

Hidden Geographical Curriculum in Taiwan English Language Teaching Materials: Implications for Learners

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This study investigated geographical portrayals as a hidden curriculum within English language teaching (ELT) materials. In addition to examining the influence of American and British cultural hegemony, this study explored how learners own places of origin were represented. Although international inclusivity fosters interculturalism, representing learners local contexts is essential because doing so sustains learning motivation. In total, 33 vocational high school English learning texts and magazines published in Taiwan were subjected to critical content analysis grounded in hidden curriculum theory. Results confirmed a persistent bias toward American and British contexts alongside a preference for the Global North, Europe, and stereotypical tourist destinations. Furthermore, the materials exhibited urbanormativity, consistently favoring urban centers while rendering rural Taiwanese people and places invisible. This research advances the field by documenting a hidden geographical curriculum that presents a skewed worldview at odds with the goals of interculturalism. The findings provide a framework for teachers to identify and address hidden biases. Further research on this topic should prioritize investigating how this specific hidden curriculum affects student identity and learning outcomes.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, inclusiveness, interculturalism, Taiwan, urbanormativity

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臺灣英語教學教材之地理潛在課程及其對學生學習之啟示

白任遠

本研究探討臺灣英語教材中隱含的地理學潛在課程。除關注英美文化霸權的影響，本研究進一步分析教材如何呈現學習者所處的地理環境與生活空間。研究以潛在課程理論為基礎，採批判內容分析法，分析臺灣出版之33本技術型高中英語教科書與英語學習雜誌。本研究認為，雖然教材的國際化有助跨文化理解，但適度呈現學習者的地方情境，亦是維持學習動機的重要因素。結果顯示，教材內容明顯偏重美國與英國的文化與地理，並高度偏向歐洲及全球北方地區，且多以熱門觀光景點為地理表徵。此外，臺灣的內容明顯呈現出城市中心主義，而鄉村及其居民則甚少提及。此現象顯示教材的地理潛在課程建構出偏斜的世界圖像，與跨文化教育追求的多元理解相衝突。研究提供辨識與處理教材中隱藏偏見的分析架構。未來應進一步探討地理潛在課程如何影響學生的身分認同及學習成效。

關鍵詞：潛在課程、包容性、跨文化主義、臺灣、城市中心主義

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1. The Geographical Imagination and Social Power

Geography is intimately connected to the human imagination. The centrality of socially-constructed, place-based belonging to personal identity speaks to its position as an ideological mainstay of modern life, one in which the media plays a prominent role (Mondon, 2022). Geography is both powerful and responsive to power. It is powerful as a mental map whereby we make sense of the world with an important role in solidifying identities (Cloke & Johnston, 2005). It responds to power especially by reflecting the relationships between places and beliefs about the social groups associated with them. For example, the mass media has often constructed rural spaces and those inhabiting them in negative ways (Bassett, 2003; DeKeseredy et al., 2014). Yet, beyond considerations of the lingering effects of American and British colonial and neo-colonial power, there is little sense of how English language teaching (ELT) may reflect and promote imagined geographies. In response, the study described here investigated how representations of place within ELT materials may form a hidden curriculum. Focusing on ELT materials from Taiwan, the study considered two types of places, those within Taiwan and those outside.

1.1 Representations of the World in English Language Teaching

Despite the recognition among linguists that no language variety possesses inherent superiority over any other, the position of England - and subsequently of the United States - as world powers has bolstered the perceived value of their respective English varieties. Ownership of English has historically been unequivocally vested in the native speaker from these traditional English-speaking countries, those countries referred to as the English “Inner Circle” by linguist Kachru (1988). In recent decades, though, those embracing the English as an International Language (EIL), World Englishes (WE), and English as Lingua Franca (ELF) movements (Nguyen, 2013; Saraceni, 2015; Wang, 2015) have sought to challenge the colonial heritage of English, recognizing it as a pluricentric world language. These stances foreground the preference for Inner Circle native

speakers as language and cultural models as vestiges of this colonial power, and recognize that most English speakers now hail from outside of the traditional English-speaking countries making this a “post-native” era (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2018; McKay, 2010).

Furthermore, the increased focus upon interculturalism and intercultural communicative competence as a mainstay of ELT further implies the need to acquaint English language learners with language varieties and cultures beyond the Inner Circle (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). English language educators have responded by working to diversify the language norms and cultures represented in ELT materials. For example, in Thailand some ELT classes have moved beyond their traditional focus upon Inner Circle language and cultural models to include learning materials based upon the English of other Asians since these are more likely interlocutors (Suebsook, 2017). In Indonesia, teachers have used TED Talks to expose learners to a variety of accents with positive results (Kusumaningputr, 2020). One teacher in Taiwan reported using English-subtitled movies from locales outside of the Inner Circle such as those from Iran and Poland in a university class to promote heightened intercultural awareness (Chao, 2013).

1.2 Geography of Learner Locale in English Language Teaching

Concerns with equity and fairness surrounding contemporary ELT extend not only to sources of English, but to the origins of English students. English is increasingly becoming a language exclusive to and means of privilege reproduction among world elites (e.g., Hasan, 2022). There are many examples of English learning success biased toward urban elites including in Latin America (Solano-Campos, 2022), Nepal (Baldauf et al., 2011), India (Chaudhuri et al., 2011), Pakistan (Haider, 2019), Japan (Kennedy, 2019), and South Korea (Jeon, 2012). Mechanisms for this phenomenon include cram schools and private tutoring to which individuals with lower socioeconomic status (SES) have less access (Bray et al., 2018). So prevalent are additional for-pay learning opportunities that the term “shadow education” has been coined to characterize them (Tam & Jiang, 2015). Much evidence indicates that rural English learners are especially disadvantaged in settings as varied as India (Bhattacharya, 2019), Malaysia, and the Philippines

(Kosonen, 2017).

Despite this situation, research in ELT materials from East Asia has failed to invoke the theoretical lens of urbanormativity. This stance recognizes that the urban is consistently granted prestige in modern society while the rural is marginalized (Fulkerson & Thomas, 2019). Mass media materials especially normalize urban life while, at best, excluding the rural (Crain & Newlin, 2021; Jansson, 2013) or, at worst, as stigmatizing rural life and rural people (Bassett, 2003). Educational scholars have responded to possible manifestations of urbanormativity by adopting a sensitivity to “spacial biases” in educational practices (Greenwood, 2009). As Prest (2016, p. 3) notes, “place-conscious education theorists have pushed back against established educational practices and policies that consistently favour and embed middle-class urban values into school curriculum and pedagogy rather than valuing local, rural understandings.”

Such biases can negatively impact rural youth through a variety of mechanisms, all related to the importance for learners to encounter people like themselves in educational materials. For one thing, these rural students may fail to see their own cultural capital reified as part of the content taught in school and as that forming a basis for school success (Bates, 2016). Also, research into the role of imagined communities in language learning consistently demonstrates the motivational value of materials in which people like learners themselves are depicted as successful target language users (McKay, 2010; Nomura, 2025). Finally, research invoking social comparison theory demonstrates that consistent exposure to portrayals of those having a higher SES lifestyle can lead to a lower sense of well being, especially among young people (Verduyn et al., 2020). This is important in Taiwan since rural SES tends to be much lower (e.g., Lin et al., 2024). If ELT teaching materials are imbued with such biases there are troubling implications for the motivation of rural students, especially when coupled with the advantages that many urban elites already enjoy in English learning. Locally-authored ELT materials would seem to offer hope for this and other forms of local place and lifestyle representation, though. Unlike common internationally-marketed ELT materials from major publishers, local materials can build upon an awareness of local diversity to optimally match materials to students’ needs (Vahdat et al., 2023).

1.3 The Case of ELT in Taiwan

Both issues, adequate intercultural representation - especially beyond the Inner Circle - and equitable representation of rural students, are important to examine in ELT materials used in Taiwan. Taiwan's new competency-based curriculum specifically includes an increased focus upon intercultural communication (Liao et al., 2023). Also, English in Taiwan tends to favor more affluent urban populations. Although the official language in Taiwan is Mandarin, gaining English competency represents a key avenue for individual social mobility in Taiwanese society, especially since it serves as a gate-keeper via university entrance exams (Cheng & Chang, 2022) and exams to enter the most prestigious high schools (Chou, 2021). As of 2011, around half of job listings in Taiwan had come to stipulate English proficiency as a requirement (Chen & Hsieh, 2011). Also, the Taiwanese government has enacted policy aimed at achieving a bilingual (Mandarin/English) society by the year 2030 (Huang, 2023). Yet, rural Taiwanese children are at a decided disadvantage in access to English learning compared with their urban counterparts (Chang, 2021). Students from schools in rural Taiwan tend to perform much lower than urban students in tests of English with many such schools not even having a full-time English teacher, but sharing a part-timer with other rural schools (Lee, 2020). The issue of shadow education only exacerbates this inequity. For-pay, shadow education in the form of cram schools (Lo & Lin, 2020), private tutoring (Chang, 2019), and short-term study abroad such as English summer camp participation (e.g., Hsu & Van Dyke, 2021) is prevalent among English students from Taiwan. Lower income and rural students tend to be systemically excluded from participation, though (Chang, 2021; Lee, 2020).

Research also indicates that students in rural Taiwan often have lower motivation for English study than their urban counterparts. For example, Tseng (2021, p. 98) notes that "students in rural districts of Eastern Taiwan, a region considered less economically developed than Western and Northern Taiwan (including Taipei, the capital), often show low motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning along with lower average scores." Another study conducted in the rural mountains of central Taiwan found low student motivation to be a problem in English learning with teachers attributing it to students' perceptions that the language was not related to

their own lives as rural agriculturalists (Huang, 2016). Recognizing the challenges facing rural learners of English in Taiwan, the government has enacted policy specifically aimed at placing these students on a more equal footing (Chang et al., 2023). Since locally-produced ELT materials have the potential to better represent local populations, this suggests a possible avenue for equitable representation of places where students live. English learning materials published within Taiwan such as the English learning magazine *Ivy League English* have enjoyed broad use for decades (Cheng & Lin, 2010). Required course texts used in elementary, middle school, and high school are also produced within Taiwan (Ho & Hsu, 2011). Research is silent, though, on the question of how well such domestic materials represent geographical diversity within Taiwan.

1.4 The Importance of the Hidden Curriculum in ELT Materials

In response, the research discussed here considered the question of inclusiveness from a geographical perspective by interrogating the contents of Taiwanese ELT materials as a hidden curriculum. While English language courses are not geography classes, *per se*, there is the potential for much geographical information, both overt and implicit, in the typical English language class. This includes information about the contexts where the language is used (e.g., Lee, 2020) as well as cultural information intended to acquaint students with the target culture and to make materials more interesting (Lee & Li, 2020). Social group information in language teaching materials also often involves depictions of people and social contexts to set the stage for learners to practice sociolinguistic dimensions of language, matching language to social situations (Hyland, 2007). Materials creators may also include implicit social information such as images of people, places, and cultural objects with a more decorative purpose in mind (Günay, 2015). All of these types of materials can have a potent educational effect given the power of unintended and unconscious learning (e.g., Fryling et al., 2011).

Hidden curriculum theory recognizes that such social group material can not only represent an actual, albeit implicit, curriculum but that this curriculum can reflect broader relations of social power (Apple, 2004). Within educational materials, the hidden curriculum can especially promote

status quo relations of social power via two mechanisms often working in tandem; these are sheer amount of representation of various groups as well as manner of group portrayals (Warren et al., 2019). Examples include attenuated representation and stereotyping of women in language learning materials (Brugelilles et al., 2002), ageism in ELT texts in which older people are both underrepresented and stereotyped when present (Brown, 2022), and othering of non-Westerners in EFL coursebooks (Thomas, 2017). This is especially a problem because accompanying the power of the text in ELT is the perception that language education simply represents an apolitical conduit for the inculcation of linguistic skills rather than representing a politically-situated practice (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). While there has been considerable research into the hidden curriculum in ELT materials, there is less sense of geographical information as a hidden curriculum. In response, this project empirically investigated ELT materials authored and used in Taiwan with the following research questions being considered.

1.5 Research Questions

Overall: How does geographical information in ELT materials from Taiwan form a hidden curriculum with implications for learner empowerment?

1. How do ELT materials from Taiwan portray places within Taiwan in terms of amount and manner of representation?
2. How do Taiwanese ELT materials portray places outside Taiwan in terms of amount and manner of representation?

2. Methodology

Data was collected from English textbooks and from English learning magazines, all published and used in Taiwan (see Appendix). Including both promoted a fuller picture of the sorts of English learning materials to which students in Taiwan are exposed. The texts used were selected because they are widely taught in high schools across Taiwan (Lyu & Zhou, 2023; Pan & Yang, 2021). Focusing on high school rather than primary or middle school materials set the stage for the optimal collection of embedded geographical information since EFL materials at that level often include a

variety of stories about world issues and locales outside Taiwan to prepare students for advanced reading (Sidek, 2012). Furthermore, publishers of high school textbooks in Taiwan claim that content is specifically included to promote “intercultural understanding” among students in alignment with government education ministry guidelines (Su, 2016, p. 395). The above factors suggested the inclusion of much material about various world and local places as well as setting the stage for the research to assess these intercultural claims. The importance of examining high school texts is bolstered because high school students often encounter the same materials again in cram schools whose job is often to reinforce day school content in preparation for the looming university entrance exams (Tsai, 2017).

In addition to traditional textbooks, this study also included English learning magazines from Taiwan in the analysis. These are monthly English texts in a magazine format with a variety of stories, but with support for language learners including simplified content, glosses in Chinese, and language skills exercises. These magazines are important for several reasons. Published for decades, they are regarded highly in Taiwan English education having won numerous awards from educational groups within Taiwan (Chang et al., 2013). They are also widely used in school classes (Cheng & Lin, 2010), but this use also extends to college classes (Tsai & Chang, 2009), and private English schools (Chou, 2017). They are also often found in public and school libraries (Shen, 2016). All magazines used for the analysis were published between 2014 and 2022. While they assume a monthly magazine format, these materials also have reference value as a source of grammar, vocabulary, exercises, and content on issues of ongoing interest. While most had been published within the five years previous to analysis, some up to ten years old were included since they had been maintained by the university language center and the public library from which they were sourced as references for ongoing use. The total number of textbooks and magazines examined in this study was 33 volumes representing 2511 pages of material.

This study focused on a potential hidden curriculum of geographical information in these materials. As Giroux and Purpel (1983, p. 126) note, though, the hidden curriculum “is not something one just finds; one must go hunting for it.” Building a methodology around hidden curriculum

detection in materials is predicated upon the recognition that structured patterns of information in educational materials comprise a curriculum (Kelly-Laubscher & Luckett, 2016; Maton, 2009). This is true even if these patterns of information are not intended. Data analysis, then, becomes an exercise in seeking patterns of implicit information within materials. In this case, the focus was upon patterns of geographical representation to seek possible biases in representation of places both inside and outside of Taiwan.

2.1 Operationalization of Domestic Representation

It was important to operationalize concepts within the research questions. This included creating an analysis scheme attuned to representation of local geography in the collected materials. The objective was to determine how various areas of Taiwan were depicted in terms of amount and manner of portrayal. Geographically, Taiwan is divided into 13 counties. All but three (the island counties of Kinmen, Lienchiang, and Penghu) are part of the main island of Taiwan. In addition, there are five “special municipalities” in Taiwan. These five are counties having large populations. In addition, the three cities of Chiayi, Keelung, and Hsinchu, although categorized as cities, lack the population necessary to merit special municipality status. The amount of representation of the resulting 21 entities was tallied.¹ Of note for this study is the fact that most of Taiwan is rural. Taiwan has over 4000 rural communities comprising 96% of the land area and with tallies of the rural population ranging from 18% to 30% of the population (Liu, 2023; Ning et al., 2023; United Nations, 2024). This includes Taiwan’s peripheral islands such as Penghu (Ni & Say, 2023). If representation in these materials were unbiased, much domestic rural representation would be expected.

2.2 Operationalization of Representation Outside of Taiwan

Determining the amount of representation of places outside of Taiwan was relatively straightforward. Textual mentions of all places outside of Taiwan were noted, whether these were regions such as Asia, individual countries, provinces/states, or cities. The tally was made when texts used the specific name of the place or when the texts included images of particular places.

¹ Taipei and New Taipei were coded as a single metropolitan entity.

In both representation within and outside of Taiwan, the analysis considered those locales depicted through images and text. Images represent a potent form of emphasis, often commanding greater attention than text for learners (Gilakjani, 2012). Also, researchers recognize images as an important avenue of socialization (e.g., Anderson-Fye, 2018). Photos especially convey a strong sense of depicting the truth when compared with text and are more effective in obscuring power structures (Jancsary et al., 2016). For example, one analysis of photos from international ELT coursebooks employed social semiotics and visual grammar to reveal how the photos used consistently placed individuals from outside of the English-speaking world in lower, and “othered,” positions (Günay, 2015). For this reason, the analysis tallied each photo of places. In the case of textual mentions of places, multiple mentions of one place within a single page were tallied as one instance of representation. This was done so that counts could more accurately reflect the extent of representations of places across the curriculum by avoiding undue inflation of place counts when individual articles about particular places mentioned them numerous times within the same page.

2.3 Operationalization of Manner of Geographical Representation

Beyond the relative amounts of representations of place, this research also considered how manner of representation promoted inclusive representation of English learners in Taiwan and interculturalism abroad. In the case of the students in Taiwan, the goal was to determine whether there were any biases tending to favor urban students over rural ones. With international representation, the goal was to determine whether different places around the world were represented in a biased manner in which certain places might be systematically favored over others. Within these objectives, an inductive framework was employed to allow for unanticipated results to be manifest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two individuals worked together in the analysis. One was a cultural outsider who had spent six years in Taiwan teaching at the middle school, junior college, and university levels. The other was an insider who was born and raised in Taiwan, who was also an English teacher, and who had lived for years in a rural Taiwan setting, in a smaller Taiwan city, in the large city of Kaohsiung, and in Taipei.

3. Results

This study found that the ELT materials from Taiwan upon which the analysis focused contained considerable geographical information. This geographical information entered the materials in one of three ways. The first was incidental place names in sentences used to teach language skills or incidental background such as photographs of places. The second was places explicitly taught as vocabulary. These were limited to locales outside of Taiwan. The final means whereby geographical information entered these materials was via stories specifically about places, both domestic and international.

3.1 Equity and Manner of Taiwan Representation

These materials biased representation of places within Taiwan toward urban settings. As Table 1 indicates, representations of Taipei dominated place representations within Taiwan. Examples included one dialog intended to teach students how to make and accept or decline invitations. In this dialog, one individual asked the other if they would like to join a picnic in “Daan Park” in Taipei (Lin, 2021a, p. 42). In another example, one article presented vocabulary and dialogs associated with getting a haircut with the situation set in Taipei (Lie, 2016). The cover of one learning magazine was an image of the Dragon Boat Festival in Taipei (Brougham, 2016). Another example came from an article about two people in the hospital. The accompanying illustration was of a hospital in Taipei with the photo of the hospital’s sign making this clear (Lin, 2021a, p. 46). Representations of other major cities in Taiwan included an example from a vocabulary exercise stating that the speaker’s sister “goes to college in Taichung and will graduate next year” (Liu, 2021a, p. 40) and an example of how to use “wh questions” in which the answer to a question about where one person’s parents live was given as Tainan (Chen, 2022, p. 32). In both of these cases (Taichung and Tainan), there is both a city and a county by the same name. While both individuals assessing the materials felt that English speakers within Taiwan would likely follow the Chinese language convention of appending the administrative unit to the place (Taichung City

versus Taichung County), both agreed that when no such administrative unit appeared, the reference was to a city in keeping with mainstream English norms. Not only did smaller cities fail to appear in these materials, but entire rural counties within Taiwan, such as Yunlin County or Miaoli County were not represented anywhere in the corpus. The above examples also illustrate the manner of urban representation in which materials depicted the urban as a convenient, exciting, and varied place to live with large parks, ample mass transit, superior healthcare, numerous educational institutions, and exciting cultural events.

Table 1. Corpus Representation of Taiwan Locales

Administrative Level	Locale	Pages with Representation
Special Municipalities	Taipei/New Taipei	61
	Tainan	4
	Kaohsiung	3
	Taichung	2
	Taoyuan	0
Cities	Chiayi	18
	Keelung	1
	Hsinchu	0
Counties	Kinmen County	8
	Yilan County	7
	Penghu County	6
	Lienchiang County (a.k.a. Matsu Islands)	5
	Hualien County	3
	Nantou County	1
	Changhua County	0
	Chiayi County	0
	Hsinchu County	0
	Miaoli County	0
	Pingtung County	0
	Taitung County	0
	Yunlin County	0

By contrast, rural places in Taiwan, when they were represented at all, were confined to tourist attractions. Examples included the Matsu Islands of Taiwan with a focus on Qinbi Village as “Matsu’s Mediterranean Village” (E. Chen, 2022, p. 26). Another example was a poster about taking a trip to a farm in “Nantou County” which formed the basis for students to answer some factual questions about the poster’s content (Lin, 2021b, p. 97). Two final examples depicted travel to Kenting and the East Coast of Taiwan (Lin, 2021b, p. 90). Both were created to simulate travel ads with prices, food menus, and photos of the scenery. Thus, these materials consistently portrayed urban settings as places to live and rural ones as places to visit.

3.2 Equity of Place Representations Outside of Taiwan

Outside of Taiwan, results indicated representation biased toward a small number of countries (Figure 1). The United States, Japan, the United Kingdom and France alone accounted for around half of the 780 pages having country representations within the corpus while all 47 of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa had only five pages of representation among the 2511 pages analyzed. Nigeria and Bangladesh, also among the ten most populous countries, had no corpus representations.

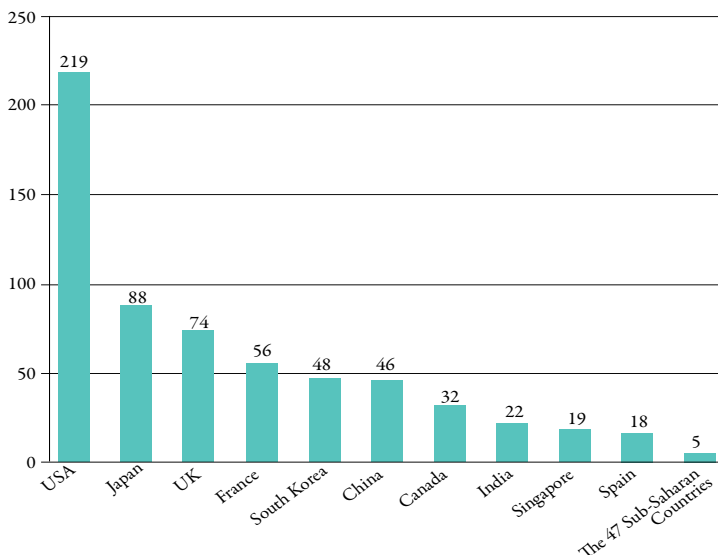


Figure 1. Top Country Representation in the Corpus

Also, some international cities received especially heavy representation. New York enjoyed 66 representations, Paris 18, London 16, while Los Angeles and Tokyo each had 10 representations. Table 2 reflects the selective representation of cities outside of Taiwan. There was a single representation of cities in Africa with Tangier being mentioned on one page. There were no representations of cities in sub-Saharan Africa nor in the Middle East. South American cities were likewise entirely unrepresented save for Rio de Janeiro. Delhi, Dhaka, and São Paulo, although among the top five most populous cities in the world (Brunn et al., 2020), were unrepresented in the corpus.

3.3 Manner of Place Representations Outside of Taiwan

There were three ways in which representations of place outside of Taiwan entered these materials. The first was incidental mentions used in materials intended to teach other skills. One example was the sentence “The distance from Taipei to Tokyo is almost 2100 kilometers” (Liu, 2022, p. 102) with the word kilometer being new vocabulary. One textbook included the phrase

Table 2. Representation of Cities Outside of Taiwan in the Corpus

Continent	Cities and Page Counts	Total
North America	New York City (66), Los Angeles (10), Chicago (5), Toronto (4), San Francisco (4), Boston (4), Seattle (4), Nashville (4), Portland (US) (3), Beverly Hills (2), Washington DC (2), San Diego (2), Greenwich Village (2), Long Beach (California) (1), Vancouver (1), Coalwood (US) (1), Philadelphia (1), Oneonta (1)	117
Europe	Paris (18), London (16), Rome (7), Athens (4), Venice (2), Prague (2), Cambridge (UK) (2), Berlin (2), Edinburgh (1), Florence (1), Pompeii (1), Manchester (1), Liverpool (1), Stockholm (1)	59
Asia	Tokyo (10), Hong Kong (4), Bangkok (2), Beijing (2), Seoul (1), Shanghai (1), Osaka (1)	21
Australia	Sydney (3), Melbourne (3)	6
South America	Rio de Janeiro (3)	3
Africa	Tangier (1)	1
Antarctica	Port Lockroy (1)	1

“to go on a tour” and the word “explore” as vocabulary, using examples of Japan and Paris to teach them: One sentence read “My family went on a tour of Japan last winter” while the other read “I went to Paris last year and had a great time exploring the city” (Liu, 2021a, p. 48, underlining in original). One sentence for teaching grammar stated that “Julie has never been to Japan” (Liu, 2021a, p. a66) to teach the present perfect tense. The second type of depiction was places outside of Taiwan explicitly taught as vocabulary. One example was a textbook teaching about pollution control in the state of Oregon (Liu, 2021b, p. 12). The final way these materials included information about places outside of Taiwan was in articles. An example was an article about the Greek island of Santorini, depicted as a “popular tourist destination famed for its blue-domed churches” (Foden, 2017, p. 42). The article included seven photos of Santorini.

Overall, the English Inner Circle, countries of the Global North, and common tourist destinations outside of Taiwan were represented in a positive manner while the countries of the Global South were presented negatively. In addition to the example of the Greek resort island above, other such portrayals included one sentence used to teach usage of the word pleasant: “Our trip to Canada was pleasant. I’ll remember it for the rest of my life” (Lin, 2021a, p. 31). Another sentence was included for students to practice superlatives: “There are a lot of museums in London. One of [the best] museums is the British Museum” (Lin, 2021b, p. 89). One textbook included a multi-page story about the “Grand Canyon” with eight color photographs (Liu, 2021b, Lesson 2). A story about methods for heating homes in the winter included a picture of a traditional Japanese tatami room with content in the text about the Japanese kotatsu heater (Jensen, 2021). This story characterized this in a positive manner as honoring traditional culture, as convenient, as comfortable, and as providing health benefits. By contrast, these materials portrayed Global South places such as African countries negatively. Indeed, these materials even failed to disaggregate these countries, instead depicting the whole continent of Africa as monolithic. One example sentence stated that “[t]he explorer was the first person to travel across Africa alone,” tapping into stereotypical tropes of an entire continent of uncivilized sameness (Liu, 2022, p. 48). In another example, one textbook used a sentence about African people dying

of hunger to demonstrate use of the word “lack” in context (Lin, 2021b, p. 106). Again, the implication is that an entire continent is the same and is fraught with various problems. An additional example spoke of the “Ebola epidemic in Africa” as an example of usage of the word “epidemic.” (Genack, 2022, p. 63).

4. Discussion

This research involved a critical content analysis of 33 textbooks and English learning magazines published and used in Taiwan. The objective was to foreground any geographical hidden curriculum within them and to shed light upon the implications for learners, an area inadequately considered in ELT. While similar projects have investigated representation of international locales, especially to understand possible ongoing bias in ELT materials toward the Inner Circle countries, this project sought to break new ground by also considering domestic representation, in this case representation of places within Taiwan itself. The domestic focus is especially important given increasing association of English with urban elites coupled with the evidence that rural English learners in Taiwan lag behind their urban counterparts. Because research demonstrates motivational value when students encounter people like themselves in educational materials, a nuanced understanding of domestic place representation is especially important to promote equity in Taiwan ELT. The content analysis crafted for this study responded by considering not only patterns in the amount but also patterns in the manner of representation of place in these materials. Understanding such patterns of bias via content analysis has value because such a hidden curriculum as a pattern of educational content is a curriculum in its own right on a par with its intended counterpart, because critical media studies demonstrates the socialization effects of such implicit media messages, and because of the power of ELT in contexts like Taiwan.

4.1 Representation of Places Within Taiwan

In terms of domestic representation, results indicated a bias toward representation of Taiwan’s urban contexts. By contrast, rural contexts

within Taiwan were rendered invisible with predominately farming locales such as Yunlin County receiving no representation. These results are at odds with the geographical reality of life in Taiwan where at least 18% of the population lives in rural areas and in which 96% of the land area of Taiwan is rural. In terms of manner of representation, the urban was typically represented as a convenient and exciting place to live while the rural was portrayed solely for its value in providing attractions created for tourists to enjoy. Rural lifestyles in Taiwan were not represented.

These results provide important insights into how urban normativity works within Taiwan. Urban normativity in a large country like the United States typically constructs the rural as a place from which to escape and as an often uncomfortable - and even potentially dangerous - place to visit (Hayden, 2013). The results of this study did echo mainstream urban normativity scholarship in terms of finding rural areas of Taiwan to be underrepresented. In this case, however, when these materials did portray rural places, they were depicted as places to enjoy as tourist attractions but not in which to live. Indeed, the government of Taiwan has targeted the development of rural tourist attractions as a means to promote dispersed economic development (Chen & Weicht, 2020). However, the portrayals in these materials of urban settings as good places to live and rural ones only as places to visit, but with no attention to what rural life offers for those living there, reflects the lived reality of the urban Taiwanese, a stance biased away from the at least nearly one-fifth of Taiwanese who are not themselves urbanites.

For those unfamiliar with Taiwan, the island might seem too small for such a rural/urban lifestyle dichotomy to matter much. It might appear that rural people would be familiar with and have access to Taiwan's urban centers. While it is true that Taiwan is only about the same size as the Japanese main island of Kyushu and is only slightly larger than the US state of Maryland, much of Taiwan is mountainous with accessibility to urban contexts varying tremendously. This is especially since conventional rail service is limited to areas near the coast and is unavailable in the more rugged interior (Liu & Titheridge, 2016). High speed rail service is even further restricted, being confined to a narrow western corridor and unavailable in the central and eastern areas comprising most of Taiwan's area (Dobruszkes

et al., 2022). Certainly those owning cars would be able to make the trip to large cities, but in many rural and mountain areas, individuals tend to rely more heavily upon motorbikes since their financial resources are lower; these are impractical for highway travel (Chang & Lai, 2015).

4.2 Representation of Places Outside of Taiwan

This study revealed four types of quantitative bias in representation of places outside of Taiwan; these were bias toward the English Inner Circle, bias toward the Global North, bias toward world urban centers, and bias toward stereotypical tourist locales. The first of these was bias toward representation of the English-speaking Inner Circle with the United States being the most represented country, the United Kingdom the third most represented, and Canada the seventh most represented. Not only was the United States the most represented country in these materials, but the magnitude of bias resulted in the United States receiving 43.8 times the representation of all 47 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa combined. Such results provide evidence not only that bias toward the Inner Circle is ongoing, but that it is not confined to materials published within the Inner Circle itself since the materials analyzed in this study were all published in Taiwan. The second form of bias was toward the Global North/Europe with countries such as France, Germany, Russia, and Spain enjoying relatively high representation. On the other hand, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Bangladesh had only a single representation among them in the corpus, although they are all in the top eight most populous countries in the world. All 47 of the countries comprising Sub-Saharan Africa had a total of only five representations within the 2511 pages of ELT learning materials assembled for this study. While such results are arguably inherently unjust and are at odds with interculturalism, they cannot even be defended by arguing for a focus on places where English is most used. Nigeria - where the official language is English - and where the population is the larger than every Inner Circle country save the United States was not represented. Such invisibility can only represent the workings of hegemony.

The results also provided evidence for two additional forms of bias. The third type was high representation of world urban centers. These included Paris, London, and Los Angeles. New York was the most

represented city in these materials. The fourth, and final, form of bias was toward stereotypical tourist locales. The top three locales among outbound travelers from Taiwan for the period January-March, 2024 were Japan, China, and South Korea (Tourism Statistics Database of the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2024). This popularity - rather than equity of representation - was reflected in these materials: These three - along with the UK and US - were the five most represented countries in this corpus. The heavy representation of Singapore - another popular tourist destination among Taiwanese - as a function of its population was notable. The Eiffel Tower alone, recognized as the most prominent tourist icon worldwide (Normand, 2007), had 17 representations. This was more than all but 11 countries in the corpus.

In terms of manner of representation of places outside of Taiwan, an implicit hierarchy was likewise manifest. As noted, the countries of Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, were especially little represented. When they were, they were typically not disaggregated, but the whole continent of Africa was depicted as monolithic. In these cases, materials depicted all of Africa as an exotic, untamed, and dangerous locale. The entire continent was also portrayed as a site characterized by deficit. By contrast, these materials consistently portrayed the Inner Circle, the Global North, and tourist locales commonly visited by people from Taiwan as exciting, convenient, wealthy, safe, and as possessing important cultural resources.

While individual statements such as those discussing starvation in Africa or noting the many museums in London are not untrue, per se, they echo - rather than working to dislodge - stereotypical representations of places and peoples, especially when they are part of a larger pattern of representation, a curriculum. These texts could have included counter-stereotypical examples tapping into the rich cultural, linguistic, and historical traditions of the 54 countries in the African Union. By the same token, the authors could just as easily have discussed food insecurity in France since France has the highest rate of undernourishment in the EU (World Population Review, 2024). This is certainly not to imply any ill-intent on the part of these content creators. As noted, the hidden curriculum is understood as unintended patterns of content with these patterns reflecting ideologies permeating our social lives and of which we may not be aware.

In sum the results presented here found that representations of places

in these materials were biased in various ways, that these patterns entail an unintended and hidden curriculum, that this hidden curriculum is not neutral but reflects relations of social power, and that this reflection of relations of social power taught by these materials are at odds with social justice and fairness, as well as with the intercultural goals accepted in mainstream ELT (Young & Sachdev, 2011), espoused by Taiwanese government policy aimed at interculturalism, and with rural student empowerment and Taiwan policy targeting it through improved English performance.

4.3 Implications for Learners

These results have important implications for English learners in Taiwan given that a hidden curriculum like that revealed here is a curriculum, and thus serves a teaching role. Because English is a required subject in Taiwan elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges, and because these materials have high prestige within Taiwan, any such teaching role is especially potent. Overall, the geographical biases manifest in these materials represent a hidden curriculum reflecting - and working to cement - historical relations of social power. The invisibility of the rural across this collection of materials confirms rural life as deviant and the urban as the norm. For the rural learner, the urban normative nature of these materials thus echoes messages permeating mainstream mass media: The rural does not matter, has little of value to offer, and living there is not something of which one should feel proud. For the urban learner these materials are confirmatory in nature: They join the litany of voices hailing the urban as desirable. For learner motivation, research amply demonstrates the power of imagining oneself as joining a target language community: This suggests that these materials serve as a form of motivation for the Taiwanese urbanite. For the rural Taiwanese learner - a population already struggling to attain the English proficiency typical of their urban counterparts - such implicit messages serve as one additional barrier to English.

For all English learners in Taiwan, these materials also work to cement historical relations of international power. The strong representation of the English Inner Circle reinscribes notions that the English language is the rightful “property” of the traditional English-speaking countries

and of those from these contexts. As with rural/urban representation, research establishes that such ideologies place motivational barriers in the path of English language learners. Manifestations of English native-speakerism are still powerful in Taiwan and work to distance Asian learners from taking ownership of English (Wu et al., 2022). Beyond the issue of Inner Circle bias, these materials also reinscribe the power of the Global North, the invisibility of the Global South, and stereotypical depictions of international locales in general. Such messages are also harmful to learners in compromising the role of English as a vehicle for interculturalism and internationalization. Indeed, the broad stereotyping of international places and the wholesale exclusion of Global South locales such as the African continent are especially egregious - and ironic - given explicit Taiwan Ministry of Education statements touting interculturalism and internationalization as warrants for the study of English in Taiwan (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2018).

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

The hidden curriculum involves unintended patterns of content in educational materials and practices that reflect relations of social power and common ideologies. Over decades, research into the hidden curriculum in educational materials has considered problematic social group representations by focusing on issues such as gender biases and racial representations. This early research was predicated upon a recognition that implicit content within educational materials such as that echoing stereotypical gender roles or rendering racial minorities invisible was both inherently unfair as well as promoting harmful effects for students. The research especially recognized that - and was further warranted by - an overall unawareness of related biases in these materials on the part of those creating them. Fortunately, great strides have been made in these two particular areas. With a focus upon how place is represented within English language learning materials from Taiwan, the research presented here demonstrates that such attention should be extended to implicit geographical information. This work especially suggests important responses for teachers, materials creators, policy makers, those making materials adoption decisions, and researchers.

Since teachers sometimes modify or supplement official materials, the results of this study can provide them with guidance in doing so. Responses can be modest. Simply including content about local issues, people, places, and happenings can help. Students could also report on lesser-known world locales, cultures, and languages. While I was a teacher in Taiwan, I assigned students to interview elderly family members or neighbors and to present their findings in English. As a result, the students used English communicatively, the interviewees felt honored, local sensibilities were valued, and both I and the students gained important insights into local history and culture. Such responses are in keeping with the mission of ELT as promoting not only language skills but as a platform for interculturalism while honoring the lived experiences of local people like students themselves. Such suggestions apply not only to teachers, but to those creating ELT materials as well.

Most notably, increased rural visibility in materials is in keeping with efforts of the Taiwanese government to address the English learning gap between urban and rural students in Taiwan. Given the need for textbooks in Taiwan to follow MOE content guidelines, this research suggests that these content guidelines themselves may need to be revisited to actively avert the patterns of geographical misrepresentation documented here. These results also demonstrate that existing policy must be more carefully followed since current government curriculum guidelines for English education in Taiwan stipulate its role in helping students appreciate cultural and ethnic diversity and in preparing them to participate in a global system (Su, 2016). While it is certain that the amount of target vocabulary and other content cannot simply be increased to include all underrepresented places and peoples, this study indicates that the ratios of representation should be changed less in favor of the Inner Circle, the Global North, and stereotypical tourist locales. Required English vocabulary could especially include more African and Middle Eastern places. Another avenue for concrete action is in evaluation frameworks widely used by educators in rendering decisions about adopting materials. These frameworks often take the form of checklists in which attention to racism, religious representation, and sexism may be included along with more strictly pedagogical concerns such as the sequencing of the materials (Brown, 2023). Equitable and fair geographical representation could be added to such frameworks.

The focus of this research and accompanying limitations imply further research. Since the focus was on textbooks used in high school, those used in elementary and middle school could also be examined. Another area for investigation would be to duplicate this research in other countries and regions to shed light on the relationship among any hidden curriculum, policy, and local society. How this content may affect the motivation of different groups of students, especially urban vs. rural ones is another area ripe for investigation. In addition, other issues pertaining to effects of such materials upon students could be examined such as how students' own past experiences and cultural or social backgrounds may influence their interpretation of and response to these materials. Since the content of the materials analyzed in this study indicated that by doing nothing ELT is reflecting forms of social injustice, any steps to address the situation described here, both through direct pedagogical action as well as through research, will be helpful.

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Appendix

Materials Analyzed

Title	Publication Date	Level	Publisher
Vocational High School English A	May, 2021	10th Grade	Long Teng
Vocational High School English A	November, 2021	10th Grade	Long Teng
Vocational High School English B	August, 2021	10th Grade	Hanlin
Vocational High School English B	August, 2022	11th Grade	Hanlin
Vocational High School English B	April, 2021	12th Grade	Hanlin
ABC Interactive Magazine (No. 243)	September, 2022	Intermediate	Live ABC
AMC English Digest (No. 399)	April, 2021	Upper Intermediate	AMC
AMC English Digest (No. 411)	April, 2022		
AMC English Digest (No. 367)	August, 2018		
AMC English Digest (No. 407)	December, 2021		
AMC English Digest (No. 408)	January, 2022		
AMC English Digest (No. 405)	October, 2021		
AMC English Digest (No. 416)	October, 2022		
Ivy Analytical English (No. 345)	April, 2017		
Ivy Analytical English (No. 330)	January, 2016		
Ivy Analytical English (No. 347)	June, 2017		
Ivy Analytical English (No. 344)	March, 2017		
Ivy Analytical English (No. 346)	May, 2017		
Ivy Analytical English (No. 340)	November, 2016		
Ivy Analytical English (No. 412)	November, 2022		
Let's Talk in English	April, 2016	Low to High	Studio Classroom
Let's Talk in English	August, 2016		
Let's Talk in English	December, 2015		
Let's Talk in English	February, 2016		
Let's Talk in English	January, 2016		
Let's Talk in English	July, 2016		
Let's Talk in English	June, 2016		
Let's Talk in English	March, 2016		
Let's Talk in English	May, 2016		
Let's Talk in English	November, 2015		
Let's Talk in English	October, 2015		
Let's Talk in English	September, 2016		
Live Interactive English Magazine (No. 259)	November, 2022		