

## English Textbooks in the Modern World: Cultural Representation in an EFL Textbook from Vietnam

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### Article information

#### Abstract

The teaching of English in Vietnam has undergone continuous transformation, driven by globalization and technological advancements. With the 2022 release of the *Global Success* textbook series by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training with Pearson, this research addressed a critical gap in understanding how cultural representation aligns with globally modern contexts. While previous studies have emphasized surface-level analyses or the origins of cultural content, this study adopted a more comprehensive perspective by examining how the evolving and hybrid nature of culture is reflected in EFL materials. This analysis focused on the Grade 11 textbook's Getting Started sections, which consistently combine text and visuals to explore cultural representations. A mixed-method content analysis of textual and visual features was conducted to uncover how these cultural representations may influence students' perceptions in the modern world. Cultures in the textbooks were categorized as native-speaker culture, Vietnamese culture, and modernized culture. The findings revealed a strong emphasis on modernized culture in the textbook, demonstrating an association between English learning and international values. While this approach has its merits, English teachers, textbook authors, and policymakers should be mindful of the imbalanced cultural representation and

	incorporate critical discussions to raise students' awareness of cultural differences.
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## 1. Introduction

English has become a global language, widely taught in schools around the world to ensure proficiency for participation in the global economy and scientific community (Brutt-Griffler, 2017). In formal education, the English textbook is an important tool. Textbooks are crucial in shaping students' understanding and critical thinking, extending beyond mere content delivery to influencing their beliefs and worldviews (Ndura, 2004; Romiszowski, 2016). English textbooks not only teach the language, but also provide information about the cultures of its users. The Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) seems to realize this issue. In 2018, the MoET introduced a new national curriculum stating that English language teaching should emphasize communicative competence and cultural knowledge of both Vietnam and English-speaking countries. This required an updated approach to English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks. Furthermore, Article 8 of the Educational Law (Vietnam National Assembly, 2019) established that textbooks are crucial teaching materials and should not perpetuate stereotypes related to race, religion, gender, or social status. Prior to 2015, EFL textbooks were solely produced by the MoET. A collaboration with Pearson in 2015 introduced a new series of textbooks, which became official in 2022.

Studies on previous Vietnamese EFL textbooks have revealed multiple issues opposed to the new education law. Dang and Seals (2018) have found that local EFL textbooks overemphasize native English norms, limiting students' exposure to diverse English varieties. Trinh and Sachs (2023) have identified gender imbalances in secondary school EFL textbooks, where males are often depicted as more knowledgeable than females, reinforcing traditional stereotypes.

Furthermore, Le (2018) notes a lack of critical thinking tasks in high school EFL textbooks, which may not fully accommodate students' ability to reflect on moral values. The new *Global Success* textbook series, introduced under the revised Education Law (Vietnam National Assembly, 2019), brings up questions about whether these same problems have been addressed.

These textbooks also raise concerns about how culture is shown and how English is presented in today's global and digital world. A key issue is whether the textbooks still heavily favor native speaker norms or present English as an international language that reflects its diverse uses worldwide. Additionally, questions arise about whether local culture is adequately represented, whether there is a balance between global and local cultural elements, or if there is a risk of undermining national cultural identity. The main aim of this study is to assess whether the teaching of culture and language in these textbooks aligns with the real-life status of English in the modern world. This study is timely and significant, aiming to inform future textbook development to ensure that educational materials resonate with students' diverse experiences. It addresses key issues within the 2022 *Global Success* series of EFL textbooks by investigating potential biases, enabling educators and textbook designers to make informed choices. By identifying these biases, educators can engage with the materials critically, fostering cultural awareness. Moreover, drawing on the first researcher's high school teaching experience in Vietnam, this study sought to address cultural content that may feel irrelevant or confusing to students.

While current research often emphasizes English in the context of globalization, this study also incorporated the role of technological advancement. Building on these concerns, this study explored the textbook based on these research questions:

1. What cultures are represented in the conversations and images in the Getting Started section of each unit of the *Global Success* Grade 11 textbook?
2. How are those cultures represented?

## **2. Literature Review**

This section serves as the foundation for the key concepts of this study by discussing the socio-economic context of English in Vietnam, teaching language with culture, cultural representation in EFL textbooks, and findings from previous studies.

### **2.1 The Socio-economic Status of English in Vietnam**

To understand the role of English education in Vietnam, it is crucial to consider the socio-economic and historical context that has shaped its development. Vietnam, a Southeast Asian country with a history of colonial domination by the French and Americans, has long associated foreign languages, including English, with power, prestige, and social mobility (Hoang, 2020). Following the end of the American War in 1975, Vietnam embarked on a journey of national rebuilding, prioritizing education as a key driver of development. However, its early closed-door policies hindered the growth of foreign language education.

The introduction of the 1986 “Doi Moi” reforms marked a turning point, integrating Vietnam into the global economy and elevating the importance of English as a tool for communication and economic progress. Membership in ASEAN in 1995 and the WTO in 2006 reinforced the need for an English-proficient workforce to facilitate trade and diplomacy (Sundkvist & Nguyen, 2020; To, 2010). In the 21st century, English education has expanded dramatically, becoming a compulsory subject in schools and a booming sector in private education. Despite these advancements, disparities persist. Urban areas, with better resources and access to qualified teachers, often achieve higher English proficiency compared to rural regions. This urban-rural divide perpetuates socio-economic inequalities, as

English proficiency increasingly correlates with better economic opportunities and social status (Tran & Tanemura, 2020).

Recent educational reforms aim to address these challenges. The new competency-based English Curriculum in the latest General Education Program (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, 2018) emphasizes communicative skills, integrated language use, and cultural awareness to prepare students for a globalized world. However, critics like Phan (2017) argue that the dominance of American and British English as benchmarks for proficiency fails to reflect the global role of English as a lingua franca, limiting the curriculum's inclusivity. The latest Vietnamese Educational Law (Vietnam National Assembly, 2019) represents another major step in modernizing the education system. Designed to align with the demands of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the law prioritizes enhancing education quality and equipping students with skills for the modern world. This evolving legal and educational framework provides the backdrop for evaluating how current English textbooks, such as the *Global Success* series, address cultural representation in this modern world.

## **2.2 Teaching Language with Culture**

Language and culture are inherently intertwined, with language serving as a medium to express the values, beliefs, and customs of a culture (Heidari et al., 2014). Effective English education should integrate both elements to help learners develop cultural competence alongside linguistic skills. However, many EFL textbooks treat language and culture separately, focusing on language proficiency while providing limited or stereotypical cultural representations (Mishan & Kiss, 2024; Mukundan, 2005). This disconnect is particularly evident in materials developed in Western contexts, which often prioritize British or American norms, neglecting the diversity of English usage worldwide (Kazemi et al., 2017; Xiong & Qian, 2011).

In today's globalized world, English functions not only as a tool for communication with native speakers but as a lingua franca for international interactions, especially among non-native speakers who now far outnumber native speakers (Buschfeld & Weidle, 2023). Recognizing this shift, contemporary EFL education emphasizes the importance of localizing content to include learners' own cultural perspectives, fostering an inclusive approach that allows students to use English to share their identities and experiences (Rahim & Daghighi, 2019; Shin et al., 2011).

The dominance of native-speaker norms in Vietnamese EFL textbooks remains evident, with a strong emphasis on British English, as noted by Le (2022). While there are positive representations of Vietnamese characters, these textbooks often fail to address learners' broader communicative needs, focusing on interactions with Anglophone users rather than reflecting the diversity of English usage globally (Nguyen et al., 2021). Dinh (2016, 2017) further highlights the lack of meta-cultural competence strategies and incomplete cultural representations in EFL materials, limiting students' ability to critically engage with cultural concepts. Tran and Yeh (2020) identify additional issues, such as oversimplified linguistic patterns and decontextualized communication practices, which fail to reflect real-world social interactions. These limitations raise the need for a shift toward incorporating cultural diversity into EFL textbooks.

To address these shortcomings, Rose and Galloway (2019) advocate for the inclusion of Global Englishes in language teaching to better prepare learners for multilingual and multicultural communication. Moving beyond native-speaker-centric models, Vietnamese EFL textbooks should integrate local cultural elements alongside modern global influences. Such an approach would not only align with the realities of English as a global language but also equip learners with the cultural awareness and communicative competence needed in today's interconnected world.

### **2.3 Cultural Representation in EFL Textbooks**

To identify cultural representation in textbooks, it is essential first to understand what culture is. Culture is a dynamic and adaptive system of shared perceptions, values, and behaviors that individuals acquire through daily interactions. As Mishan and Kiss (2024) point out, culture evolves fluidly, shaped by social engagements rather than being static or governed by rigid rules. It influences how individuals generate thoughts, feelings, ideas, and perceptions, storing knowledge and memories that guide behavior (Sadri & Flammia, 2011). Cultural elements include beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect both collective norms and the diverse experiences of individuals belonging to different cultural groups or sub-groups.

Cultural representation, therefore, refers to how culture is portrayed or reflected in textbooks. It is not limited to visible portrayals of culture but also includes subtle, implicit messages about cultural norms, values, and identities. Rogers (2004) emphasizes the importance of critically examining textbooks to uncover hidden or overlooked messages, as these materials can either reinforce or challenge cultural stereotypes. Risager (2020) adds that cultural representation in textbooks should not only document the prevalent content but also bring attention to marginalized or underrepresented cultural groups.

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the role of different modes in the textbooks when analyzing cultural representation. Smith (2022) explains that textbooks often use various modes, such as text and images, to construct meaning. These modes work together to provide a richer portrayal of culture. For instance, images in EFL textbooks can complement and deepen the understanding of cultural content, offering a more complete learning experience. By acknowledging the two salient modes in the textbooks—texts and images—we can gain a broader view of how culture is represented and communicated.

## **2.4 Previous Studies on Cultural Representation in EFL Textbooks**

Research on cultural representation in language textbooks often focuses on categorizing cultural content or identifying its origins. To analyze two English textbook series in Hong Kong, Yuen (2011) developed the 4Ps model, classifying cultural elements as products, perspectives, practices, and persons, noting a focus on products and English-speaking cultures. Nomnian (2013) added “places” as a fifth category, studying Thai culture in English textbooks and highlighting the importance of local culture in teaching. Saemee and Nomnian (2021a) used these five themes to analyze Thai primary school textbooks, finding that products were the most commonly represented category. However, these studies tend to focus on what is presented in the textbooks and overlook what is absent or might be intentionally excluded. By not examining the gaps or silences in cultural representation, the research might miss a critical aspect of how textbooks shape students’ perceptions of cultures.

The second approach in cultural representation research focuses on identifying cultural origins. Keles and Yazan (2020) used Kachru’s World Englishes framework to show the dominance of Inner Circle cultures in language textbooks, mainly European culture. Saemee and Nomnian (2021b) categorized content in Thai ELT Activity Books into source culture, ASEAN, Asian, target, international, and global cultures, revealing a preference for international and target cultures. However, in a Vietnamese EFL textbook, the classification of Vietnamese culture remains unclear across these categories. This framework is important because it allows for a systematic and comprehensive analysis of cultural representation, helping to uncover biases and dominant cultures in EFL materials.

Research on cultural representation in EFL textbooks often relies on static categorizations of national or ethnic identity, overlooking the fluid intersections of global trends, youth subcultures, and digital influences. To address this limitation, this study adopts a holistic approach, framing culture as an evolving process shaped by social interaction, global flows, and technological mediation. Rather



than treating cultural elements as fixed or isolated, this perspective examines how they interact and adapt in real-world contexts. Applied to textbook analysis, this approach not only identifies patterns of representation but also evaluates whether cultural content acknowledges complexity or risks oversimplification.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Textbook Selection**

The *Global Success* textbook series, co-published by Vietnam's MOET and Pearson, was selected for this study due to its official endorsement and widespread adoption in Vietnamese schools (Doan, 2022). At the time of this research, the Grade 11 book was the highest level available in the series, making it a practical choice for analyzing how cultural content is presented to advanced secondary learners. Compared to lower-grade textbooks in the same series, the Grade 11 version presented more complex representations of culture, aligning better with the study's aims to explore how culture and the English language were portrayed at a more advanced proficiency level.

This study focused on the Getting Started sections from ten units of the Grade 11 textbook, as these sections were determined to be the most analytically viable for two key reasons. First, the Getting Started sections consistently combined textual and visual elements to introduce unit themes, providing a standardized format for comparison across units. This consistency was verified by examining all ten units and confirming that each section adhered to the same structural design (e.g., an introductory dialogue, thematic images, and comprehension tasks). Second, unlike other sections that focused narrowly on grammar or skills, the Getting Started sections explicitly combined language, visuals, and cultural themes, making them particularly relevant for analyzing how culture was embedded in the textbook. By examining these sections, the study provided insights into whether the textbooks reflected the diversity of English use globally, addressing concerns raised in prior research (e.g., Dinh, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2021).

### **3.2 Data Analysis**

To prepare data for analysis, all Getting Started sections of the textbook were cleaned. These sections, comprising the first two pages of each unit (totalling 20 pages across ten units), consistently featured a conversation and accompanying images, making them suitable for examining cultural representation from different modes in the textbook. Comprehension tasks and blank spaces designed for student responses were excluded, as they did not contribute to the cultural analysis. The characters' names in the conversations were categorized as either native English speakers or Vietnamese. Using these names, the number of Vietnamese and native English-speaking characters was recorded. The images accompanying the conversations were also extracted and analyzed, focusing on how they complemented the textual content.

After the texts and images were prepared, the data were organized into three major categories for analysis. While these categories emerged during analysis in this data-driven study, their inclusion in the literature review would provide additional context and clarity to support the study's findings. This study adapted a framework from Saemee and Nomnian (2021b), which identifies six cultural types: source culture, ASEAN culture, Asian culture, target culture, international culture, and global culture. While this framework provides valuable theoretical grounding, its applicability requires empirical verification in specific contexts. Initially, we examined these established categories (source culture, target culture, international culture, etc.) but remained open to emerging patterns during our analysis of the Vietnamese textbook. This approach allowed us to test the relevance of Saemee and Nomnian's framework while accommodating unique cultural representations specific to the Vietnamese educational context. The final coding scheme maintained Vietnamese culture as the source culture category while adapting other classifications as needed to reflect the actual textbook content.

For this study, focusing on a Vietnamese EFL textbook, the local culture was categorized as Vietnamese culture, representing the source culture. ASEAN and Asian cultures were excluded, as they did not explicitly appear in the data. The target culture, representing native English-speaking countries, was referred to as native speakers' culture. International and global cultures were combined into a single category, termed modernized culture, to emphasize the impact of globalization and technological advancements on cultural representation. This adapted categorization ensured a focused and relevant analysis of cultural elements in the chosen Vietnamese EFL textbook.

***Native speaker culture:*** This referred to the culture of English-speaking countries like the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It encompassed traditions, values, and customs such as Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, as well as deeper cultural aspects like respecting personal space and the “American Dream.”

***Vietnamese culture:*** Vietnamese culture was rich with customs, beliefs, and traditions, such as Vietnamese cuisine, the áo dài, the Tết festival, and ancestor worship. It also encompassed deeper values like respect for family, elders, and hierarchical social relationships.

***Modernized culture:*** In this study, “modernized culture” referred to the evolving cultural elements shaped by technological advancements and globalization, which were widely recognized across regions. These elements, including fast-food chains, pop culture, technological gadgets, and evolving gender roles, reflected the continuous influence of modern global trends (Maude, 2016; Sadri & Flammia, 2011). It was not a static concept but rather dynamic, representing a growing phenomenon that adapted as societal needs and technology progress.

The researchers first examined the conversations to identify cultural elements, including beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflected the three above cultures. Data were collected from the words and exchanges within the conversations. By varying the analysis between single phrases and larger exchanges, the researchers focused on counting conceptual units rather than linguistic ones. The analysis did not seek to determine who dominated the conversation or how power dynamics played out; therefore, repetitive elements were counted as a single instance. For example, if two exchanges were made in the same adjacency pair, they were treated as one. Similarly, if a topic like gender issues was mentioned multiple times, it was still counted as a single occurrence.

Visual analysis followed a similar framework. The analysis first considered salient elements in the photo. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) have proposed guidelines to identify how visual elements communicate meaning and how viewers' attention is directed within an image. Saliences referred to how certain elements in an image were made more prominent through visual techniques such as size, color contrast, placement, and sharpness. Then, cultural elements were identified within those salient features, exploring how they represented the three categories mentioned above.

The first researcher, a Vietnamese, conducted the analysis, which was then cross-checked by the second and third researchers. The final cross-check compared the proportions of surface and deep cultural elements in the text and visuals.

#### **4. Findings**

This study was guided by two research questions: (1) Which cultures appear in the textbook's Getting Started sections? and (2) How are these cultures represented? The analysis consisted of four parts: the overall representation of cultures, representation of native speakers' cultures, representation of Vietnamese culture, and the dominance of modernized culture.

#### 4.1 Overall Cultural Representations in the Textbook

This section of the analysis focused on the overall cultural representation in the ten Getting Started sections of the *Global Success* Grade 11 textbook. Table 1 below shows the overall representation of cultures found in the textbook.

**Table 1**

*Overall Analysis of Cultural Representation in Global Success*

Characters		Global Success	Cultural representation	Native speakers' culture	Vietnamese culture	Modernized culture
Native speaker	Vietnamese					
8	20	11	Text	28	21	75
			Visual	4	12	14
			<b>Total</b>	32 (20.78%)	33 (21.43%)	89 (57.79%)

At first glance, the conversations in the textbook featured more Vietnamese characters (20) than native speakers (8), presenting Vietnamese learners as proficient English users. Modernized culture remained a dominant theme, with 89 cultural instances found, making up 57.79% of the content. The textbook showed a nearly equal representation of native speaker and Vietnamese cultures, accounting for 20.78% and 21.43% of the total cultural content, respectively. Native speaker culture was more evident in the text with less visual emphasis, whereas Vietnamese culture was mainly found in the text but was also supported by visuals. The analysis was further explained under three main categories.

#### 4.2 Representation of Native Speakers' Culture in the Textbook

##### *Native speaker culture in the textual layer*

Native speaker culture was often portrayed through language patterns, helping students learn target language conventions. For example, in the excerpt (Example 1), Mai—a female Vietnamese—proposed her ideas in a meeting but was rejected by Nam—a male Vietnamese—and Mark—a male native speaker. Both teenagers used formal English positive politeness strategies, such as using “but” and suggesting that the ideas be saved for later.

**Example 1:** Rejection adjacency pairs (Unit 9, page 100)

**Mai:** Yes, I think we should promote issues that affect a lot of people in our city, such as crime and overpopulation.

**Nam:** I like your ideas, Mai, but I think we should plan our campaign around social issues that directly affect teenagers like us.

In the same conversation, after listening to Mai's ideas, Nam first acknowledged their positive rapport by saying he liked the idea. After hedging his decision to alter Mai's plan, he started to narrow down the scope of the campaign. Mai then turned to Mark for additional feedback.

**Mai:** I agree with you. Hmm...so Mark, what do you think? Should we focus our campaign on a general social issue or one affecting mainly teens?

**Mark:** Hmm. I think this time we should focus on a problem teens struggle with every day because this won't be a big campaign. However, we'll try to use your ideas for another project, Mai.

During Mark's turn, he began by explaining why the campaign should focus on teenagers. He then acknowledged Mai's idea by suggesting it be used in the future. The interactions here seemed too formal for a group of high school friends. In real life, friends are usually more casual and informal with each other. This example showed how textbook language could sometimes feel unrealistic. Moreover, the interactions were presented without guidance for teachers or tasks for students to explore the pragmatic rules behind the conversation, which could help bridge the gap between textbook language and real-life communication. While patterns may be noticed, the lack of exploration into the rationale behind the language use left the pragmatic rules unexamined, limiting deeper understanding.

*Native speaker culture in the visual layer*

This nuclear family setup (Figure 1) was common in native speaker culture but contrasted with the extended family arrangements often found in Vietnamese households, where multiple generations may live together.

**Figure 1**

*Visual Extract from Mark's family (Unit 2, page 18)*



The image in Figure 1 was much brighter and more relaxed than the image of a Vietnamese family in Figure 2 below. In Figure 1, the family members were dressed casually and freely, reflecting the relaxed and individualistic approach to personal expression common in Western cultures. Additionally, the composition of Mark's family in the image emphasized that the children were the central focus of the household. This highlighted a child-centered parenting style, in which much of the family's attention and resources were directed toward the children's needs. This contrasted with the more collective focus of traditional Vietnamese families, where respect for elders is more prominent.

### **4.3 Representation of Vietnamese Culture in the Textbook**

*Vietnamese culture in the textual layer*

As presented in Table 1, Vietnamese characters outnumbered native speakers in conversations. This suggested a shift toward recognizing non-native speakers' competence in English. However, this portrayal may be idealized,

creating an unrealistic expectation of English dominance in everyday Vietnamese contexts and overlooking more authentic multilingual practices, where Vietnamese might naturally mix with English. For instance, in Example 2 (Unit 5), three Vietnamese speakers—Mr. Quang, Mai, and Nam—engaged fluently in English to discuss global warming. Similarly, in Unit 7, Ms. Hoa, Mai, and Nam discussed their career choices in English with ease. This seemed to reflect an agenda promoting English as the primary medium in academic settings, regardless of the speakers' nationalities.

**Example 2:** Sample conversations of fluent Vietnamese users of English

**Mr. Quang:** Good morning, class. Today's lesson will start with Mai and Nam's talk about some of the causes and consequences of global warming. Would you like to go first, Mai?

**Mai:** Yes, thank you...

**Nam:** Exactly...

(Extract from Unit 5, page 52)

**Ms. Hoa:** Good morning, class. There was an education fair last weekend. Did anyone go?

**Nam:** Yes, Mai and I did...

**Mai:** Sure...

(Extract from Unit 7, page 76)

Moreover, Vietnamese culture was represented at a deeper level, with explanations about beliefs, due to the textbook authors' familiarity with it. Mai's family, in Unit 2, was described as an extended family (see Example 3 below), with the belief that differences among members were natural, and that grandparents held certain stereotypical beliefs and gender roles.

**Example 3:** Mai's extended family

**Mai:** Well, I live with my extended family, and I have to learn to accept the differences between the generations.



**Ms. Hoa:** That's a good point. Can you give us an example?

**Mai:** Well, my grandparents hold traditional views about male jobs and gender roles. For example, my grandfather wants my brother to be an engineer, but my brother hopes to become a musician. And my grandmother thinks women have to do all the housework.

(Extract from Unit 2, page 18)

This traditional family dynamic often involved differences in opinions and beliefs, especially between younger and older generations. In Mai's family, these differences were evident, with the grandparents holding certain stereotypical beliefs and adhering to traditional gender roles. This reflected the generational gap that could exist in extended families, where elders often maintained more conservative views, while younger members may embrace more modern or progressive ideas.

#### *Vietnamese culture in the visual layer*

The idea of a traditional extended Vietnamese family was also reinforced in the visual (see Figure 2 below). Mai's extended family was dressed in traditional clothes, with her grandparents and parents positioned at the center. This highlighted the importance of elders in Vietnamese culture.

#### **Figure 2**

*Visual Extract from Mai's family (Unit 2, page 19)*



The image placed the grandparents and parents at the center, emphasizing their central role in the family structure. This composition highlighted the respect and authority elders command in Vietnamese culture, with traditional attire reinforcing values of honoring and respecting seniority. Together, these elements stressed the importance of the extended family in preserving cultural continuity and passing down traditions.

#### **4.4 Representation of Modernized Culture in the Textbook**

The textbook's name *Global Success* suggested that the content was designed to reflect English as a universal tool for achievement, reinforcing the idea of English being viewed on a global scale and emphasizing its role in international communication. Given this title, it is not surprising that modernized culture emerged as the most prominent theme in the textbook, comprising 57.79% of the total cultural content. Apart from the categorization by textual and visual layers, modernized culture was also interpreted through four subthemes: a hustling and bustling world, global citizenship, alternative forms of education, and environmental issues.

These subthemes were significant in interpreting modernized culture because they can mirror the evolving challenges and opportunities students face in a rapidly globalizing and technologically advancing world. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers and students to critically assess these representations, as they may present an idealized or oversimplified view of the world, potentially neglecting the complexities and disparities that shape real-life experiences.

##### *Modernized culture in the textual layer*

##### Modernized culture as a hustling and bustling world

This subtheme highlighted the fast-paced, technology-driven world we lived in, where convenience was key. . In the following extract, modernized culture was depicted through references to fast food, exercise, and maintaining a balanced

diet. These elements highlighted the need to avoid fast food due to prolonged sitting and working, emphasizing the importance of a more nutritious diet.

**Example 4:** Modernized culture as the life full of rush

**Nam:** I know. I ate a lot of fast food, but now I prefer fresh fruits and vegetables. I've learnt from him that taking regular exercise and eating a balanced diet are the key to a long and healthy life.

(Extract from Unit 1, page 8)

In Unit 9, modernized culture reflected concerns about teens' struggles in a fast-paced and demanding world. It highlighted a growing awareness of mental and emotional challenges faced by teens. In Example 5, elements of this type of culture included an awareness campaign (a student-led project tackling social issues) that responded to the pressures of living in a “hustling and bustling” society.

**Example 5:** A campaign to address social issues in today's world

**Mark:** Hi, everyone. Last time our club met, we decided to start an awareness campaign to draw attention to a pressing social issue. So have you thought about any issues that we could focus on?

**Nam:** Well, bullying, peer pressure, and body shaming, for instance, are major problems among teenagers today although many people don't feel comfortable talking about them.

**Mai:** Sounds good! Now let's decide on a social issue. Is the top problem facing teens today peer pressure, body shaming, or bullying?

(Extract from Unit 9, page 100)

Modernized culture as the need to become a global citizen

The second subtheme emphasized the importance of understanding and engaging with global issues such as international cooperation. In Unit 4, modernized culture was portrayed through the volunteer program that Mai was

inquiring about (Example 6). The modernized approach to finding information about the program was through the website. To join, Ms. Pang explained that students needed to have a community project and English proficiency. These were contemporary standards by which students were encouraged to improve themselves.

**Example 6:** A talk at the exchange program office

**Mai:** My cousin was an AYVP volunteer. He often said taking part in the programme was an experience he would never forget.

**Mai:** What are the areas covered by AYVP?

**Ms. Pang:** There are eight themes. I suggest checking our website to find out this year's themes.

**Ms. Pang:** To be selected, you should be over 18. Then you may need to propose a community project related to the theme. And we'll probably interview you to make sure you speak English well and are very keen on participating in the programme.

(Extract from Unit 4, page 42)

### Modernized culture as an alternative form of education

The third subtheme reflected evolving views on education, where alternative paths to success were gaining recognition, particularly relevant in today's job market, where specialized skills could be just as valuable as a traditional university degree. For Unit 7, the first mention of modernized culture was an education fair (Example 7). In this conversation, examples of modernized culture included university, vocational school, and a biology competition. Mai wanted to pursue a career as a scientist, which fit into the contemporary world of science regardless of gender. Nam, on the other hand, wanted to continue his family's car repair shop. Modernized culture was rooted in the belief in alternatives to formal education. In the contemporary world, there were more choices for everyone than just going to university after high school.

**Example 7:** Discussion of options after high school

**Ms. Hoa:** Good morning, class. There was an education fair last weekend, you know. Did anyone go?

**Nam:** That's true, but academic education isn't everything. The other option is going to a vocational school where we can learn skills for particular jobs.

**Mai:** I'm hoping to go to university. Having won several biology competitions, I want to study biology and become a scientist.

**Nam:** Well, I don't think university is for me. I want to go to a vocational school because I want to become a car mechanic. My father owns a car repair shop.

(Extract from Unit 7, page 76)

Modernized culture as the awareness of environmental issues

In the world with increasing environmental challenges, the last subtheme pinpointed the importance of sustainability and ecological awareness. In unit 10, Ms. Hoa asked Nam about his family trip to Cuc Phuong National Park over the weekend (Example 8). Due to the lack of trees in the city, families would choose to go to greener places for the weekend, which was a good example of modernized life in the city. The topic of ecosystems and discussion pattern were later situated in a modernized classroom in the city, where the environment was engaging for both teachers and students. The three of them then mentioned pollution and climate change, two of the most serious environment problems facing the world today.

**Example 8:** Nam's trip to Cuc Phuong National Park

**Ms. Hoa:** Nam, you went to Cuc Phuong National Park last weekend, didn't you?

**Mai:** What's an ecosystem, Ms. Hoa?

**Ms. Hoa:** That's right. Unfortunately, many ecosystems around the world are being lost, damaged, or destroyed because of climate change, pollution, and overuse of natural resources.

(Extract from Unit 10, page 110)

*Modernized culture in the visual layer*Modernized culture as a hustling and bustling world

In Figure 3, from Unit 1, all the elements belonged to the modern world. Items like fruits and vegetables that did not originate from tropical countries like Vietnam, and were typically found in supermarkets, along with dumbbells and fancy water bottles, emphasized a health-conscious attitude within a busy modern lifestyle.

**Figure 3**

*Visual Extract from Unit 1 (page 8)*



These items, typically available in supermarkets rather than local markets, highlighted the convenience of modern life. Dumbbells in the visuals indicated a commitment to regular exercise despite a busy schedule. Fancy water bottles further reinforced this health-conscious mindset. They were often seen as the reminder to stay hydrated when having a busy schedule. These aligned with the modern emphasis on health and wellness.

The theme of a hustling and bustling modern world was supported by the items depicted in Figure 4. The modern clothing and phone usage of the characters in the photos reinforced the ideas presented in the above conversation. The images and text worked together to emphasize that these serious challenges—bullying, peer pressure, and body shaming – continued to be significant in a contemporary setting.

**Figure 4***Visual Extract from Unit 9 (page 101)*Modernized culture as the need to become a global citizen

Figure 4 (below) helps to demonstrate modern concepts by showing the ASEAN flag and the AYVP program logo. Mai and Ms. Pang were also shown wearing appropriate attire for an international workplace. They were talking while sitting in a modern living room.

**Figure 5***Visual Extract from Unit 4 (page 42)*

These elements signaled a connection to global initiatives and the integration of modern values in professional settings. Mai and Ms. Pang were depicted wearing attire that aligned with the international workplace dress code, reflecting the professionalism and cultural awareness expected in such environments. The incorporation of culturally significant clothing in a modernized style demonstrated not only respect for heritage but also adaptability to global standards. This balance tied the clothing to both cultural pride and modern workplace norms.

### Modernized culture as an alternative form of education

Within Unit 7, the images below (Figure 6) support the contemporary career choice made by Mai and Nam.

#### **Figure 6**

*Visual Extract from Unit 7 (page 76)*



The laboratory setting visually represented the cutting-edge nature of Mai's chosen field. In contrast, the male mechanics were shown working on cars in a garage, which highlighted the hands-on experience Nam was aiming for. Interestingly, the mechanics were depicted wearing workshop jumpsuits, a choice that contrasted with typical Vietnamese garage attire, where more casual or functional clothing was usually worn, reflecting a more globalized or idealized image of the profession. Together, these visuals not only illustrated the characters' individual career choices but also highlighted broader cultural themes such as tradition versus modernity, gender roles, and the evolving aspirations of younger generations in a rapidly changing world.

### Modernized culture as awareness of environmental issues

The image below (Figure 7) highlighted the human-nature interaction, emphasizing that protecting the planet was a global responsibility that required cooperation. By placing humans at the center of agency, it suggested that human beings were not passive observers but active participants in environmental stewardship. The hands actively holding the Earth inspired empowerment, urging people to take action and contributed to positive environmental change.



**Figure 7**

*Visual Extract from Unit 10 (page 110)*

**5. Discussion and Implications**

In the conversations from the ten Getting Started sections of the *Global Success* Grade 11 textbook, native speaker culture was depicted mainly through adjacency pairs, without further cultural explanations. This contrasted with previous studies, which found that native speaker culture was dominant in textbooks (Kazemi et al., 2017; Xiong & Qian, 2011; Zhang & Song, 2022). The current analysis revealed that cultural exchanges in the textbook dialogues primarily followed fixed adjacency pairs, lacking the varied communication strategies found in real-world interactions between native and non-native speakers. Moreover, similar to Tran and Yeh (2020), the lack of context or explanation limited students' understanding of native speaker culture, potentially causing misunderstandings and reinforcing stereotypes.

Vietnamese culture appeared less frequently in the textbook but was portrayed in greater depth. This aligned with findings from Nomnian (2013) who observed a deeper representation of Thai culture in locally produced textbooks, and Le (2018) who noted the inclusion of local wisdom in EFL materials. Common themes in the depiction of Vietnamese culture included family values, respect for teachers and elders, and the absorption of wisdom from previous generations, elements that are central to Vietnamese society (Le, 2018). While these local cultural elements help students understand their heritage, the global role of

English calls for broader cultural perspectives, prompting textbooks to incorporate more materials related to modern global culture.

The Getting Started sections of the Grade 11 *Global Success* textbook suggested an influence of modern culture. Integrating modern concepts into language education has its unique benefits. This approach can help students associate the English language with a modern perspective. In this textbook, exposing students to technological tools like computers and smartphones aligned with Seidlhofer's (2004) perspective on English as a lingua franca, which considers English as a bridge for international communication across diverse contexts. In this way, students are prepared for international environments. Additionally, global themes such as environmental issues and gender equality prepare students for discussions on significant global topics. These modernized themes found in the textbook expanded students' worldview and aligned with Baker's (2015) assertion that English learners must engage with English from modern perspectives to become informed global citizens (Baker, 2015).

However, there are also some significant concerns. The textbook's portrayal of modernized culture was primarily through urban life and advanced technology. According to Seidlhofer (2011), there is the risk of overemphasizing Western-centric or urban norms, which may alienate learners from less affluent backgrounds who cannot relate to such experiences. In the case of the Grade 11 textbook, Vietnamese students who came from rural areas or less economically stable backgrounds lacking access to modern gadgets like phones or laptops may feel marginalized. Baker (2015) also warns against the potential materialism associated with this focus on technology, which can foster a mindset that equates success in learning English with owning the latest devices. This approach might inadvertently create a sense of inadequacy among students who cannot afford these tools, leading to exclusion rather than inclusion.

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that learning a language is intrinsically linked to learning its culture, as highlighted by Kramsch (1998). The introduction of modern culture in language education without distinguishing it from local culture can threaten the preservation of local cultural elements, which are often maintained through oral traditions. This shift can alter the fabric of local culture, leading to a dilution of unique cultural identities in favor of a more homogenized, modern narrative (Crystal, 2003). As the influence of English as a dominant language strengthens, the risk of overshadowing local cultural expressions becomes more pronounced, potentially leading to the erosion of local languages and customs. This modern perspective on language teaching must therefore balance global themes with respect for local cultural heritage to ensure that students appreciate and retain the richness of their own identities while engaging with the broader world.

To make textbooks more relevant, teachers can address the focus on modern culture, which may overlook rural students' experiences. By incorporating local cultural elements and encouraging discussions on their importance, teachers help students connect with their culture and question the dominance of modernized themes. This approach enhances students' sense of belonging and introduces more authentic language use, better preparing them for real-world communication. Moreover, with English serving as the gateway to international communication, this textbook can help students from both rural and urban areas engage with international issues while remaining aware of their own local culture. Students need to value their cultural heritage, but to be global citizens, they also need to be informed about modern culture.

English in Vietnam is often linked to a modern perspective due to its societal status (Hoang, 2020). While understandable, this study highlighted the need for regular cultural analysis in textbooks. This could involve regular reviews and updates to the content, incorporating feedback from educators, students, and cultural experts. Conducting studies similar to this one can also be a vital step in

validating the content of EFL textbooks. Preliminary readings during this study also revealed that the teacher's book lacked sections aimed at raising teachers' awareness of cultural representation within the textbook. Adding notes about cultural dominance in the teacher's guide and incorporating more interactive tasks and real-life language could improve lesson relevance and authenticity.

The emphasis on modern settings in English education reflects its status in today's globalized world, which is important for preparing students for contemporary challenges. However, curriculum designers should provide clearer guidelines on cultural values to include in EFL textbooks, emphasizing diverse English speakers and promoting effective communication rather than native-speaker norms. This approach can challenge native-speakerism, fostering inclusivity and recognizing the global diversity of English use. To ensure balanced cultural representation, mechanisms such as regular content reviews, feedback incorporation, and research-based evaluations of cultural portrayals in textbooks are crucial. These practices can guide textbook publishers in creating culturally sensitive materials, reducing stereotypes, and fostering respect for diverse perspectives. Additionally, policies on cultural representation would serve as valuable tools for authors and teachers, raising awareness and enabling the development of textbooks that integrate language learning with cultural understanding, thereby better preparing students for a globalized world.

## **6. Limitations**

The scope of this study was limited to analyzing the Getting Started section, which, while offering consistent inclusion of texts and visuals, may limit the findings' generalizability. However, the qualitative approach provided a nuanced understanding of cultural representation through characters and content, revealing interactions and interpretations that might be overlooked in purely quantitative studies. Despite challenges with generalizability, this mixed-method analysis balanced systematic coding with in-depth exploration, effectively uncovering the complex layers of cultural representation in the textbook.

Additionally, the study did not incorporate empirical data to explore how students formed cognitive images of the cultural content, as this extends beyond the research scope. Future studies should investigate these cognitive processes and include the perspectives of stakeholders such as textbook authors, teachers, and students to provide a holistic understanding of how EFL textbooks function in educational settings.

The term “modernized culture,” coined in this research, reflects a culture in flux, emphasizing its evolving nature. This progression calls for further research to examine how modern cultural elements are represented in EFL textbooks and what implications they have for fostering learners’ global and local cultural awareness. As cultures continue to change, such studies will be crucial for ensuring textbooks remain relevant and inclusive.

## **7. Conclusion**

Modernized culture emerges as a dominant theme in the ten Getting Started sections of the *Global Success* Grade 11 textbook, reflecting English’s alignment with urban and contemporary lifestyles. However, this study revealed a critical gap—the underrepresentation of rural perspectives—which risks alienating students from less urbanized backgrounds. For English to truly be a tool of empowerment, it must reflect the diverse realities of its learners. Ensuring rural students see their experiences represented is not just a matter of inclusion, but a step toward bridging socio-cultural divides within Vietnam.

Additionally, this research emphasized the important role of teachers in contextualizing and critically engaging with textbook content. While the textbook provides a foundation, it is teachers who can challenge stereotypes, address cultural biases, and promote deeper discussions about modernized culture and its intersections with local identities. Through such efforts, educators can help students develop intercultural competence, fostering respect for both local heritage and global diversity.

Although the *Global Success* textbook contributes to English education by engaging students with global issues, this study highlighted the need for collaborative efforts between curriculum developers, teachers, and cultural experts. These stakeholders must ensure that textbooks evolve to reflect a balanced portrayal of modernized culture, native speaker culture, and Vietnamese culture. By doing so, EFL materials can become tools that not only teach English but also empower Vietnamese students to navigate the complexities of the modern world while appreciating their cultural roots.

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