

An Investigation of Cultural Aspect in New English File

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Abstract

The incorporation of cultural instruction into language classes has become more widespread. This study aims to explore the perspectives of both teachers and students concerning the teaching and learning of "culture" through English language coursebooks. To collect data, interviews were conducted with 12 English instructors and 95 students of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City (UMP). The insights gathered from both educators and learners are anticipated to play a crucial role in raising awareness about the significance of cultural education. Furthermore, it is expected that these perspectives will contribute to the enhancement of intercultural competence through the utilization of coursebooks. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding how culture is integrated into language education and how it can be a valuable component in fostering a deeper understanding of both language and cultural nuances among students.

Keywords: culture, culture teaching, intercultural competence, English language coursebooks

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1. Introduction

In the global context, it is obvious that the English language plays a vital role in many cross-cultural exchanges around the world. This is particularly evident in countries like Vietnam, which have recently embraced globalization through initiatives such as joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). For this reason, Vietnamese have more opportunities than ever to meet and communicate with non-Vietnamese. Therefore, a focus on language teaching trend should be paid special attention because the integration of cultural awareness into language teaching has emerged as a critical aspect of English language education. Language learners of English need not only linguistic competence but also a good grasp of cultural awareness to communicate effectively and successfully across diverse cultures and societies. Thus, culture has become an increasingly important component of English language teaching in recent times. In providing L2 learners with this knowledge, textbooks are one of the main and important sources to shape language learning experiences and facilitate cultural understanding.

This study aims to examine the extent to which cultural aspects are incorporated into the New English File, a currently used textbook for first-year Pharmacy students at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. By investigating the presence and depth of cultural content within the New English File, this research seeks to shed light on the significance of integrating culture into the language learning and teaching process. Through this exploration, the author aims to discern the impact of cultural awareness on the development of students' language skills and their ability to engage effectively in cross-cultural communication in today's interconnected world.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of culture

As we know, culture is defined in many different ways. The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1997, 7th impression: 94) defines culture as "the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behavior, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society". According to Kramsch, culture is "(1) Membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting; (2) the discourse community itself; and (3) the system of standards itself" (Kramsch, 1998). Another definition of culture from The National Center for Cultural Competence is that culture is an "integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations" (Goode, Scokalingam, Brown & Jones, 2000).

Generally speaking, it is difficult to give an exact definition of culture. However, to some extent, culture is defined as patterns of living which consists of the behaviors and the rules underlying these behaviors as well.

2.2. The significance of culture in language teaching

The definitions above point out that language is not only a part of culture, it also reflects culture. It is considered

a primary component of language as well as a facilitator to explain or express culture. We cannot learn some lessons about celebrations or costumes of the area in which the language is spoken and think that it is enough to know about culture. Instead, cultural knowledge should be tightly associated with linguistic knowledge of language in all second language classes. The following are ways in which language reflects and embodies cultural norms, values, beliefs, and identity:

Vocabulary and Lexicon: The words and vocabulary present in a language often reflect the cultural context in which it is spoken. For example, languages spoken in regions with distinct climates or landscapes may have specific terms related to local flora, fauna, or geographical features. Additionally, languages often contain words that reflect cultural practices, traditions, and societal structures unique to a particular culture. In the New English File textbook, you might find examples related to the cultural reflection of language in various contexts like this. A unit on travel and geography might include words like "outback" in Australia or "moor" in the UK, reflecting the distinct landscapes of these regions. Another example could be vocabulary related to food and cuisine, which often reflects cultural preferences and practices. The textbook might include terms like "sushi" from Japan, "taco" from Mexico, or "curry" from India, demonstrating how language is intertwined with culinary traditions. Furthermore, exploring vocabulary related to nature and the environment can also illustrate cultural connections. For instance, the word "tsunami" from Japanese demonstrates how languages incorporate terms specific to natural phenomena or landscapes found in different cultures.

Grammar and Syntax: The grammatical structures and syntax of a language can reflect cultural priorities and perspectives. For instance, some languages place a strong emphasis on politeness and hierarchy in their grammar, reflecting cultural values of respect and deference. For example, a section on formal vs. informal language in the textbook could demonstrate how different languages have distinct grammatical forms to express levels of formality.

Idioms and Expressions: Idioms, proverbs, and expressions are deeply rooted in cultural contexts and often convey cultural wisdom, beliefs, and experiences. Understanding and using these linguistic expressions require familiarity with the cultural nuances and historical background from which they originate. In the New English File textbook, examples related to idioms, proverbs, and expressions rooted in cultural contexts may be found in various sections focusing on language usage, communication skills, or cultural insights. The textbook includes exercises or activities that introduce common English idioms and expressions along with their meanings and origins. For instance, a unit on daily life or social interactions might feature idiomatic expressions like "raining cats and dogs" or "kick the bucket," along with explanations of their cultural origins and usage. Or a unit on British culture might discuss idioms like "keep calm and carry on" or "a penny for your thoughts," providing cultural context for learners.

Pragmatics and Communication Styles: The ways in which language is used in communication, including politeness strategies, turn-taking norms, and conversational conventions, vary across cultures. These differences in pragmatic aspects of language reflect cultural norms regarding social interaction, hierarchy, and interpersonal relationships. In the New English File textbook, examples related to pragmatics and communication styles may be found in sections focusing on interpersonal communication, functional language use, or cultural awareness. Within the units dedicated to functional language use in various contexts, such as greetings, making requests, or giving feedback, learners could be introduced to different politeness strategies and conversational conventions used in English-speaking cultures. For instance, they might learn phrases like "Could you please..." or "Thank you for your help," along with explanations of their pragmatic implications and cultural appropriateness.

Language Variation and Dialects: Languages exhibit variation and dialectal differences based on regional, social, and historical factors. These variations often reflect cultural diversity and the influence of historical events, migrations, and social interactions on language development and usage. In the New English File textbook, examples related to language variation and dialects may be found in sections focusing on regional differences in English usage, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. The units could cover differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar among English-speaking regions, such as British English, American English, Australian English, etc. For example, learners might learn about British terms like "lorry" for "truck" or American terms like "elevator" for "lift."

Language Evolution and Change: Language is dynamic and continuously evolves over time. Changes in language, including the adoption of new words, shifts in pronunciation, and alterations in grammar, can reflect broader cultural shifts, technological advancements, and societal changes. Sections of the textbook may discuss contemporary language trends and changes in English usage. Learners could explore the adoption of new words and phrases, such as slang terms, neologisms, or loanwords from other languages, reflecting cultural shifts and technological advancements. For instance, they might learn about the emergence of tech-related terms like "selfie" or "emoji" in modern English.

Besides producing grammatical sentences correctly, language learners should be aware of the culturally appropriate ways to perform the functions of language such as how to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone (Peterson and Coltrane, 2003). Language learners should

understand that to communicate successfully, they should use the language appropriately in different cultural contexts. Therefore, cultural issues should be fully incorporated as a vital component in the curriculum to help learners completely succeed in speaking a second language.

In short, language and culture cannot be separated from each other in the process of learning if one wants to truly master a language. Embracing both language and culture in the learning process not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also fosters intercultural competence, empathy, and appreciation for diversity. By recognizing the inseparable connection between language and culture, learners can embark on a journey towards comprehensive language mastery and meaningful cross-cultural communication.

2.3. Cultural content in textbooks

It is not an easy task to select the appropriate textbook for different language learners. Among the criteria of choosing an ESL course book, cultural aspect, the fifth essential element in the teaching-learning process in foreign language classrooms or 'hidden curriculum' (Cunningsworth, 1995) plays a vital role in enhancing the language awareness of learning as well as positively affecting students' linguistic success in foreign language learning.

Traditionally, the teaching of culture is often related to the source cultures (C1), second cultures (C2) and third cultures (C3). C1 is the home culture of a particular speaker which influences his communication in L2. C2 is generally referred to the target cultures of the language but some other cultures are still included. C3 is not the source cultures nor the target cultures but the full range of cultures of people of different nationalities in the world. English is now a global language and most people are speaking English for communication using their own cultural styles. In other words, people use English but bring their C3 to the communicative context.

An analysis of English language textbooks around the world reveals that the schema of C1, C2, and C3 accounts for the cultural content of the textbooks and locates them in different time stages of the development of global awareness (Cortazzi & Zin, 1999a). The category of C3 cultural content is obviously seen in many ESL books in which textbook characters from all around the world use English as a global language. This kind of textbooks seems more appropriate for the global classroom because it makes little sense to focus on only one culture in textbooks and materials in the current context. However, the ideal is the combination of C1, C2, and C3 features in the materials in a global perspective (Cortazzi, 2000).

As for the content of culture instruction to be taught to L2 learners, various suggestions were made from researchers and organizations. Chastain (1988) lists important topics for culture teaching such as personal needs, food, education, weddings, and money. In a different way, Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) developed topics for culture teaching with no concern for order of importance or progression: social identity (groups characterized by social class, ethnic minorities), social interaction at different levels of familiarity, belief and behavior (patterns of everyday life, usually taken for granted), socio-political institutions (institution of the state and of socialization such as ceremonies, local government), national history and geography (historical events, geographical places), media (TV, newspaper, radio), arts (literature, cinema), language variation (Black English, Cockney, here the main focus is on language is presented). By this classification, both formal culture or large C culture (including art, music, literature, architecture, technology, politics) category and deep culture or small c culture (focusing on behavioral patterns or lifestyles of the people) category are covered in different sections of the set of instructional materials.

Interestingly, Harumi (2002) believes that the traditional dichotomy between large C culture and small c culture is not completely valid as cultural contents to teach in English classrooms nowadays any more. He proposed a new framework of culture teaching in which culture is divided into three components: culture around language, culture in language and culture through language. Culture around language is realized as people's behavior and for L2 learners this is considered valuable experience to be exposed to foreign culture. Nowadays, as English has become a global language, culture around language is mainly culture around English although culture around other languages should not be excluded. In Japanese context, customs and habits of English – speaking people such as Halloween and Christmas have long been introduced to students especially children and young learners. Verbal communication such as eye-contacts and handshakes and debating are good examples of cultural experience that Japanese students should be aware of. The case is the same for Vietnamese learners of English.

Culture in language is defined as people's thought patterns and it is taught as a normal school subject to L2 learners. In the context of English education, culture in English is focused. Some examples of typical thought patterns of English – speaking people which are different from Japanese thought patterns are personal pronouns such as I and you in conversation or culturally loaded vocabulary items such as brother, sister. More complicatedly in the appropriate way of addressing people in a conversation, Vietnamese has a variety of words such as "anh", "chị", "em", "chú", "bác", "cô", "đì", "cậu", "mợ", etc.

Lastly, culture through language is culture as embodied in cultural information in cross-cultural communication. This will be a target in L2 classrooms when L2 is considered a medium of learning and

communication. In the context of teaching English as a global language, culture through language, according to the writer, can refer to culture through English (L2) and to culture through Japanese.

In the area of the teaching content of the fifth element of the language, a valuable finding by McKay (2005) reveals that most of English Learners in Expanding Circle Countries including Vietnam, where English is widely studied as a foreign language, use English to achieve a basic understanding of the message. Therefore, the curricula should have the following focus: (1) repair strategies such as asking for clarification and repetition, rephrasing, and allowing waiting time should be introduced and practiced, (2) students should have a knowledge of a variety of conversational gambits such as “well”, “so”, “I think”, “I see”, and “ah” to indicate that the listener is listening to his conversational partner or routines such as expressing disagreement, managing turn-taking, and taking leave, (3) students should understand different pragmatic norms of various cultures such as the way to receive a compliment to help learners recognize that L2 speakers they interact with may have very different expectations from their own, (4) students should be free to express their own pragmatic norms but should be aware that these differ from the listener’s and may cause cross-cultural misunderstandings.

2.4. When to teach culture in a language classroom?

It is suggested that the study of culture should begin on the very first day of class and keep going after that. Cultural content should be included in the instructional materials right at the elementary level and should not be postponed until students have greater language competence because language is part of culture and vice versa.

In the traditional framework of language teaching, as outlined by Chastain (1988), there exists a sequential approach to integrating cultural content into the curriculum. Chastain recommends prioritizing the introduction of “small c” culture topics before delving into “large C” culture.

“Small c” culture encompasses everyday social behaviors, customs, and communication patterns that are observable in daily interactions. This includes elements such as greetings, facial expressions, body language (kinesics), and other non-verbal communication cues. These aspects of culture are often universal or widely applicable across different cultural contexts. According to Chastain’s framework, introducing learners to “small c” culture provides them with a foundation in understanding basic social norms and communication practices. Mastery of these fundamental aspects of culture enables learners to navigate interpersonal interactions more effectively and build rapport with speakers of the target language.

Once learners have a grasp of “small c” culture, Chastain suggests gradually introducing “large C” culture topics. “Large C” culture refers to broader cultural concepts, such as history, traditions, values, beliefs, and societal norms, which are specific to a particular cultural group or community. These topics require a deeper level of cultural understanding and may vary significantly between cultures.

By sequencing cultural content in this manner, Chastain’s approach aims to scaffold learners’ cultural competence, starting with basic social conventions and gradually progressing to more complex cultural concepts. This sequential progression allows learners to develop a nuanced understanding of both “small c” and “large C” culture, thereby enhancing their ability to engage meaningfully in cross-cultural communication and interaction.

Sharing the same point of view with Chastain, Harumi (2002), in his new culture framework, states that in the elementary stage, culture around language should be the main focus. Students should be exposed to different types of culture around languages through various activities to help them become aware of the existence of different cultures and different viewpoints. In the intermediate level, students should mainly focus on culture in English to recognize the relationship between individual English expressions and typical thought patterns of English-speaking people. In the advanced stage, English is considered a medium of communication. A variety of cultural contents should be introduced to students so that they can realize that English is a valuable tool to communicate cultural information as well as to learn about different countries in the world.

In a few words, there is no need to wait until the learners have a good background of the language to provide them with cultural knowledge. Teachers should show them the cultural aspect of the new language right at the beginning level.

2.5. How to teach culture?

There are various effective methods for teaching foreign or second language culture, each aimed at fostering students’ understanding and appreciation of the target culture. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) advocate for a range of interactive tasks, such as class discussions, research projects, and role-plays, utilizing materials sourced from English-speaking countries. These activities facilitate discussions, comparisons, and reflections on both English culture and the learners’ own cultural backgrounds.

To further enrich cultural sources for language teaching, Peterson and Coltrane (2003) propose a diverse array of instructional strategies. These include incorporating authentic materials like films, news broadcasts, and television shows, as well as utilizing online resources such as websites. Additionally, materials like photographs, magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, travel brochures, and printed materials can provide valuable insights into cultural practices and perspectives. Proverbs, role-playing exercises, culture capsules, and ethnographic

studies also offer engaging ways to explore cultural themes. Furthermore, integrating literature and film into language instruction can deepen students' understanding of cultural contexts and narratives.

In brief, offering students a variety of materials and activities beyond the confines of the textbook is essential for enhancing their comprehension of the new language and its associated culture. By engaging with authentic cultural sources and participating in interactive tasks, students can develop a richer understanding of the target culture and its significance within the broader context of language learning.

2.6. How to evaluate the cultural contents in ESL textbooks?

According to Kilickaya (2004), when using textbooks with cultural contents, teachers should be aware of the factors of socio-cultural factors, stereotypes, generalizations and intercultural communication.

Socio-cultural Factors: Teachers need to consider the socio-cultural context within which the language is being taught and learned. This includes understanding the cultural backgrounds and experiences of the students themselves, as well as the broader societal and cultural dynamics that may influence their perceptions and interactions. Tailoring cultural content to resonate with students' lived experiences can enhance their engagement and understanding.

Stereotypes and Generalizations: Stereotypes can be defined as “the conventionalized ways of talking and thinking about other people” (Kramsch, 1998:131). Stereotyping involves the assumption that all members of particular groups of people will think and behave identically, usually in a negative way. Therefore, when analyzing a course book, it is necessary to identify unrepresentative negative stereotypes. Teachers should exercise caution to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or oversimplifications of cultural identities within instructional materials. While cultural generalizations may provide a framework for understanding, they can also lead to misconceptions and reinforce biases. It is essential to present diverse and nuanced portrayals of culture that reflect its complexity and variability.

Intercultural Communication: Incorporating cultural content into language teaching provides an opportunity to promote intercultural communication skills among students. Teachers should encourage open dialogue and critical reflection on cultural differences, facilitating respectful and empathetic interactions across cultural boundaries. Emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness can foster mutual understanding and appreciation among students from diverse backgrounds.

In intercultural language learning, no specific culture but a variety of cultures should be focused in the curriculum to raise students' awareness of their own culture and help them to interpret and understand other cultures. By remaining mindful of these factors, teachers can effectively navigate the integration of cultural content into language instruction, fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. By promoting critical engagement with cultural material and facilitating intercultural communication, educators play a vital role in preparing students for meaningful interaction in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

3. Study design and Participations

Pharmacists are required to fulfill a five-year course at this university. It is a requirement for Vietnamese students at the universities to study a foreign language (mainly English). Therefore, English is one of the subjects that need to be included in the curriculum.

The students of a five-year program at UMP are required to follow three 3 - credit English courses: one general English (GE) in the first year and two ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in the second year. Although these students have completed high school and have some background of English, there is a big gap among their English proficiency because many of them come from the rural areas. Therefore, the general English courses play an important role in giving them a good background of general English so that they can learn the English terminology in their field of study easier in the following year. With a view to help students lay a solid foundation in English, the Intermediate New English File textbook is considered appropriate for GE courses and therefore selected for these students by the Department of Foreign Languages of UMP. The Intermediate textbook consists of seven units with each unit consisting of the following parts: grammar, vocabulary, skills work (reading, listening, speaking), practical English and writing. At the end of each unit, there is a Revise and Check exercise for consolidation.

Textbook Description

New English File Coursebook by Clive Oxenden and Christina Latham-Koenig is a multi-level New English series comprising of six books from beginner to advanced level for adults and young adults. Each level has one Student Book, one Workbook, one Teacher's Book, a photocopiable Teacher's Resource Book and CDs. The "New English File" (NEF), presently adopted as a primary course book in numerous universities, asserts its alignment with the Common European Framework (CEF). The CEF seeks to establish a shared foundation for the development of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, and related aspects across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001).

One significant aspect of the series is its inclusion of cultural content, which enriches the learning

experience by offering insights into the cultural contexts of English-speaking communities around the world. In "New English File," culture content is seamlessly integrated throughout the units, providing learners with opportunities to explore and understand the diverse cultural aspects associated with the English language. This cultural content serves multiple purposes:

Contextualization of Language: Cultural contexts are woven into language learning materials, allowing learners to understand how language is used in real-life situations. Dialogues, texts, and activities often feature culturally relevant scenarios, such as social interactions, travel experiences, and daily routines, helping learners grasp the cultural nuances of language use.

Cultural Insights and Comparisons: "New English File" offers cultural insights and comparisons that encourage learners to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds while expanding their understanding of English-speaking cultures. Through discussions, readings, and activities, learners explore various cultural topics, traditions, customs, and societal norms, fostering intercultural awareness and appreciation.

Language and Culture Integration: The series emphasizes the inseparable connection between language and culture, demonstrating how language reflects and shapes cultural identity. Idioms, expressions, and linguistic features are presented within their cultural contexts, enabling learners to not only acquire language skills but also gain deeper insights into cultural values, beliefs, and communication patterns.

Authentic Materials and Multimedia Resources: "New English File" incorporates authentic materials and multimedia resources, such as audio recordings, videos, and online activities, to provide learners with immersive cultural experiences. Authentic materials expose learners to real-world language use, while cultural content offers glimpses into the diverse cultural landscapes of English-speaking communities worldwide.

Overall, the culture content in "New English File" enhances the language learning journey by offering a rich tapestry of cultural insights, experiences, and perspectives. By exploring the cultural dimensions of language, learners develop not only linguistic proficiency but also intercultural competence, preparing them for meaningful engagement in an increasingly interconnected global society.

4. Findings

4.1. Data gathered from 95 students

A vast majority, 93.6% (89/95), emphasized the importance of incorporating cultural learning into language acquisition. They highlighted the value of meaningful communication and understanding societal norms and behaviors. Conversely, 6.4% expressed apprehensions regarding the potential risks associated with learning a culture through language.

A substantial majority, comprising 96.8% (92/95) of the students, are convinced that learning the culture of the target language through language acquisition brings numerous benefits. In contrast, a small minority, 3.2%, expressed the opinion that this approach could lead to a loss of personal identity.

A significant majority, accounting for 98.9% (94/95) of the students, affirmed that their course books impart knowledge about culture and cultural aspects. In contrast, 1.1% of the students suggested that the course books do not provide cultural information but instead offer a general understanding of the world.

The majority of students, specifically 94.7% (90/95), noted the presence of numerous sections in the coursebooks that incorporate cultural elements. Conversely, 5.3% of the students believed that the coursebooks lack any cultural components, such as conventions, customs, and beliefs.

4.2. Data gathered from 12 English instructors

Consensus among all instructors was reached on the acknowledgment that the coursebooks they employ incorporate various sections explicitly designed for teaching the culture and cultural aspects of the target language.

The viewpoint of 91.6% (11/12) of the instructors emphasizes the inseparability of social and cultural contexts from language. Consequently, they consider teaching culture as a fundamental component of coursebooks. On the contrary, 8.4% of the instructors suggested that students might compromise their national identity by acquiring cultural values associated with the target community during the learning process.

The majority of instructors, constituting 83.3% (10/12), expressed the opinion that coursebooks ought to include cultural instruction. In contrast, 16.7% of them believed that coursebooks should have a partial focus on teaching culture.

The viewpoint of 91.6% (11/12) of the instructors emphasized that teachers should complement coursebooks in cultural teaching by offering additional background information during courses to enhance awareness. In contrast, 8.4% of them asserted that teachers should refrain from playing a role in cultural teaching or supplying cultural information during the language teaching process.

5. Discussion

Throughout the textbook, we can see clearly that each lesson of the book is divided into different skills for

students to learn easily. Although culture is not a separate part to teach, it is obvious to see that culture is tightly associated with all of the other parts. Once the students learn the language, they learn the culture not only of that language (C2) but also the culture of different people around the world (C3) as well as their own culture (C1). This book is a good combination of C1, C2 and C3 with the characters from different countries. In addition to learning the culture of other people, Vietnamese students can also learn theirs through exercises and questions asking them to discuss with their partners or writing about their own culture. As Cortazzi (2000) suggests about an ideal textbook with the combination of C1, C2 and C3 in cultural aspects, New English File is considered to be the right one. That is why New English File book is a very popular book for language learning not only in public universities and language centers in Vietnam but in some other non-English speaking countries nowadays as well.

Different parts of the book consisting of the conversations, reading and listening texts supply students with a wide range of cultural knowledge. Therefore, students can be equipped with such awareness as the concept of seasons which are quite different in Vietnam, the understanding of special occasions in the world, the life and lifestyle of English speaking people and famous people in the world, cities and countries in different corners and so on.

In conversations, students are also exposed to gambits which language learners in Expanding Circle Countries including Vietnam should know as McKay (2005) finds out. As Vietnamese people don't have the habit of using conversational gambits, this part should be introduced to familiarize students with the way English speaking people often say.

To simplify the picture, this book has introduced a large amount of cultural knowledge which is very necessary for learners of English. This is to help learners recognize that once they learn the language, they learn the culture of that language as well as of the people who are using that language. Especially in the global context as today when English has become an international language, it is not necessarily just to know the culture of English speaking people but people around the world.

In terms of the significance of integrating culture into the language learning and teaching process, insights gleaned from student interviews revealed that the majority of learners have developed an understanding of the role and importance of culture in language classes. They recognize that language usage reflects the culture of its speakers and that learning a language alongside its culture enhances their intellectual breadth, worldview, and communicative skills. Some students even expressed that acquiring knowledge of the target culture helps them better understand their own cultural background. However, a small fraction of students expressed concerns about potentially losing their cultural values, viewing language learning as merely a job requirement.

Regarding English language coursebooks, students generally believe that these materials play a role in teaching culture, with a perceived multicultural approach. Nevertheless, some students noted a lack of information about their own country's culture in the coursebooks and expressed a desire to see more elements of Vietnamese culture included.

Teacher perspectives on teaching culture through coursebooks varied, with some emphasizing the interconnectedness of language and culture, while others were hesitant due to concerns about unexpected outcomes. Despite differing views, many teachers agreed on the importance of incorporating cultural competence in language teaching. Teachers also acknowledged that coursebooks explicitly aim to teach language alongside cultural values, enhancing lessons with a focus on "Social English" or "Practical English." Overall, both students and teachers recognize the inseparable relationship between language and culture in language teaching, emphasizing the need for a careful and sensitive approach to prevent misunderstandings and biases.

Implication for teaching

Vietnam is in a context of EFL countries where learners of English need to get intercultural understanding if they want to study or live in English speaking countries or to communicate in English more effectively in the working environment of the global society as today right in their own country. General speaking, to Vietnamese students, there are so many cultures to learn, thus one of the best approaches teachers can apply is the culture-general approach. This means a wide range of intercultural frameworks, not any particular culture, should be employed to offer learners an insight into cultural differences and similarities, the way to recognize racism, prejudice, non-verbal behavior, values and belief systems (Shibata, 1998).

In order to do so, a great number of activities should be carried out to achieve the best learning outcome. As analyzed above, New English File course book is the material presented with a lot of cultural features all over the lessons. What concerns most of language teachers is the techniques to teach such cultural content in the most effective way.

A wide range of activities recommended by Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) and Peterson and Coltrane (2003) in the literature review can be applied in different learning situations. Group discussion, project work and role-plays are very essential in activating students' schemata and then they can easily get a comparison about the similarities and differences of two various cultures. Rich and interesting sources of material such as films, authentic newspaper articles and photographs not only help to widen students' knowledge of the language they

are learning but bring about enthusiasm and interest in exploring the new culture.

Reading passages or authentic texts in the textbook may contain idiomatic expressions or proverbs within context. Learners could be encouraged to analyze these expressions in terms of their cultural significance and how they contribute to understanding the text as a whole. For instance, a short story or article might include idiomatic phrases that reflect the cultural values or beliefs of the characters or setting.

Writing exercises may prompt learners to incorporate idiomatic expressions or proverbs into their own writing, encouraging them to apply their understanding of cultural nuances and historical background. For example, learners might be asked to write a short story or dialogue that includes idiomatic expressions relevant to a specific cultural setting or theme. Or writing tasks may prompt learners to reflect on their own cultural communication styles and compare them to those of English-speaking cultures

Listening activities could feature recordings or dialogues showcasing different English dialects and accents, language evolution and change in action, different communication styles and pragmatic conventions. Learners could listen to speakers from various regions, different generations with different communication styles and identify differences in pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary. For instance, they might listen to speakers from Scotland, the United States, and South Africa to compare their accents and dialectal features. Or they might compare how older and younger speakers use language differently when discussing technology or social media.

Role-playing activities could be included to simulate real-life communication scenarios and practice pragmatic skills. Learners might engage in dialogues where they must navigate turn-taking norms and politeness strategies appropriate to different social contexts. For example, they could role-play a customer service interaction, a job interview, or a casual conversation among friends, adjusting their language and behavior accordingly.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the culture is an essential part in language learning and consequently, a good ESL textbook should contain cultural features so as to help learners master the foreign language thoroughly. In this respect, New English File is a good start for those who want to acquire another language. The material successfully covers both structural and cultural aspects of the language, aligning with the criteria for teaching a second or foreign language. New English File likely covers essential structural components of the English language, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). By providing comprehensive coverage of these elements, the material enables learners to develop a solid foundation in English language proficiency. This coursebook also integrates cultural content effectively, exposing learners to the cultural contexts associated with English-speaking communities. By incorporating cultural insights, comparisons, and authentic materials, the material enhances learners' understanding of cultural nuances and promotes intercultural awareness and communication skills. To sum up, New English File material enables learners to achieve their objectives in learning English. It offers a well-rounded and engaging language learning experience that prepares learners to navigate linguistic and cultural challenges effectively in diverse contexts.

Based on the study and own experience as a language learner and lecturer, the author can come to the conclusion that learning the cultural aspects of the English language offers students the opportunity to learn the language appropriately in different social contexts. In other words, they learn how to use the appropriate way to express themselves as well as use proper structures in various circumstances to become successful language learners. All in all, culture teaching via English language coursebooks has become not only widespread but also one of the disputable issues of language teaching and learning.

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