

Vietnamese indigenusness depicted in English 3 student books

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Abstract: This study aims at examining the Vietnamese indigenusness depicted in English 3 students' textbooks through the lens of cultural responsive teaching approach. Content analysis was applied to figure out the occurrence of indigenusness in both visual images and written texts, and to analyze the effectiveness of including indigenus culture in curriculum development and textbook design. The study's findings showed that English 3 textbooks are localized by employing Vietnamese characteristics with different roles directly related to the four main topics of the whole books. The Vietnamese indigenusness occurs far more frequently than the native English speaking depictions in both visual images and written texts throughout the two students' textbooks. The appearances of native English speaking depictions and ethnically neutral depictions along with the Vietnamese indigenusness also create a culturally diverse environment in which students may learn to recognize each other's merits, divergences, and thoughts.

Keywords: Indigenusness; content analysis; localize; culturally diverse environment.

1. Introduction

Textbooks play a significant role in curriculum content and teaching-learning process since they provide language teachers and students with concrete knowledge and ideas of what they could do inside and even outside classrooms. Notably, textbooks are products of particular discourse communities such as schools, institutions, or Ministry of Education and Training; therefore, they are shaped or affected by the socio-cultural conventional rules of that community. The meaningful and adequate textbooks as curriculum content may foster students' learning. However, the question is what would happen if students come to school and learn knowledge from textbooks that describe the world which they are not a part of, and present historical events and figures alien to them.

In Vietnam, in 2010, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) assigned a group of Vietnamese authors in collaboration with native authors from world leading publisher - MacMillan Education to design and publish a series of English textbooks from 3rd grade to 12th grade. The emphasis of this collaboration is to embed various cultures (English, American, Asian, etc.) and the indigenus culture into English textbooks to establish a connection between students' lived experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and at the same

time, raise students' consciousness of cultural divergences.

This study aims at examining Vietnamese indigenusness depicted in *English 3* students' textbooks through the lens of the cultural responsive teaching approach, thus answering the following research questions:

(1) *How much Vietnamese indigenusness are represented in visual images and written texts in English 3 students' textbooks?*

(2) *What is the effectiveness of including Vietnamese indigenus culture in these textbooks?*

2. Content

2.1. Literature reviews

Cultural responsive teaching (CRT) views cultural divergences as assets, builds up caring and supporting learning communities, in which "culturally different individuals and heritages are valued," and utilizes indigenus cultures and heritage knowledge of ethnically diverse groups to "guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students" (Gay, 2010). CRT maintains power balance in classrooms by embracing the heterogeneous traits among students, and at the same time, provides equitable learning opportunities to students from all

ethnic groups.

As demonstrated in the study on cultural responsive teaching of Gay (2010), textbooks are the most common and important source of curriculum content. There are a number of studies on curriculum and textbook design as well as the ethnicity and indigenouness depicted in these kinds of textbooks, such as Sleeter and Grant (1991); Grice and Vaughn (1992); Gay (2002, 2010); and Shin & Crook (2005); etc. Sleeter and Grant (1991) suggest that authors and publishers should pay enough attention to involve “real human experiences,” to determine “concepts, experiences, images and contributions” which are adequate to teach students from heterogeneous cultures. In offering further support for this view, Gay (2010) claims that to avoid the inadequacies of textbooks, “accurate, wide-ranging, and appropriately contextualized content about different ethnic groups’ histories, cultures, and experiences in classroom instruction on a regular basis” need to be inclusive. The findings of Bishop’s (1992), and Norton’s (1992) studies also indicate that teaching the literature including “characters, settings and events” identical to children’s lived experiences could improve their literacy achievement.

2.2. Methodology

* Description of English 3 students’ textbooks

English 3 includes 2 Student’s Books (volume 1 and 2), a Teacher’s book, a Workbook and 2 CDs. *English 3* Students’ Books consist of 20 units and 4 reviews; each unit is divided into three lessons. *English 3* Students’ Books are constructed basing on four main topics including *Me and My Friends*, *Me and My School*, *Me and My Family*, *Me and the World Around*, which are familiar to young learners. The communicative activities include.

* Data collection and analysis

The data under consideration were the visual images and written texts collected from *English 3* students’ textbooks. Content analysis method was employed to analyze the Vietnamese indigenouness depicted in two *English 3* textbooks. The researcher coded the data by labeling the relevant images, words, phrases, terms or sentences according to the Vietnamese indigenouness, and native English speaking depictions in both visual images and written texts within two textbooks. Coding was implemented by manually marking each occurrence

of Vietnamese indigenouness or native English speaking depiction represented in illustrations and texts. While coding the data, the researcher faced with the lack of certainty in deciphering the characters’ ethnicity in visual images and written texts. In order not to mislabel the ethnicity of these characters, the researcher categorized such characters as “Ambiguousness.” Then, the statistic results were consulted with the second researcher until both researchers agreed on 90% of the coding. Then, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the frequency of occurrences of each category through the lens of cultural responsive teaching approach to evaluate the effectiveness of involving indigenous culture and cultural heritage in teaching and learning English.

2.3. Findings and discussion

* Vietnamese indigenouness represented in visual images in English 3 students’ textbooks

The study’s finding reveals that the occurrence of Vietnamese indigenouness across visual images (56.37%) is considerably higher than that of native English speaking depictions, (22.94%), and that of ambiguous characters, (20,69%).

Particularly, the covers of textbooks are decorated with images of Vietnamese teachers and students; also, the following page introduces the Vietnamese (13 per 22) and foreign (9 per 22) characters who accompany students in diversified learning activities and tasks. Compared to their foreign counterparts, those characters with Vietnamese appearances and names are presented more frequently in each unit. The female teachers wear Ao Dai, and students are dressed with popular Vietnamese elementary uniforms. The presence of Vietnamese students and teachers in a large number of visual images reveals the writers’ intention of creating a familiar learning setting that allows 3rd grade students feel safe to deal with new linguistic knowledge. Additionally, the school settings such as tables and chairs, classrooms, school yards, school gates, school banners, the illustrations of houses, sceneries, some posters and even streets illustrated in the textbook are localized by employing Vietnamese characteristics. The plausible explanation for the great use of locality in *English 3* textbooks could rely on the findings of Grice and Vaughn (1992) that 3rd graders could find it less challenging when learning new language presented in textbooks through the things which are

not alien to their background knowledge.

Besides, the researchers found that each unit of the two textbooks represents depictions of both Vietnamese indigenous culture and native English speaking culture but at different levels. Some units consist of moderate levels of ambiguous, or ethnically neutral illustrations. The ambiguity including ethnically neutral depictions and the native English speaking representations appearing comparatively may provide 3rd graders with culturally diverse characteristics, thus raising their awareness of the differences across cultures .

* *Vietnamese indigenusness represented in written texts in English 3 students' textbooks*

Vietnamese indigenusness depicted in written texts takes up the highest share, (67.54%), whereas the proportion of native English speaking representations is significantly lower, (30.24%), and ambiguousness has the lowest percentages, (2.23%).

Specifically, the covers of two students' textbooks are localized not only by images of Vietnamese teachers and students, but also by several phrases written in Vietnamese such as Tiếng Anh 3 with big font size. Notably, there is only one occurrence of native English speaking representations that is MacMillan Education publisher with small font size arranged at the same line with VEPH. The decoration of textbook covers indicates that the authors's intention in employing the heritage language and cultural indigenusness would be to help students sense the familiarity at the first sight, and subsequently go on with new lessons with positive attitudes. Besides in the first unit of two textbooks, the native English-speaking characteristics are detected once in visual images and none in written texts, while Vietnamese depictions occur with high frequency (35 times in written texts). The repeated appearance of Vietnamese characters across this unit seems to provide more reasoning to the use of heritage language and indigenous culture to construct a safe and friendly learning environment . Throughout the next 19 units and 4 reviews, Vietnamese indigenusness consisting of Vietnamese characters school name in Vietnamese, Vietnamese festivals and holidays, and a number of famous cities and landscapes in Vietnam, is persistently presented with large proportion.

On the other hand, the occurrence of native English speaking representations increases gradually

in each unit. Native English speaking characters and their family members, etc. are presented mostly in Vietnamese school contexts, where they make conversation or exchange information with Vietnamese teachers and friends. The appearance of these culturally different characteristics across written texts helps create a diverse context for Vietnamese learners to get to know as well as acknowledge the divergence between their own culture and the culture, going well along with the language being learnt. This finding partly echoes the studies of Gay (2010) which emphasizes the significance of including cultures, experiences and historical events of diversified ethnic groups in textbooks. The authors in such cases tend to embed the divergent characters, situations and stories into the textbooks to raise students' consciousness of cultural diversity as they start to learn a new language, and also to bridge "the prior knowledge with the new knowledge, the know with the unknown, and the abstractions with the lived realities" (Gay, 2002).

3. Conclusion

Overall, *English 3* textbooks are localized by employing Vietnamese characteristics with different roles. Although the native English speaking depictions are moderately presented, the Vietnamese indigenous representations are in a dominant position in the written texts throughout two textbooks. The analysis of Vietnamese indigenusness under the light of cultural responsive teaching demonstrates that the local culture and heritage language could be useful to support 3rd graders practice their linguistic skills since they are learning English and using "English to communicate in the Vietnamese context" (Van, 2015).

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