CHAPTER V

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the first two chapters of this thesis, the researcher reviewed the general trends towards the politicization of the English language teaching profession and established that the teaching of the so called Standard English was facing unyielding resistance in many parts of the world. It was further established that the dissemination of the native variety of English, suspected of serving the cause of cultural and linguistic imperialism, was resisted both at the macro- and micro-levels. One important micro-level strategy to resist the teaching of English in its western cultural context and its consequences was said to be the indigenization of the EFL curriculum development. On the face of it, resistance to the western culture through developing local ELT curricula seems to be very practical. On a practical level, however, things are not as easy as they look as cultural resistance can backfire if its inherent pitfalls are not skillfully foreseen and avoided. In this study, attempts were made to find out whether the probable resistance to the dissemination of the western culture through indigenized high school EFL curriculum in the Islamic Republic of Iran was done in such a way that it could achieve its intended cultural safety without losing sight of the above-mentioned pitfalls or not. The successfulness and sustainability of cultural resistance through developing local EFL curriculum in Iran was premised on the following requirements.
1. There should be no internal conflict among the cultural attitudes of the three agents of resistance surveyed in the study as lack of internal harmony adversely affects the successfulness of cultural resistance;

2. The ‘null curriculum’ should be proportionate to the scope and extent of resistance. In other words, the exclusions should be limited to the incompatible aspects of the western culture which are resisted in Iran and the EFL curriculum must not be deprived of the necessary dose of compatible international cultural content (whether western or non-western) which are required for successful intercultural communication.

3. The cultural safety of the locally-designed EFL curriculum must be achieved without losing sight of its technical adequacy and overall acceptability.

Therefore, the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn from them are presented with reference to these three basic requirements of a sustainable cultural resistance operationally defined in this study.

5.2 Findings and Conclusions about cultural resistance

One important threat to the successfulness of cultural resistance is the lack of harmony among the cultural attitudes of people who influence the EFL curriculum in significant ways. Therefore, internal harmony among the three agents of resistance in this study was defined to be the first requirement of sustainable cultural resistance. The results of the three cultural attitude surveys showed that all the three agents of resistance in this study showed resistance to the Iranian high school students’ exposure to the incompatible aspects of the
western culture through EFL curriculum. As it was operationally defined in chapter one, cultural attitudes can be regarded conflicting if one group’s resistance to some or all aspects of the western culture corresponds to the other group(s)’ approval of those same aspects. The results of the three surveys showed that all the three groups were unanimous in their resistance and there was no conflict in the nature of their negative attitude towards the incompatible aspects of the western culture. Although the high school EFL teachers’ resistance was statistically significantly lower than that of the education officials, there was no conflict between their attitudes as the education officials’ resistance to the unfavorable aspects of the western culture consistently matched with the high school English teachers’ resistance to those same aspects. Both the Iranian education officials and the Iranian high school EFL teachers, although with varying degrees of intensity, were opposed to the teaching of such incompatible concepts as dating, cohabitation, intermingling of boys and girls, consumption of wine and going to dance parties, discos and bars. They were so firm in their resistance that they thought the financial cost of developing local materials should not be a reason for accepting to expose the Iranian high school students to the unsafe cultural contents of imported ELT materials. They also strongly suspected that there was a hegemonic agenda behind the harmless-looking teaching of English as a second/foreign language which aimed to spread the western culture around the world, impose a western “mental structure” on the minds of the students and shape their tastes, likes and dislikes in such a way that they would gradually be alienated from their native identities. They saw the establishment of an Asian or Islamic ELT material
development association, with the membership of many Asian or Islamic
countries that have an acceptable level of cultural affinity, as an effective
defense mechanism through which the detrimental influences of the
monopolized English language teaching could be kept at bay.

As another sign of their harmonious resistance, the education official’s
approval of the compatible aspects of the western culture matched with the
teachers’ approval of those same compatible aspects. Both groups approved of
the inclusion of such compatible aspects of the western culture as scientific
discoveries, the life story of some western scientists, writers and Noble Prize
Laureates as well as the geography, currency, transportation systems, historical
monuments, and the educational systems of the English speaking countries in
the Iranian EFL curriculum.

The third group of people whose attitude towards the western culture
was surveyed comprised the high school students’ parents who also showed
strong resistance to their children’s exposure to the manifestations of the
incompatible western culture and disapproved of their possible adoption of a
western lifestyle. They found the probable inclusion of the incompatible
aspects of the western culture in their children’s ELT textbooks worrying and
said they were very particular about the cultural safety of the books their
children read, the instructional movies they watched and the internet sites they
surfed. They, too, had a strong suspicion about the imperialistic motives behind
the imported ELT materials and preferred the locally designed ELT materials
to their imported equivalents with the proviso that the local materials would
have an acceptable level of professional quality. They also believed in parental and governmental supervision of the cultural content of the ELT materials as a way to resist their children’s exposure to the unwanted aspects of the western culture.

To put it in a nutshell, the major finding of the survey section of this study was that all the three groups whose cultural attitudes had been surveyed - education officials, EFL teachers and students’ parents - had an internally harmonious and non-conflicting type of resistance to the teaching of the incompatible aspects of the western culture through English. The observed unanimity of resistance was very important because it served to legitimize the official resistance shown by the education officials in the ministry of education. Without the backing of the students’ parents and the EFL teachers, official resistance can be said to be an imposed attitude and for that reason both would lack legitimacy and would be vulnerable. Figure 5.1 shows the harmony among the three agents of resistance in this study which satisfied the first requirement of sustainable cultural resistance.

Figure 5.1 Unanimity of cultural resistance
5.3 Findings and conclusions about the proportionateness of the null curriculum

The second requirement of a sustainable cultural resistance through EFL curriculum development was defined to be the proportionateness of the null curriculum to the scope and intensity of observed resistance. As operationally defined in chapter one, the successfulness and suitability of cultural resistance involved the exclusion of all and only the incompatible and conflicting aspects of the western culture from the local EFL curriculum so that the exclusions would free the curriculum of the incompatible western cultural values without depriving it of the necessary dose of non-conflicting and compatible culture required for successful intercultural communications.

The results of the EFL curriculum evaluation done by three independent groups of evaluators showed that the Iranian locally-designed EFL textbooks as an important part of the local EFL curriculum was satisfactorily free from all those aspects of the western culture that were strongly resisted in Iran. The ELT textbooks made no written or pictorial reference to the unfavorable western cultural concepts like dating, cohabitation, mixed-gender dormitories, drinking alcohol, and eating such things as pork or bacon. Nor did they include any pictures depicting girls and women in revealing clothes or swimsuits and boys and men in shorts most of which are typically found in the internationally-marketed ELT materials. The cultural content of the ELT textbooks were such that the evaluators were not concerned about their potentiality to promote the western way of life and demote the local culture. The evaluators did not fear that studying the high school English textbooks might have the long-term detrimental effect of reducing the learners’ loyalty to their native culture. The
The conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that the locally-designed EFL curriculum was highly responsive to cultural concerns in Iran and adopted a ‘null curriculum’ that eliminated all those undesirable aspects of the western culture that were deemed to be detrimental for the Iranian high school students. It successfully harnessed the much-suspected ‘hidden curriculum’ of the ELT materials by ensuring the absence of contents or topics that are suspected of serving the promotion of the western culture and the marginalization and humiliation of the local culture. This means that one part of the second condition for achieving a sustainable cultural resistance was also met. As Figure 5.2 displays, cultural adequacy rests on the fulfillment of two conditions the first of which was met by the Iranian locally-designed EFL curriculum.

One important part of the second requirement of sustainable cultural resistance was that its ‘null curriculum’ (the intentionally omitted topics and contents) must not be exaggerated so that it deprives the curriculum of the necessary dosage of compatible foreign and domestic culture required for successful intercultural communications. However, the findings of this study
showed that the Iranian locally-designed high school textbooks as a part of the local high school EFL curriculum did not include a sufficient dose of native culture and compatible cultural information about other nations and people deemed to be necessary for intercultural communication. This means that the scope of “null curriculum” which refers to “what schools do not teach” was exaggerated and inflated (Eisner’s 1994, p.97). The exclusion of the incompatible aspects of the western culture was justified because it was a responsible reaction to the unanimous cultural concerns of eligible decision-makers about the nature of Iranian EFL curriculum. However, the null curriculum exceeded the acceptable limits of exclusions and in so doing deprived the EFL curriculum of those necessary elements of native culture that the students need to introduce their cultural identity as well as the compatible elements of the foreign cultures required for effective intercultural communications. This is a blow to the sustainability of cultural resistance as it adversely influences the curriculum. Figure 5.3 provides the third piece of the jigsaw of sustainable cultural resistance.

Figure 5.3 Violation of the second condition for achieving cultural adequacy
5.4 Findings and conclusions about balanced attention to all components

The third very important condition for ensuring the sustainability of cultural resistance, as operationally defined in chapter one, was that the cultural safety of the Iranian locally-developed EFL curriculum would be achieved without losing sight of the technical adequacy and overall acceptability of the curriculum. This was addressed by the ninth hypothesis. The results of the independent evaluations done by the high school EFL teachers, high school students and ELT experts showed that the cultural safety of the Iranian locally-developed EFL curriculum was highly satisfactory while the technical adequacy of the curriculum was judged to be very low so much so that it made the culturally safe curriculum generally unacceptable for the teachers, students and experts. The followings can be said to be the technical weaknesses of the EFL curriculum based on the findings of the present research.

1. The objectives of the high school English EFL curriculum are not very clearly stated and the documents containing these objectives are not easy to access (46.25% satisfactory).

2. The objectives of the high school EFL curriculum do not satisfactorily match the language needs of the Iranian high school students (31.84% satisfactory).

3. The selected contents and skills are not adequate for the achievement of the curriculum goals (33.22% satisfactory).

4. The gradation of the materials is not such that each unit can adequately facilitate the learning of the next unit (37.07% satisfactory).
5. The high school English textbooks do not clearly describe what the intended learners already know and the type of competencies they are expected to achieve upon the completion of the course nor do they clearly describe the activities expected of the teachers and learners (29.3% satisfactory).

6. The high school ELT materials do not include a workbook, the necessary audiovisual materials and the required teaching aids (Only 18.32% satisfactory).

7. The language learning activities and materials of the high school English curriculum are not at the right level of difficulty for those learners who do not take English courses at private institutes (42% satisfactory).

8. The content and topics of the high school teaching materials are not interesting enough for the learners (22.1% satisfactory).

9. The language learning activities and the content of the high school English textbooks are not varied enough to accommodate the learners’ diverse learning styles (21.59% satisfactory).

10. The high school textbooks do not look good and their textual and graphic designs are not appealing (18.8% satisfactory).

11. There are not enough cyclical returns to the taught materials for review and reinforcement (27.9% satisfactory).

12. The high school English textbooks do not make a timely transition from mechanical to more meaningful and natural language learning activities which are relatable to the learners’ experiences (25.2% satisfactory).
13. The high school English textbooks do not include all the language skills needed by a typical Iranian high school student (27.2% satisfactory).

14. The presentation of the grammar points and vocabulary items is not such that the learners can use them to understand and produce language better (Grammar 33% and vocabulary 36.5% satisfactory).

15. The instructions and exercises in the pronunciation section cannot satisfactorily improve the learners’ pronunciation (32.6% satisfactory).

16. The language function section of the Iranian high school English textbooks does not include authentic conversations and cannot effectively improve the students’ conversation skills (19.3% satisfactory).

17. The reading section teaches only one-third of the techniques of effective reading and cannot satisfactorily prepare the learners for reading in real life situations (30.9% satisfactory).

18. Considering the allotted time for teaching the textbooks, the teachers’ skills and proficiency, students’ level of proficiency and the nature of the final examinations, the teaching of the high school textbooks through the recommended method is not practicable (34% satisfactory).

19. Neither the individual teachers nor the high schools are provided with a teacher’s manual that can help the effective teaching of the English textbooks (13.2% satisfactory).

20. Not all sections of the high school English books are taught according to the recommended method (36.6% satisfactory).
21. The allotted time is not enough for teaching all the sections of the textbooks according to the recommended method (36.6% satisfactory).
22. Iranian high school English teachers’ language proficiency and professional teaching skills are not adequate for teaching the textbooks according to the recommended method (45.1% satisfactory).
23. The class size and the physical conditions of the school are not adequate for the teaching of the textbook according to the recommended method (35% satisfactory).
24. The EFL curriculum does not provide for the evaluation of the high school English teachers’ performance by educational supervisors, peers and/or students (15.4% satisfactory).
25. There is not an effective feedback collection system to ensure that the students and teachers are satisfied with the curriculum (11.3% satisfactory).
26. The English teaching program is not regularly evaluated and amended to ensure its efficiency (14.2% satisfactory).
27. The EFL curriculum does not include an efficient language testing system which includes quizzes, midterm and final exams, review tests and diagnostic tests (28% satisfactory).
28. Language tests are not such that students who get a high score in them can use the tested language skills effectively (29.3 satisfactory).
29. The backwash effect of the high school English tests is not desirable (31.1% satisfactory).
30. The high school officials and English teachers are not required by the curriculum to encourage the out-of-class, more informal language learning activities like extensive reading, making English newsletters and English book reading competitions (15% satisfactory).
31. High schools do not encourage and facilitate the informal out-of-class language learning activities by providing the required facilities and equipment (e.g. by equipping the library with English story books or instructional CDs and DVDs that can be borrowed and used at home) (17.4% satisfactory).

In terms of its overall acceptability, the Iranian EFL curriculum failed to live up to the evaluators’ expectation. None of the three groups of evaluators considered the high school English curriculum efficient and successful (it was averagely 22.1% satisfactory for them) and were of the opinion that what the high school students gained from it was not worth their teachers’ and their own time and efforts (It was 29.6% satisfactory for them). Moreover, none of the three groups of evaluators preferred the high school English teaching materials to the imported materials like ‘Interchange’ and ‘Headway’ series (The average of three groups’ preference was 15.2%).

Simply put, out of the three components of the Iranian EFL curriculum evaluated in this study, only one part of the cultural component was highly satisfactory; the second part of the cultural component and the technical and overall acceptability components were judged inadequate.

Figure 5.4 Violation of the third requirement for the sustainability of cultural resistance
5.5 Conclusions about the sustainability of cultural resistance through EFL curriculum development in Iran

The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from all the findings of the present study is that the Iranian locally-developed high school EFL curriculum has been highly responsive to the cultural resistance in Iran without being half as much responsive to the technical and professional requirements of a successful EFL curriculum with the result that it failed to sustain the cultural resistance it was inspired by. The following two reasons are among the most important reasons why the Iranian EFL curriculum cannot be considered a good medium for the sustainable implementation of cultural resistance.

1. Its null curriculum is overblown in the sense that what are excluded from the curriculum are not restricted to the incompatible aspects of the western culture and have encroached upon the compatible aspects of the western and non-western cultures which are necessary for intercultural communication.

2. The care taken to ensure the cultural safety of the EFL curriculum did not go hand in hand with an equally strong care to guarantee the technical adequacy of EFL curriculum thereby losing the satisfaction and support of the insider and outsider evaluators. The rhetoric question to be asked is, ‘how can a technically inadequate curriculum replace its hegemonic rivals and be welcomed by its intended consumers?’

The EFL curriculum fell short of satisfactory. That is to say, it was not regarded successful and efficient; it was not considered to be worth the teachers and students’ time. Neither its beneficiaries nor the outsider experts preferred it to the culturally unsafe internationally-marketed ELT textbooks. This last point is of great importance because the three surveys had shown that the locally-designed ELT materials were generally preferred to the imported ones, but the
quality of the local EFL curriculum was not high enough to sustain that preference. Figure 5.4 summarizes the strong and weak points of the locally-developed EFL curriculum which had their respective share in enhancing and hampering the sustainability of cultural resistance.

Figure 5.5 Sustainability of cultural resistance through EFL curriculum development in Iran

There was no internal conflict among the three agents of cultural resistance - officials, teachers and parents – and all the three groups unanimously disapprove of the teaching of the incompatible western culture through English.

The EFL curriculum showed high responsiveness to the cultural, political and ideological concerns of the education officials, EFL teachers and students’ parents by adopting a null curriculum that eliminated the unwanted cultural contents from the local curriculum and by harnessing the much-suspected hidden curriculum typically found in ELT materials.

The null curriculum was disproportionate and encroached upon the compatible aspects of the western and non-western cultures and even upon the native culture and made the curriculum vulnerable for being short on the essential cultural content.

The EFL curriculum was weak in terms of its technical adequacy and did not live up to the standards of its beneficiaries and ELT experts. As a consequence, it did not enjoy an acceptable level of overall acceptability.

The first requirement was met. This contributed to the desired sustainability of cultural resistance.

The second requirement was partly met which contributed to the desired sustainability of cultural resistance.

The second part of the second requirement was violated. This hampered the sustainability of cultural resistance.

The third requirement was grossly violated which was a severe blow to the sustainability of cultural resistance.

Result 1: The locally-designed EFL curriculum failed to provide its intended learners with a successful and efficient language learning experience and win their satisfaction and continued loyalty.

And for this reason

Result 2: The beneficiaries of the EFL curriculum felt that they did not gain as much from the curriculum as they expected. This left no justification for sustaining the resistance-inspired curriculum and the learners and the teachers who may have initially preferred the culturally safe local materials to the imported ones reversed themselves and began to prefer the hegemonic but professionally adequate imported materials thereby marking the failure of cultural resistance.

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5.6 A model of sustainable cultural resistance through EFL curriculum development

The results and findings of this research showed that the three requirements of sustainable cultural resistance operationally defined in the first chapter were relevant requirements whose violation can grossly hamper the sustainability of cultural resistance. The violation of these requirements by the Iranian local EFL curriculum was responsible for its lack of sustainability. As a major conclusion drawn from the findings of this research, the present researcher would like to introduce a model of sustainable cultural resistance through EFL curriculum development. This model encompasses three requirements whose fulfillment or violation can have two diametrically opposite outcomes. Whenever the three basic requirements of a sustainable cultural resistance are met, the result is a successful and efficient language learning experience for the intended language learners who manage to learn English well without jeopardizing their local cultural identity and consequently remain satisfied with the resistance-inspired EFL curriculum and their loyalty to the efficient and safe curriculum protects them from the much-feared hegemony of international ELT curricula. If one or more of the three basic requirements of sustainable cultural resistance are violated, cultural resistance will have to experience the worst-case scenario of losing the battle to the hegemonic but professionally adequate rival ELT materials. Figure 5.5 on the next page displays the model of sustainable cultural resistance through EFL curriculum development.
Figure 5.6 A Model of sustainable cultural resistance through EFL curriculum development

First Requirement: Unanimity of the possible cultural resistance

- Unanimous rejection of incompatible western culture

Second Requirement: Proportionateness of the Null Curriculum to the scope of resistance

- Elimination of incompatible Western culture in response to cultural resistance
- Inclusion of the necessary dose of compatible western and non-western culture required for intercultural communication

Third Requirement: Balance between cultural safety and technical quality of the EFL curriculum

- Optimum Cultural Safety
- Optimum Technical Quality
- The resultant overall acceptability

If the three requirements are met, the language learning experience of the intended learners will be both culturally safe and professionally efficient and satisfactory. Therefore, there will be no objection to the resistance-inspired locally-developed EFL curriculum and it continues to be an efficient and sustainable medium of resistance to the unwanted influences of the western culture.

If the three requirements are not met, the language learning experience will be either professionally inefficient and unrewarding or culturally unsafe. In either case the beneficiaries' interest and satisfaction will be lost. This will leave no justification for continuing with the resistance-inspired curriculum and the learners and the teachers who may initially show preference for the culturally safe local materials reverse themselves and begin to search for professionally adequate materials even if they are among the hegemonic imported materials thereby marking the failure of cultural resistance.

Cultural resistance will be renounced.

Cultural resistance will be sustained.