

EFL TEACHERS' PRACTICE OF THE CULTURE SECTION IN GLOBAL SUCCESS COURSEBOOKS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN HA LONG CITY HIGH SCHOOLS

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***Abstract:** The global dominance of English has shifted the focus of English Language Teaching (ELT) from purely linguistic skills to the integration of Cultural Awareness (CA) and Intercultural Awareness (ICA). Although textbooks like Vietnam's Global Success series were introduced to align with international standards and foster intercultural competence, Western-centric content remains prevalent, and a significant gap persists between teachers' positive perceptions and their actual classroom practices. This gap is driven by institutional challenges such as rigid curricula, time constraints, and insufficient training. By applying Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework, this article addresses a specific research gap, examining how high school teachers in Ha Long City interpret and implement the textbook's Culture Section to provide statistical insights and practical solutions for better cultural integration in the Vietnamese EFL context.*

Keywords: culture awareness, intercultural awareness, Culture section

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to comprehensively explore how educators perceive and utilize the cultural components of their curriculum. To achieve this, the research focuses on two primary objectives: examining teachers' perspectives on the specific cultural dimensions presented in the Global Success series and investigating their actual classroom practices, including how they adapt the material to overcome implementation challenges. Consequently, the study is guided by two central research questions that address both the pedagogical beliefs of the teachers and the practical application of the Culture Section in a real-world high school setting. Therefore, the study addresses two pivotal research questions:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the cultural dimensions within the Global Success series?
2. How do they address these sections within the specific pedagogical environment of Ha Long City high schools?

The inquiry is predicated on the theoretical stance that language teaching is culture teaching. Without a sophisticated understanding of the values and traditions shaping language use, students are ill-equipped for global integration.

II. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Literature Review

When evaluating cultural elements in EFL materials, researchers focus on cultural dimensions and pedagogical effectiveness. Cultural representation should ideally balance

source culture (the learner's own), target culture (English-speaking countries), and international culture. However, many textbooks exhibit an imbalanced representation, often prioritizing Western norms or presenting non-Western societies through simplified stereotypes. Effective cultural content should move beyond "Big C" culture (history and arts) to include "little c" culture, such as daily habits and social etiquette, to foster true intercultural competence.

2.1.1. Pedagogical Effectiveness and Adaptation

A well-designed textbook should align with established frameworks like the CEFR and integrate the four language skills, including: listening, speaking, reading, and writing into meaningful, real-world tasks. Because there is no coursebook fits every classroom perfectly, teachers must act as curriculum developers, adapting materials to meet the specific needs of learners.

2.1.2. The Global Success Series and Research Gaps

The Global Success series, developed for the Vietnamese national curriculum, includes a dedicated Communication and Culture/CLIL section. This section aims to develop intercultural competence through everyday English, cultural essays, and comparative analyses. Despite these aims, researches indicate that Vietnamese EFL teachers face significant implementation challenges, including time constraints, lack of specialized training, and a lack of in-depth

instructional guidelines. Existing studies have largely focused on university contexts or general textbook analysis, leaving a research gap regarding the practical implementation of the Culture Section in Vietnamese high schools. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how teachers in Ha Long City interpret and adapt these cultural elements in their daily practice.

2.2. Methodology

The study employed a Sequential Explanatory Design, validating its rigor by using qualitative interviews to explain the statistical trends found in the quantitative data.

This research utilizes a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, the researcher collects and analyzes survey questionnaire data from 96 EFL teachers to gain a broad understanding of the research problem and identify specific areas requiring further investigation, such as developing an interview guide. In Phase 2s, the researcher conducts semi-structured interviews to refine, explain, and elaborate on the initial statistical results, concluding with an interpretation of how the qualitative findings deepen the quantitative insights.

2.2.1. Research Setting and Participant Pool

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to ensure high data reliability. For the quantitative phase, a census approach was used to survey the entire population of 96 high school EFL teachers across public and private institutions in Ha Long City. The research

instrument: a three-part questionnaire based on an established theoretical frameworks, was also pre-tested in a pilot study with six local teachers to refine clarity. Internal consistency was validated using Cronbach's Alpha, maintaining a threshold coefficient of $\alpha=0.70$. Concurrently, for the qualitative phase, a purposive subset of 10 teachers was selected for semi-structured interviews based on their experience and willingness to participate. Interview data underwent transcription, member checking for participant verification, and thematic analysis to identify core themes and sub-themes. Finally, the separate quantitative and qualitative results were triangulated, cross-referencing statistical data with participant narratives to provide a validated, comprehensive understanding of classroom practices regarding the Culture Section.

2.2.2. Sampling and Participant Selection

For the quantitative phase, a census approach was applied, inviting all 96 EFL teachers across 12 public and private high schools currently implementing the Global Success textbook series. Based on the sample size formula for an unknown population, this number achieves a 95% confidence level, accurately representing the city's high school educational landscape while avoiding convenience sampling bias. Subsequently, for the qualitative phase, a purposive subset of 10 teachers was selected for semi-structured interviews. Participants were chosen based on their teaching experience and willingness to provide deeper insights.

				N=96	
Variable			Number	Percentage	
Gender	Male		9	9.4	
	Female		85	88.5	
	Not reveal		2	2.1	
Years of practice					
<5 years			34	35.4	
5 years			16	16.7	
From 6 to 10 years			35	36.5	
>10 years			11	11.5	
Education					
Bachelor			67	69.8	
Master			28	29.2	
Ph.D			1	1	
Types of school					

Private			38	39.6
Public			58	60.4
Received training in teaching cultural elements				
Yes			49	51
No			47	49

Table 1 Backgrounds of participants

2.2.3. Instrument Development and Testing

The questionnaire was developed based on Ariawan (2020) and Cortazzi & Jin (1999) to assess demographics, teachers' perspectives on cultural dimensions in the Global Success series, and their pedagogical practices. To ensure validity and clarity, the instrument was piloted with six high school teachers in Ha Long City. Additionally, its internal consistency was statistically verified using Cronbach's Alpha, adhering to a minimum reliability benchmark of 0.70.

2.2.4. Qualitative Data Analysis and Coding

Employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, this study concurrently analyzed quantitative survey data from 96 teachers using SPSS and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers via thematic analysis. By merging and cross-referencing these independent findings through data convergence, the researcher leveraged nuanced qualitative insights to elaborate on and validate broader statistical trends. This triangulation enhanced the study's internal validity, providing a comprehensive dual-track approach that effectively captured both the general perspectives of the teacher population ("what") and the contextual realities of their classroom practices ("how" and "why").

2.3. Instrumentation

2.3.1. Survey Questionnaire

The primary quantitative instrument was a questionnaire administered to 96 EFL teachers, featuring distinct scales designed to quantify pedagogical attitudes and practices:

- 5-point Likert Scale: Used to assess teachers' perspectives on the cultural dimensions in the Global Success series, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5).

- 4-point Likert Scale: Applied to the section investigating implementation challenges, ranging from "Not at all challenging" (1) to "Very

challenging" (4). This forced-choice format was selected to eliminate neutral responses and elicit definitive data on practical obstacles.

- Supplementary Items: Multiple-choice questions were included to identify dominant cultural themes (e.g., festivals, history), alongside Yes/No questions to detect potential cultural stereotypes.

2.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

To capture nuanced insights into teachers' pedagogical reasoning and classroom behaviors, this study utilized semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Guided by a pre-determined, open-ended protocol, this format ensured consistency while offering the flexibility to probe individual responses. The qualitative process followed a rigorous path to guarantee data quality. All interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To establish trustworthiness, member checking was employed by returning transcripts to participants for accuracy verification. Finally, the narrative data underwent thematic coding to identify common pedagogical strategies and challenges. These qualitative findings were subsequently used to triangulate and explain the broader statistical trends derived from the quantitative survey.

2.4. Findings and Discussion

2.4.1. Teachers' Perspectives: The Ideological Consensus (RQ1)

The findings reveal a near-unanimous ideological consensus among educators regarding the importance of culture in English Language Teaching. Quantitatively, teachers expressed a strong belief that language and culture are inseparable, viewing cultural instruction as essential for developing students' Intercultural Communicative Competence. Teachers argued that in the era of globalization, English serves as a "global lingua franca." Therefore, teaching

is no longer just about grammar and vocabulary; it is about equipping students to navigate diverse cultural values and traditions. This perspective

aligns with the theoretical framework of Byram (2020), emphasizing that learners must become intercultural mediators.

Cultural Representation	M	%N	D	SD
Not effective	2.868	0%	-1.868	≈0.493
Less effective		19.8%	-0.868	
Fair		74%	0.132	
Effective		6.3%	1.132	
Very effective		0%	2.868	

Table 2 Teachers' evaluations on Culture Section

According to the survey data, 74% rated the textbook's cultural integration as "Fair" (3/5), indicating that while cultural elements are present, they lack depth and quality. Very few teachers

rated it highly, leading to a consensus that the book requires significant improvement and forces instructors to regularly supplement lessons with external materials.

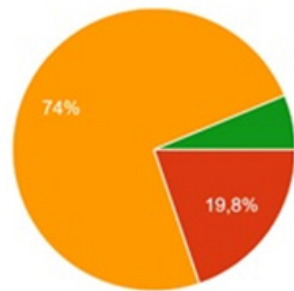


Figure 1. Teacher's ranking of the Culture section
Legend: 1 - Not effective 2 - Less effective 3 - Fair 4 - Good 5 - Very good

2.4.2. Representation and Bias: Stereotypes and Trivia

The study found a high level of concern regarding how cultures are depicted, with 80.2% of teachers identifying stereotypical or rigid portrayals in the Culture Section.

Qualitative interviews revealed a strong Western-centric bias, with teachers noting that the book often ignores the diverse global contexts where English is spoken. Participants criticized the book for focusing on a trivia-based approach to "Big C" culture (history and traditions) rather than deep cultural understanding.

2.4.3. The Paradox of Choice: Syllabus Pressure vs. Content Quality

While a majority of surveyed teachers (59.4%) express general satisfaction with the Global Success Culture Section, comprehensive data reveals that strict curriculum time constraints remain the greatest barrier to its effective implementation. To overcome these limitations and address fluctuating student engagement, 70% of interviewed teachers actively modify or supplement the textbook with interactive,

comparative activities. Conversely, the remaining 30% strictly adhere to the static syllabus to avoid falling behind schedule. Ultimately, the combined survey and interview insights highlight a critical tension between teachers' resource preferences, the demand for more instructional time, and rigid institutional pacing constraints.

2.5. Teachers' Practices: Pedagogical Agency in Action (RQ2)

Driven by a textbook culture section often rated as only "Fair," 93.8% of teachers actively adapt or supplement their materials, shifting their role from textbook transmitters to autonomous curriculum developers.

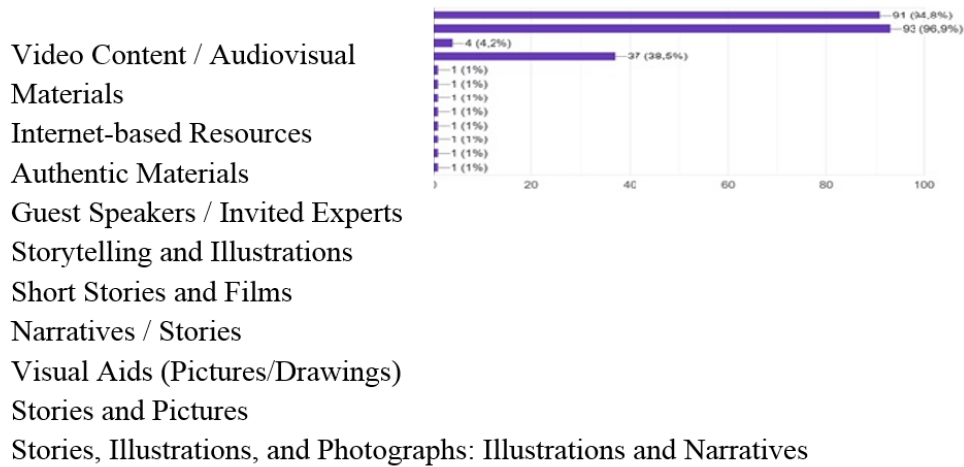
Digital Sourcing: To inject real-world context into static lessons, an overwhelming majority rely on the Internet (94.8%) and videos (96.9%).

Teachers heavily favor high-engagement methods, with 97.9% using group discussions and 70.8% employing project-based learning.

Due to strict linguistic syllabus pressures and a lack of scheduling flexibility, external resources like guest speakers are virtually non-existent (4.2%).

Figure 2. Which sources do you utilize to supplement your pedagogical knowledge?

Total Respondents: N = 96



Teachers exercise agency by circumventing the textbook's raw or trivia-based reading passages, which they feel often lead to student disengagement. Instead of following the book page-by-page, they swap out standard exercises for experiential activities like role-plays and research projects to ensure students gain a more meaningful and practical understanding of culture.

III. CONCLUSION

The Global Success series provides a foundational structure, yet the study proves that material alone cannot foster true Intercultural Awareness.

In summary, while teachers perceive cultural integration as crucial in ELT, they rate the effectiveness of the Global Success "Culture Section" as only fair, indicating substantial room for improvement. To address these material limitations, most educators frequently modify or supplement the textbook content, demonstrating a need for greater pedagogical flexibility. In practice, this adaptation relies heavily on supplementary resources, with video materials and the Internet being the most utilized media.

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