



Integrating Local Cultural Factors into English 10 Lessons: An Action Research Study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 13 July 2026	The purpose of this action research was to examine how incorporating local culture into the “Communication and Culture” section in an English lesson would influence students’ engagement levels. The action research was conducted with tenth-grade students at a rural Vietnamese high school where the English textbook <i>Global Success</i> was used. Since the textbook featured only target culture content with little or no reference to local Vietnamese culture, students struggled to connect to the topics. The teacher-researcher followed a two-cycle process of action research, which consisted of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Sources of data collection included classroom observations, student questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and teacher reflective journals.
Corresponding Author: Ho Nhat Phuong	Results indicated an increase in student engagement, specifically behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The study found that active behavioral engagement doubled in the second cycle. Other positive changes included students feeling more confident when communicating and some students progressing towards deeper levels of description by comparing cultural values such as family relationships and traditional songs. Students felt the tasks were less difficult because they could share what they already know about their culture. Students also took on less of a learner role and more of a peer-like role when working with the teacher-researcher. The results of this study imply that the incorporation of local culture can be both feasible and successful in similar rural EFL contexts.
KEYWORDS: Local cultural content, Student engagement, Action research, Communication and Culture lessons, EFL teaching	

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English during the age of globalization has shifted from imparting grammar and vocabulary knowledge to facilitating learners’ ICC skills in order to become successful global communicators. For this reason, Vietnam’s English curriculum, General Education Curriculum 2018, accounts for global integration and national identity preservation during lessons. However, discrepancies may exist between curriculum and teaching English locally in rural areas of Vietnam. English 10 - Global Success textbook touches on various topics from different countries but may inadvertently treat Vietnamese culture as “add-on” or lack specificity in textbook content according to some teachers and students (Chuang, 2017). Students from rural schools may lack the ability to express their personal culture through English. This can cause learners to feel unmotivated and develop a disconnect with their own culture.

As a result, this study explores ways that factors of local culture could be explicitly infused into lessons themed

“Communication and Culture”. These lessons were taught at Hoa Lac High School, a rural school where students tend to have rich cultural backgrounds but are limited in finding opportunities to express their personal culture in English. Additionally, three research questions were formed to analyze this action research further by exploring how the action was taken and how students reacted to the insertion of local culture. This study used an action research method that consisted of two cycles. The results of this study will discuss the methods taken to implement culturally responsive teaching and how students reacted to this by showing their participation and development of ICC.

The purpose of this study is to have both theoretical significance and practical implications that may apply to ICC-driven lessons. Theoretically, this study implements Byram’s (1997) model of ICC in a real Vietnamese context by using students’ local culture as a gateway to understanding other cultures. Although not generalizable, this study may provide teachers that teach in rural areas

lessons learned on how to implement local culture into their lessons despite limitations. The results of this study have shown that local culture can be integrated into lessons and seemed to increase students’ participation and willingness to communicate. The rest of this paper will be broken down into following sections: Literature Review (section 2), Methodology (section 3), Results and Discussion (section 4), and Pedagogical Implications (section 5).

This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How does the integration of local cultural factors into Communication and Culture lessons in the English 10 - Global Success textbook enhance 10th graders’ intercultural communicative competence and classroom engagement?

RQ2. What are the key benefits and potential challenges of integrating local cultural factors into Communication and Culture lessons in the textbook English 10 - Global Success?

RQ3. How can pedagogical strategies be improved to enhance this cultural integration?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Culture and Intercultural Communicative Competence in EFL Teaching

Culture has been argued to be an indispensable aspect of language and one of the basic aims of foreign language instruction is to develop learners’ communicative competence which includes knowledge and understanding of culture (Kramsch, 1993). Culture-specific content has been widely used in English Language Teaching (ELT) to raise students’ cultural awareness. With the expansion of English across cultures and its use as a lingua franca between people from different L1 backgrounds which require different linguistic norms and sociolinguistic realities (Kachru, 1985), linking culture with language becomes even more complex. Byram (1997) introduced intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as language plus intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness to conceptualize learners’ language acquisition. Ever since ICC has become a dominant area of inquiry in EFL contexts including Vietnam as seen in Vietnam’s 2018 General Education Curriculum which highlights the importance of culture and developing “intercultural understanding as well as national cultural identity”. Past research has found that ICC is upheld as an important pedagogical approach however teachers inconsistently implement ICC in the classroom and tend to focus on the “target cultures” more than students’ culture.

2.2. Local Cultural Integration and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Addressing these issues, recent studies have paid more attention to incorporating learners’ local culture into EFL teaching. Culturally responsive pedagogy advocates matching instruction with learners’ lived experience and sociocultural background.

McKay (2003) argues when students use local cultural content they can act as “cultural informants”, resulting in students feeling like they have ownership of English. While teachers in Vietnam strongly agree that local culture should be included, Nguyen and Tran (2018) found teachers struggled to find appropriate materials. Some studies demonstrate when learners are taught about Vietnamese culture festivals and traditions their confidence increases (Bui, 2023). However, these studies were conducted in urban areas, not rural EFL environments.

2.3. Research Gap and Focus of the Present Study

While interest in this area is expanding, few empirical studies have investigated local culture incorporation into rural Vietnamese classrooms. Additionally, previous studies address culture in abstract terms with little discussion on implementing cultural incorporation into concrete textbook lessons such as English 10 - Global Success. Using action research, the current study explores the effects culturally responsive teaching practices have on student engagement and intercultural understanding during two cycles.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed an action research design using qualitative and descriptive quantitative data, following a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This approach allowed the researcher to systematically examine and improve pedagogical practices in a real classroom context. The research was conducted during the 2025 - 2026 academic year.

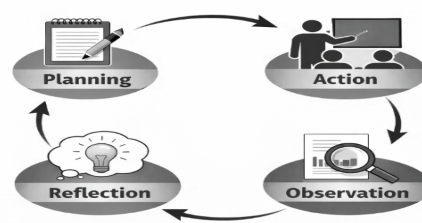


Figure 1. The Action Research Cycle

3.2. Research Context and Participants

Participants. Data was collected from students attending Hoa Lac High School, a rural public institution located in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta region. Forty students enrolled in 10th grade (23 females and 17 males) participated in the study; all students were taking the same English class as prescribed by the English 10 - Global Success textbook. Convenient purposive sampling was used to select the class. Students were predominately at a pre-intermediate level and had little opportunity to learn English outside of the classroom. The classroom teacher who collected data and implemented each lesson was also the researcher. This class was chosen over others to ensure that the research would run

smoothly and teachable in nature. Below are some practical reasons for teacher participants' choices: (1) students ranged in proficiency, which allowed me to see how students of different levels viewed cultural integration; (2) this class was chosen due to time availability in the teacher researcher's schedule. This allowed her to see how students reacted to the lessons in her own classroom; (3) students had little exposure to lessons infused with culture, which allowed the teacher-researcher to see how students reacted to the lessons without much prior knowledge; and (4) class size (40 students) was large enough to obtain a variety of thoughts and perspectives from students.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under research and ensure trustworthiness of the study, multiple sources of data were collected. Triangulation of data was attempted in order to increase trustworthiness by comparing information obtained from classroom observations, teacher journal and students' interviews. Member checking involved sharing interview transcripts with participants to verify accuracy, whereas peer debriefing included discussions with colleagues to reduce researcher bias. The following data collection methods were employed:

Classroom observations: Throughout each cycle, video recordings were taken and field notes were compiled during each lesson. Patterns of student participation, interactions that occurred, and engagement were taken into account while observing lessons. An observation protocol was followed for consistency during each session.

Student questionnaires: Questionnaires were distributed following each cycle in order to receive feedback from students about their thoughts on lessons where culture was integrated. Students were asked about their level of engagement, increased motivation, cultural awareness, and difficulties they faced. Questionnaires consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Semi-structured interviews: Interviews were conducted with 10 students who were purposively sampled to provide a range of different levels of proficiency and participation patterns. Questions asked students about their experiences with the integration of local culture, their feelings towards certain activities, and what they found beneficial/challenging.

Teacher reflective journal: During each cycle, the researcher took detailed notes about what they observed, thoughts, challenges faced, and decisions made. This gave an insider perspective of the cycles.

Student artifacts: Pieces of students' work were collected such as writing samples, presentations, and discussion posts.

3.4. Instructional Intervention

The intervention was implemented through "Communication and Culture" lessons across three Units of Study: Family Life, Humans and the Environment and Music. Localized

content was infused into these lessons in Cycle 1, which included topics such as family roles/values in Vietnam, pollution in local rivers, and Southern Vietnamese folk music (Don Ca Tai Tu). As Cycle 1 data revealed hints of critical reflection occurring, Cycle 2 involved changes to allow for additional scaffolding, inclusion of authentic interviews with local artists, and making connections between the local and global explicit.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to school approval and informed-consent procedures common to educational research. Approval was secured from the school administration and local Department of Education and Training before data were collected. Informed consent was obtained from all participants; students and their parents/guardians were told about the nature of the study and its purpose, procedures, and were informed of their rights as participants prior to agreeing to participate. They were told that participation was voluntary and that they could refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Parent/guardian consent forms and student assent forms were obtained. Steps were taken to ensure participant anonymity. All identifying information was removed from transcripts during analysis and in any reports or publications resulting from this study. Pseudonyms are used when quoting from interviews or writing case descriptions. As the researcher was the classroom teacher, care was taken to reduce potential conflict of interests. Students were told that their decision to participate or not would not impact their grades or standing within the classroom. Recordings were kept in a locked location to which only the researcher had access. Data will be kept for five years after publication. Afterward, they will be destroyed. There are no risks to participants as the instructional activities were pedagogically sound and fit within the scope of curriculum requirements.

3.6. Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Codes were developed inductively during initial coding. Codes were combined to form larger themes like "behavioral engagement" and "affirmation of cultural identity." Member checking was completed by presenting early findings to some students and peer debriefing was used by discussing findings with colleague. The use of multiple sources of data (observations, questionnaires, interview and teacher journal) allowed for triangulation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Enhanced Student Engagement Through Culturally Familiar Content

An increase in student motivation was also seen as lessons contained more culture-related content specific to their locality. On a behavioral level students demonstrated higher levels of participation which was measured by classroom observations. In Cycle 1 approximately 45% of learners

frequently participated during class discussions, an improvement over baseline data which indicated only 28% of students typically participate during lessons. In Cycle 2, the number of students frequently participating reached 68%. Table 1 demonstrates instructional implementations and outcomes for each cycle.

Student responses displayed evidence of cognitive engagement with the lessons. Students were able to apply background knowledge of Vietnamese family life when answering questions and participating in discussion. It could be inferred that students’ background knowledge allowed them to make connections to their own culture and possibly even made them want to communicate.

Results from questionnaires administered after each lesson also reflected higher levels of student motivation. During Cycle 1, 82% of learners strongly agreed that lessons which

focused on local culture were “more interesting” than regular lessons taken from textbooks. In cycle 2, this number increased to 91%. 76% of students reported that they felt more comfortable speaking English when the discussion topics were related to their own culture.

These results support Bose and Gao’s (2022) findings that tasks which are situated in students’ culture allow for higher levels of engagement as there is less cognitive load on the students and they are able to focus their attention on learning the language. By using topics that were familiar to students’ lives in Vietnam, they were able to use their background knowledge and begin learning how to express these ideas in English.

Table 1: Pedagogical Development and Student Outcomes Across Instructional Cycles.

Table 1. Cross-Cycle Comparison of Instructional Implementation and Student Outcomes

Aspect	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Observed Improvement
Instructional focus	Initial integration of local cultural content into Communication and Culture lessons	Refined integration with increased scaffolding and explicit cultural comparison frameworks	More systematic and pedagogically coherent implementation
Teaching strategies	Use of familiar local examples, group discussions, and basic cultural comparison tasks	Enhanced scaffolding (sentence frames, guiding questions), authentic local materials, extended interaction time	Improved clarity of tasks and stronger student support
Student participation	Moderate participation; contributions mainly from more confident students	Broader participation across proficiency levels; increased voluntary contributions	More inclusive and evenly distributed classroom interaction
Student engagement	Increased interest compared to traditional lessons, but some hesitation remained	Higher behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement	Greater sustained attention and enthusiasm during activities
Depth of cultural understanding	Mostly surface-level comparisons between local and global cultures	Deeper analysis of cultural values, practices, and perspectives	Development of intercultural analytical skills
Communicative confidence	Students spoke in short responses and relied on teacher prompts	Students produced longer, more spontaneous discourse	Increased willingness to communicate in English
Classroom interaction patterns	Predominantly teacher–student interaction	Increased student–student interaction in pair and group work	More collaborative learning environment
Challenges observed	Limited vocabulary, hesitation to express opinions, uneven participation	Remaining language challenges but improved fluency and confidence	Reduced impact of initial challenges
Overall learning outcomes	Positive initial effects on engagement and cultural awareness	Stronger engagement and clearer evidence of intercultural competence	Observed pedagogical improvements across cycles"

Table 2. Summary of Student Engagement Across Instructional Cycles

Dimension of Engagement	Indicators	Baseline (Before Intervention)	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Overall Change
Behavioral Engagement	- Active participation in discussions - Volunteering responses - Participation in pair/group work	Low (~28%) Limited participation, mainly confident students	Moderate (~45%) Increased participation, some hesitation	High (~68%) Broad participation across proficiency levels	Substantial improvement in observable classroom participation
Emotional Engagement	- Interest in lesson content - Enjoyment and enthusiasm - Reduced anxiety	Low-moderate Students showed limited interest and confidence	High interest in culturally familiar topics Reduced anxiety reported	Very high Strong enthusiasm and positive attitudes toward lessons	Increased motivation and emotional investment in learning
Cognitive Engagement	- Depth of responses - Ability to compare cultures - Critical reflection	Surface-level responses Minimal cultural comparison	Emerging analytical responses Basic cultural comparisons	Deeper analysis Critical comparison of cultural values and practices	Clear development of higher-order thinking and intercultural awareness
Overall Engagement	- Sustained attention + interaction	Low	Moderate	High	Consistent growth across cycles

4.2. Development of Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Comparison Skills

The use of local cultural content acted not as its own purpose but rather as a starting point from which students could build intercultural awareness. Students evidenced more advanced skills of comparison, analysis, and critical evaluation when thinking about cultural practices from Vietnamese and other cultural perspectives.

During earlier activities in Cycle 1, students often made basic comparisons that stopped at identifying superficial differences (e.g., Vietnamese people use chopsticks but Western people use forks). As students became more accustomed to thinking through the lenses of cultural comparison, their written analyses began to show evidence of development. By Cycle 2 students began naming cultural values and could explain how certain values shaped different practices. This could suggest development of what Byram (1997) describes as intercultural awareness. While describing Vietnamese family practices, students were able to refer to specific knowledge about extended family members, roles of different generations, and emerging nuclear family trends in rural areas. Students' responses began to show evidence of emerging critical reflection as they compared traditional and modern family practices, analyzed reasons for cultural shifts, and evaluated positive and negative consequences of familial changes.

"I believe that in Vietnam we have close families because we value family dedication and helping our parents when they are older. In American or Western countries they value being

independent. Although they are both good values, they shape families differently." This could suggest development of what Byram (1997) identifies as skills of "interpreting and relating". Students were beginning to do more than list differences; they were creating descriptions that built a framework for understanding culture.

There were also signs of critical cultural awareness. Students started challenging some aspects of cultural knowledge like their own culture rather than accepting them. In Cycle 2, they were discussing traditional gender roles in Vietnamese families. When asked whether they should change traditions or keep them the same, some students started debating the opinion. A few students shared opinions that expressed both views.

Students also shared in interviews that comparing cultures allowed them to have deeper perspectives on their own culture. "I used to think that the Vietnamese way was the way we do things and the western way was the way they do things. But now I know that there's a reason why we do things a certain way and I can actually tell people that. I'm proud of being Vietnamese but I can also understand other cultures" (Interview 3).

These results indicate that localisation when done effectively does not promote close-mindedness to other cultures but allows students to start thinking about culture from their own culture. They first had to deeply understand the culture they lived in before they could start to conceptualise understanding other cultures.

4.3. Improved Classroom Interaction and Communicative Confidence

An unexpected result of the CI lessons was that students became more confident communicating in English. This became evident when looking at language produced by students. The first thing noticed in analyzing classroom discourse was an increase in student talk time. During baseline observations, students spoke approximately 15–20 minutes of every 45-minute lesson. This time consisted primarily of answering the teacher’s questions with short phrases or single words. During Cycle 1 student talk time increased to approximately 25-28 minutes. In Cycle 2 students talked for about 30-32 minutes of each lesson. Another change in discourse was observed in the length of student comments. Students progressed from short memorized phrases to longer stretches of spontaneous speech. It was clear that students were engaged in meaningful discourse, taking risks by saying what they wanted to say even if they lacked the language to communicate perfectly. They used strategies such as paraphrasing, code-switching, and gesturing to facilitate communication.

The most poignant example of this occurred during a Cycle 2 lesson. Students were discussing Don Ca Tai Tu, which is a style of Vietnamese music. One of my quieter students raised his hand and offered to tell the class about the history of this style of music. He spoke for almost three minutes without interruption. Although his speech was littered with errors, he was perfectly communicating meaning. His classmates were engaged and asked him questions following his comment. This was the first time I had seen my students really communicate with each other. After completing lessons that integrated culture, teacher journal entries revealed that students felt more comfortable and worked together as a community. Errors did not appear to bother students as much as they had in the past. This is supported by research on willingness to communicate, which shows that students are more likely to choose not to communicate if the topic is unfamiliar or uninteresting. 84% of students reported that they feel "more confident" or "much more confident" when talking about topics from their own culture. One student's response illustrated this finding: When we talk about things that take place in my hometown during the festival, I have lots to say. I will tell them even though I make mistakes. But if we talk about something that I don't know, then I have nothing to say.

This may have interesting implications for the idea of building student confidence. Instead of simply increasing student motivation, teaching about topics from students' own culture may provide them with something to say when speaking the target language.

4.4. Benefits and Challenges of Local Cultural Integration

In addition to benefits of local cultural integration identified, there were also several challenges that emerged during implementation.

Perceived benefits. In addition to engagement, culture awareness, and communicative confidence discussed earlier, there were some unexpected benefits. During lesson presentation, the teacher-researcher reflected that because integrated lessons allowed students to talk about their own culture and local community, students were able to take on the role of an expert rather than someone who does not know. Allow students to teach the class about their own life and local culture positioned them as informants, which seemed to empower students and build confidence.

Also during lesson presentation, there were many instances of students turning to talk to classmates. It seemed that by learning about each other and creating a shared experience in the classroom, students were building understanding of each other. As they discussed their family traditions or traditions from locales in Vietnam, their own hometown practices, or ways of thinking, they seemed to build relationships with their classmates through increased contact and understanding.

Perceived challenges. There were several challenges that came up during the implementation of culturally integrated lessons. The first was developing materials. Textbook lessons came with materials that were already made. Lessons based on local culture required the teacher to develop his own materials or find them elsewhere. This often took time to find images, video clips, stories, songs, and other materials that were both authentic to the local culture and appropriate for classroom use.

Another challenge was linguistic support. When students were allowed to talk freely about local cultural topics, they often did not have the vocabulary or grammatical structures to do so. Teachers wanted to provide support without inhibiting communication. The strategy used to address this challenge in Cycle 2 was pre-teaching vocabulary and providing pictures as support as well as sentence frames to make it easier to communicate.

Also during lessons, teachers needed to be wary of portraying culture in stereotypes or as something that does not change. Teachers needed to present information as generic when it was not and discuss differences that occur based on region, urban vs. rural settings, etc. For example, when discussing the Vietnamese family, teachers would need to acknowledge that there is not just one type of family, family structure is different in different regions and cities in Vietnam, and families are changing as Vietnamese society changes.

The last challenge was curriculum. Because there is an English 10 textbook with topics that must be covered by the end of the school year, teachers had to ensure that students

were learning what they were expected to learn in the curriculum. The way teachers addressed this was by using local culture to reach curricular objectives instead of replacing textbook lessons with local cultural info.

In reflection, both the researcher and the students felt that the pros outweighed the cons. As stated in the teachers reflective journal: “The extra preparation time is worthwhile because students are actually using English meaningfully rather than just completing exercises. The challenges are manageable once you develop a system for finding and organizing cultural materials.”

4.5. Effective Pedagogical Strategies for Cultural Integration

Reflecting on the action research cycle described above revealed several instructional practices that worked well for infusing local cultural content.

Initially, students needed linguistic scaffolds in order to speak about cultural topics in English. Successful scaffolds included: (1) pre-teaching culture-related vocabulary; (2) providing sentence frames and useful phrases for discussion; (3) supplying visual scaffolds like pictures and diagrams; (4) modeling thinking processes for comparing cultures; and (5) allowing students time to plan/organize their thoughts before speaking.

Second, students benefited from using authentic materials. Photos that I took instead of teacher-made descriptions, video interviews with cultural members of the community, and genuine examples of traditional rubbings helped students better visualize cultural topics.

Third, gradually increasing the complexity of the compare and contrast questions supported student understanding. While early activities had students identify superficial, concrete differences between American culture and their own, later activities required students to infer cultural values, evaluate cultural differences, and make connections between culture and history.

Fourth, pair and group work allowed for enough talk time to practice language skills, pool cultural knowledge, and support each other in taking risks. Additionally, these groupings allowed more proficient students to support their peers and reinforcing their own understanding by explaining cultural topics to others.

Fifth, teaching students how to compare cultures pushed them beyond describing physical attributes. Explicitly showing students how to ask questions like: “Why is this done?” “What values are reflected in this practice?” “How are these things similar/different in other cultures?”

Lastly, students needed to make connections to their personal experiences. The activities that promoted the most participation and engagement were the ones that allowed students to draw from their own experiences, family traditions, and prior knowledge about their community. This made activities more authentic and allowed students to feel more motivated to share.

Table 3. Summary of Effective Pedagogical Strategies for Local Cultural Integration

Category	Specific Strategies	Instructional Purpose
Linguistic Scaffolding	- Pre-teaching key cultural vocabulary. - Providing sentence starters and discussion frames. - Using visual supports (photos, diagrams).	To reduce cognitive load and provide students with the necessary linguistic tools to express complex cultural ideas.
Instructional Scaffolding	- Teacher modeling through "think-aloud" cultural comparisons. - Allowing planning time before spontaneous speaking. - Implementing progressive complexity in tasks.	To guide students from surface-level observations to deeper intercultural analysis and critical thinking.
Authentic Engagement	- Utilizing real-world materials from local contexts (photos, videos, interviews). - Connecting lessons to students' lived experiences and family practices.	To enhance motivation, authenticity, and the quality of student contributions by making content vivid and meaningful.
Collaborative Learning	- Structured pair and group work. - Mixed-ability grouping for peer support.	To create a supportive environment for taking communicative risks and pooling collective cultural knowledge.
Critical Frameworks	- Explicit instruction in "Why" and "What values" inquiry questions. - Positioning students as "Cultural Informants/Experts".	

4.6. Cross-Cycle Comparison and Refinement

This research highlighted another benefit of the iterative process of action research: the lesson plans can be adapted with each cycle to better serve the needs of students, particularly rural students who may feel isolated by their curriculum’s international slant. Students benefitted when they were treated as owners of their learning. The pedagogical changes that occurred between cycles correlated with lessons that flowed more organically during cultural integration and helped students make connections between their culture and English.

Students participated more in Cycle 1 than they had during baseline, but still exhibited some reluctance. Students required more time to warm up to sharing aspects of their culture and discussion often stalled at surface level. One reflection in the teacher journal captured this well: “Students seemed interested but not confident. Short answers. A lot of waiting for me to prompt.”

In Cycle 2, I provided more scaffolding, time, and explicit instructions on how to compare their own culture and target culture. These alterations resulted in lengthier student responses and more students participating. Students initiated more discussions without my prodding. Answers were longer and students’ cultural comparisons included more detailed similarities and differences between their own culture and target culture.

It was also noted that participation was more widespread in Cycle 2. During Cycle 1, there was a core group of students who would always participate. These were your typical extroverts. During Cycle 2, while these students still participated the most, I noticed students who had previously not participated at all or very little offered longer responses. I believe these students needed the extra scaffolding and time to feel comfortable participating.

Students in Cycle 2 also exhibited deeper understanding of intercultural awareness. Students in Cycle 1 did make comparisons between their culture and target culture, but these were mostly observations of how things were different. Cycle 2 students analyzed cultural values, questioned assumptions, and made statements that showed an ability to see both similarities and differences between people of different cultures.

Allowing myself to experience this iterative process of action research has convinced me of its benefits toward teacher professional development. As teachers, we can scrutinize our practices and make small changes to improve our lessons. If something doesn’t work, we can identify what specifically needs to change instead of tossing the entire approach out.

5. CONCLUSION

Key contributions in answering my research questions, this action research project yielded classroom-based evidence that supports arguments in favor of implementing local

culture integration during Communication and Culture lessons in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Culturally-responsive pedagogy may help Vietnamese EFL students feel more engaged during lessons that focus on culture, help develop certain aspects of students’ ICC, and better prepare students to confidently communicate using English.

Classroom practicalities This action research project had several concrete applications. First, my work showed that Byram’s ideas about ICC can translate to real classroom applications (that is, lesson activities) in rural Vietnam. Second, this research provided insights into the possibility that local culture integration can happen even within the current curriculum and with limited time/resources. Third, I was able to provide some concrete lesson activities/ideas that were successful in my context for others who may be interested in implementing similar ideas.

Motivating students with Culture lessons Due to the globalized context of most English textbooks, students who live in rural areas and have limited opportunities to access target language cultures can feel that English is not meant for them. Allowing students to be the “experts” on their local culture and use the English language as a tool for sharing that culture is one way to combat this mentality that frames rural children as “deficient” due to their lack of knowledge about target language cultures.

Limitations of study There are several limitations to this study. First, because my project only took place at one school with one class, we cannot claim that these findings will apply to all Vietnamese students and contexts. Second, with a sample size of only 40 students, we cannot claim that these results will generalize to larger populations. Third, because I was the teacher- researcher who taught these lessons and conducted this research, I was an insider to these lessons which could have influenced how I interpreted my data and led to me being biased in my observations and reflections. Fourth, since my data only focused on students’ performance during and after the lessons, we do not know if students retained this information long-term or if this lesson design would have any effect on students’ scores on standardized tests. Fifth, because action research cycles take time and cultural competence takes time to develop, these two short cycles within one semester may not have been enough time for students to reach their full potential in terms of cultural competence. Sixth, this study was specific to “Communication and Culture” lessons that are a part of English 10 - Global Success. Therefore, these findings may not apply to other lessons that are taught in English classrooms. Seventh, this project took place in a rural high school in Vietnam. Schools with different demographics or those in urban areas may not see similar results upon implementation.

Directions for future research are many. Future studies could take a longitudinal approach, assessing students after subsequent years in school to determine whether students

who experienced cultural integration continue to accrue its benefits and whether instruction with cultural integration transferred to more global gains in language proficiency on standardized testing. Future research could also compare various topics of culture integration to see which topics improve which areas of language learning most and provide teachers more detailed information when deciding what culture to teach. Additionally, further research should be conducted in different regions of Vietnam to see how local culture integration may play out in differing cultural regions with varying resource availability (urban vs. rural, north vs. south, etc.). Research involving an experimental or quasi-experimental design would allow for more robust conclusions to be drawn about cultural integration's effect on student learning. Examining any correlations between culture integration and scores on Vietnam's national English exams would be beneficial to assuage concerns teachers may have about deviating from “coverage.” Future research should be done to provide Vietnamese English teachers with methods of pedagogical and professional development to encourage cultural integration beyond the individual teacher scale. Finally, there are many opportunities for research on cultural integration outside of assessing its effect on traditional learning outcomes. Little is known about how cultural integration in EFL instruction impacts students' affective learning and identification with the English language. Does cultural integration promote student identification with the English-speaking world? Will students be more or less likely to see themselves as global citizens if the culture in their English classrooms reflects their own home culture? Will students be more efficacious in their language learning? These are all questions for future research to tackle. Future studies could also look at teacher learning as they engage in culturally responsive teaching. What pedagogical knowledge and skills do teachers need to engage in cultural integration? How can they receive support from administrators and teacher education programs? Action research could allow groups of teachers from the same school (or multiple schools) to work together to find answers to these questions and determine how local culture can be integrated into language classrooms. Studies may also examine how technology can be used to integrate local Vietnamese culture as well as connect Vietnamese youth with other classrooms and young people around the world. Apps and social media are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, and the relationship between technology and language learning is another variable to consider in future research.

Although limited in scope, this research has implications for several parties. Perhaps most obviously, EFL teachers may find this study useful in providing evidence that integrating local culture can be beneficial for learners, achievable within a similar educational context, and directly informed by classroom experiences they can adjust to fit their own

situations. Curriculum developers and textbook writers can also learn from these lessons to design more culturally-responsive materials in the future. Teachers can take away lessons on designing lessons that leave room for localization as well; this study demonstrates that perhaps textbooks can more effectively be used as frameworks to be built upon rather than strict lessons to be followed verbatim. Teacher educators may use this study as an example of action research conducted for professional development and pedagogical improvement. For policy makers, this research provides evidence that allowing teachers to adapt their curriculum and spending resources on creating space for teachers to develop localized teaching materials could have beneficial effects on student learning.

Finally, this study has important implications for assessment practices. When teachers allow students to make references to local culture in their speaking and writing, we as teachers need to ensure that we are assessing these lessons as positively as we would correct usage of target language forms. In conclusion, allowing students to bring their own cultures into CCL can not only be considered a strategy to help them learn language forms, but also acts to validate their identities while teaching them about others. In a world where English is becoming increasingly used as a tool of global communication, it is important to allow students to communicate using this language about their own lives. This study has shown that this is not only possible, but may benefit students' learning. Allowing students to make connections to their own lives in EFL lessons can make these lessons more meaningful, motivating, and effective for learners. If this study has shown teachers and teacher learners anything, it is that including local cultural factors in the EFL classroom is possible, even in under-resourced rural contexts. Lessons can be culturally responsive with limited materials if teachers are willing to be creative, utilize student knowledge of local culture, and reflect on their practice.

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