 - 68.4% of the EL teachers acknowledges that the book comprises materials promoting social responsibility and environmental issues.
 - 73.6% purport that the two genders are represented as equal
- The findings were further supported by the data retrieved from an evaluation checklist. The textbook incorporates:
- mediation tasks comparing L1 and L2
 - tasks covering customs and habits of different countries
 - instances of L2 micro-culture (music, sports, habits, food)
 - children from various cultural backgrounds
 - Equal number of male/female protagonists equal amount of speech occurrences
 - Non-sexist presentation of genders (male characters doing household chores/female characters contributing financially to their families).

Conclusion/ Pedagogical implications

The research tools proved that Greek EL teachers are familiar with ICC. Nevertheless, as knowledge of a teaching orientation, does not ensure its application (Karavas-Doukas, 1996), school advisors should organize workshops, linking IT to the state school books. Furthermore, observation sessions of colleagues promoting ICC could prove useful. Furthermore, EL teachers can engage in action research in their teaching contexts, to investigate IT. Lastly, as a book first published in 2009, it needs to be revised to include contemporary issues such as immigration, the status of women in non-Western societies and children in war zones.

References

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