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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Culture, Values, and Pedagogy in the "Voices Beginner" EFL Textbook in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study provides a critical analysis of the *"Voices Beginner"* English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook, focusing on its integration of value-based vocabulary, representation of cultural and ideological themes, and pedagogical relevance for student teachers in the Saudi context. Using the qualitative as well as the quantitative content analysis and principles of critical discourse analysis, the research investigates how the textbook presents environmental, cultural, and social values through reading passages, vocabulary items, and explorer profiles. Findings reveal that while the textbook promotes important global values such as environmental awareness and cultural diversity, it does so predominantly through Western-centered examples and perspectives. Value-laden vocabulary appears throughout the textbook but is often presented without sufficient depth or connection to learners' local contexts. Cultural representation is imbalanced, with limited inclusion of Arab or Islamic content, which may hinder learner engagement and identity alignment, particularly for future educators. The study concludes that although *"Voices Beginner"* serves as a linguistically appropriate resource for beginner learners, its educational impact can be enhanced through localized adaptations and supplementary materials. Recommendations are provided to help bridge the gap between global textbook content and the cultural and professional needs of Saudi student teachers, promoting a more inclusive and context-sensitive EFL learning experience.

Keywords: EFL textbooks, Cultural representation, Critical discourse analysis, Pedagogical relevance.

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تحليل خطاب نقدي للمضامين الثقافية والقيمية والتربوية في كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية للمبتدئين " Voices Beginner" في السعودية

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الملخص:

تقدّم هذه الدراسة تحليلًا نقديًا لكتاب تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية *Voices Beginner* لغة أجنبية، مع التركيز على تكامله في عرض المفردات ذات البعد القيمي، وتمثيل القضايا الثقافية والأيديولوجية، ومدى ملاءمته التربوية لطلبة معلمي اللغة في السياق السعودي. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهجية التحليل الكمي والنوعي للمحتوى، وعلى مبادئ تحليل الخطاب النقدي، لفحص كيفية تناول الكتاب للقيم البيئية والثقافية والاجتماعية عبر نصوص القراءة، والمفردات، ونماذج "المستكشفين" الواردة فيه. أظهرت النتائج أنّ الكتاب يعزز عددًا من القيم العالمية المهمة مثل الوعي البيئي والتنوع الثقافي، إلا أنّه يفعل ذلك في الغالب من خلال أمثلة ورؤى متمركزة حول الغرب. كما أن المفردات ذات البعد القيمي تتكرر في أنحاء الكتاب، لكنها غالبًا ما تُعرض دون تعميق كافٍ أو ارتباط واضح بسياقات المتعلمين المحلية. وجاء تمثيل الثقافة غير متوازن، إذ اقتصر حضور المحتوى العربي أو الإسلامي على نطاق محدود، مما قد يضعف انخراط المتعلمين وتوافقهم الهوياتي، خصوصًا لدى المربين المستقبليين. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنّ كتاب *Voices Beginner*، بالرغم من كونه موردًا لغويًا مناسبًا لمرحلة المبتدئين، يمكن أن تتحسن فاعليته التربوية عبر تكييفات محلية ومواد مساندة. وتقدّم الدراسة توصيات لردم الفجوة بين محتوى الكتاب العالمي واحتياجات الطلبة المعلمين في السعودية، بما يضمن تجربة تعليمية أكثر شمولية وحساسية للسياق الثقافي والتربوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كتب تعليم الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية، تمثيل الثقافة، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الوعي البيئي، الملاءمة التربوية.

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Introduction:

In the recent years, English language teaching has witnessed a significant shift from being a purely linguistic endeavor to becoming a multidimensional educational practice that encompasses the development of cultural awareness, the promotion of human values, and the nurturing of global citizenship. Modern textbooks of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are now expected not only to build learners' communicative competence but also to serve as tools for intercultural engagement and ethical reflection.

"Voices Beginner" is one of the internationally adopted EFL textbooks designed for beginner learners. It integrates global themes such as environmental responsibility, cultural diversity, and social values into language instruction. Through its reading passages, listening activities, and explorer profiles, the textbook aims to expose learners to a range of perspectives while introducing essential vocabulary in authentic, communicative contexts.

However, such globalized content raises important questions about cultural representation, ideological positioning, and contextual relevance, particularly when these materials are used in culturally specific settings such as Saudi Arabia. The inclusion or omission of particular values, voices, and cultural references can subtly shape learners' worldviews, especially for student teachers in faculties of education who are being trained to teach English within their local communities (Puspitasari & Fageeh, 2025).

In the field of English language education, textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping not only linguistic competence but also learners' perceptions of the world, their values, and their cultural awareness. As structured pedagogical tools, EFL textbooks do more than facilitate vocabulary acquisition and grammar learning; they serve as cultural and ideological artifacts that subtly convey worldviews, norms, and expectations to learners. This is particularly significant in beginner-level materials, where the foundation of both language skills and worldview formation is being laid.

The *"Voices Beginner"* textbook, developed by National Geographic Learning, represents one such global EFL resource that aims to integrate language learning with global themes, including environmental awareness, intercultural communication, and social values. Its visual content, reading texts, vocabulary sets, and explorer profiles are designed to engage learners in real-world issues and promote global citizenship. However, the extent to which these materials align with the sociocultural realities and educational needs of learners in specific contexts—such as Saudi Arabia—remains an area requiring critical investigation (Alshenqeeti, 2019).

In recent years, there has been increasing scholarly interest in examining how textbooks reflect (or fail to reflect) diverse cultural identities, foster value-based learning, and respond to local pedagogical demands.

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Within the Saudi educational context—particularly in teacher training programs—there is a growing emphasis on integrating national identity, cultural authenticity, and critical thinking into foreign language instruction. Consequently, it becomes essential to evaluate whether imported textbooks such as *"Voices Beginner"* support or hinder these educational goals.

This study undertakes an integrated critical analysis of the *"Voices Beginner"* textbook to examine three core dimensions: the representation of cultural and ideological content, the presence and pedagogical use of value-oriented vocabulary, and the relevance of the material to the needs of student teachers in Saudi Arabia. Through a qualitative content analysis grounded in principles of critical discourse analysis, the study aims to identify both the strengths and limitations of the textbook in fostering culturally responsive and value-rich English language learning.

Problem of the study:

As English language education increasingly incorporates cultural values and global perspectives, it becomes essential to critically evaluate how well EFL textbooks reflect the sociocultural realities of their target learners. While textbooks like "Voices Beginner" aim to provide inclusive content and value-based language instruction, there is still concern about the depth, balance, and contextual relevance of the cultural and ideological messages they present. In the Saudi educational context—where learners are embedded within distinct cultural, religious, and pedagogical traditions—relying on globally produced textbooks may present challenges in representing local values or addressing the expectations of future educators. For student teachers enrolled in colleges of education, who are expected to model both linguistic competence and cultural sensitivity in their future classrooms, this issue is particularly critical.

The lack of empirical evaluation of how cultural values, environmental themes, and value-based vocabulary are presented in beginner-level EFL materials raises questions about their pedagogical effectiveness and ideological neutrality. Furthermore, the suitability of such materials for training future Saudi teachers has not been adequately explored through a localized, critical, and pedagogically informed lens. This research seeks to address this gap by analyzing *"Voices Beginner"* in terms of its cultural representations, lexical choices, and contextual relevance to the educational needs and value frameworks of student teachers in Saudi Arabia.

Objectives of the Study:

This study aims at:

1. Examining the *"Voices Beginner"* EFL textbook's effectiveness in integrating cultural, environmental, and global citizenship values in its language components.

2. Investigating the representation of different cultures and nationalities, with a focus on the presence or absence of ideological bias or stereotyping.

3. Evaluating the pedagogical relevance of *Voices Beginner"* EFL textbook for Saudi student teachers in colleges of education, considering their local cultural context and future teaching needs.

Significance of the Study

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance within the field of English language education. On a theoretical level, it contributes to the growing body of research that explores the intersection of language learning, cultural representation, and value integration in EFL materials. By adopting a critical lens, the research sheds light on how beginner-level textbooks may influence learners' perceptions of culture, identity, and global citizenship through the selection and framing of content. On a practical level, the study addresses a pressing need within the Saudi educational context: the evaluation of foreign language teaching resources used to prepare future educators. Student teachers in colleges of education require materials that not only support their linguistic development but also align with their cultural values and professional responsibilities. This research provides insights into how effectively the *"Voices Beginner"* textbook meets these expectations and highlights areas where adaptation or supplementation may be necessary.

Ultimately, the study offers valuable recommendations for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers aiming to localize and culturally contextualize EFL instruction. Its findings may inform future textbook selection and guide the development of more inclusive, balanced, and pedagogically relevant learning materials tailored to the needs of Saudi learners and educators.

Literature Review

This section presents a review of the related terms of the study as well as the review of some of the previous studies related to analyzing of Culture, Values, and Pedagogy in the "Voices Beginner" EFL Textbook in Saudi Arabia. The intersection between language education, cultural representation, and value transmission has been a growing area of interest in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Scholars and educators have long recognized that textbooks are not neutral tools; rather, they reflect ideological choices, cultural assumptions, and educational priorities. Accordingly, textbook analysis has evolved from basic linguistic evaluation to more complex examinations of how values and cultural narratives are embedded within learning materials.

A significant body of research has focused on how EFL textbooks introduce and frame moral, environmental, and intercultural values. Many studies have found that while global values such as cooperation, respect (Sitio, 2023), environmental sustainability, and cultural appreciation are present in modern EFL materials, their depth of integration varies widely. Some textbooks include superficial mentions

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of such values, whereas others integrate them meaningfully into reading passages, discussions, and communicative tasks that encourage learner engagement and critical thinking.

In addition to value integration, cultural representation has emerged as a central concern in EFL textbook evaluation. Several studies have shown that many textbooks, especially those produced in Western contexts, tend to prioritize Western cultural norms and perspectives. This often leads to an imbalanced presentation of global cultures, with underrepresentation of local, Arab, or Islamic identities. This imbalance may impact learners' cultural identity development and hinder their connection to the material.

Aleidan and Alharbi (2025) examined how people with disabilities are represented in Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks used for Grades 1–12. Using qualitative content analysis of texts and images from twelve textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, the researchers found that disability representation is extremely limited—appearing on only 0.45% of total pages—and completely absent at the primary level. When present, portrayals focused almost exclusively on physical disabilities, while sensory, cognitive, and learning disabilities were largely ignored. Although people with disabilities were shown positively as capable and successful, such as teachers or students overcoming challenges, these depictions emphasized exceptional achievements rather than everyday inclusion. Visual representation was also scarce, with only two images featuring individuals with disabilities. The study concluded that Saudi EFL textbooks do not adequately reflect the diversity of disability experiences and recommends greater inclusion of varied disabilities, more realistic portrayals, and policy efforts to promote inclusive educational materials.

Alqahtani's (2024) study, "Women in Saudi Secondary School EFL Textbooks: A Critical Study of Women's Empowerment as Enshrined in the Saudi Vision 2030," examined how women are visually represented in the Mega Goal English textbook series used in Saudi secondary schools. The study aimed at determining whether the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasize women's empowerment and equal opportunities, are reflected in these educational materials. Using a content analysis approach focused on pictorial representation, Alqahtani analyzed six textbooks (Mega Goal 1–6, 2023 editions) to assess the frequency, social roles, and activities associated with male and female figures. The study revealed a striking gender imbalance: men appear far more frequently (up to 98% of images in some books) and are shown in a wide range of professional and social roles—such as engineers, doctors, and entrepreneurs—while women are largely portrayed in traditional, domestic contexts, such as mothers, housewives, or shoppers. Even in later textbooks, where women's representation slightly increased, their roles remained limited and stereotypical. The study concluded that these EFL textbooks fail to mirror the significant real-world progress Saudi women have achieved under Vision 2030, where they now occupy leadership roles and contribute substantially to the

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workforce. Alqahtani warned that such underrepresentation perpetuates outdated gender norms, hinders female students' aspirations, and undermines the Vision's empowerment goals. The study called for revisions to future EFL textbooks to ensure balanced gender representation that reflects women's evolving role in Saudi society.

Alshumaimeri and Alharbi (2024) in their study "English Textbook Evaluation: A Saudi EFL Teacher's Perspective" provided an in-depth analysis of Saudi EFL teachers' attitudes toward the English textbooks currently used in public schools. It aimed to evaluate how effectively these materials facilitate language learning and reflect the sociocultural context of Saudi learners. Through a mixed-methods approach combining questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the research gathers teachers' insights on various aspects of textbook design, including content quality, language level, cultural representation, teaching methodology, and skill integration.

This study concluded that teachers generally appreciate the textbooks' clear structure, logical progression of lessons, and coverage of essential grammar and vocabulary. However, they express concerns about the lack of authentic communicative activities, limited opportunities for critical thinking, and minimal exposure to diverse global cultures. Many teachers also note that the textbooks often emphasize rote learning over interactive, learner-centered approaches. The study also concluded that while the textbooks meet some instructional goals, they fall short of promoting communicative competence and intercultural awareness. It recommended revising textbook content to include more realistic dialogues, task-based learning activities, and balanced cultural elements to better align with modern EFL pedagogy and the needs of Saudi learners.

Al Shammari (2017) in her study "Evaluating the Representations of Identity Options and Cultural Elements in English Language Textbooks used in Saudi Arabia" examined how cultural values, social identities, and global perspectives are portrayed in English textbooks used in Saudi schools. This study investigated whether these materials present a balanced representation of local Saudi culture alongside international and intercultural elements. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the study analyzed selected textbooks to identify patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and cultural bias. The findings reveal that while the textbooks include some local cultural references to promote national identity, they tend to emphasize global and Western cultural content, often overlooking the diversity within Saudi society. The study concluded that a more balanced integration of local, regional, and global cultures is needed to enhance students' intercultural competence and support culturally responsive language learning.

Within the Saudi context, educators have increasingly called for materials that are not only pedagogically sound but also culturally responsive. Studies analyzing EFL textbooks used in Saudi schools and

universities have highlighted the importance of including local voices, national values, and religious references. There is also a growing demand for content that supports national educational goals, particularly within teacher training programs where student teachers are expected to model and promote values aligned with their communities.

Research in critical discourse analysis (CDA) has provided valuable tools for examining how textbooks construct meaning through language and visuals. CDA enables researchers to uncover implicit ideologies, social hierarchies, and power relations embedded in texts. When applied to EFL materials, CDA allows for a nuanced understanding of how language instruction can either reinforce or challenge dominant narratives and cultural stereotypes.

Furthermore, pedagogical relevance plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of any textbook. A well-structured textbook should offer age-appropriate, culturally suitable, and cognitively engaging content. For teacher trainees, this also includes exposure to teaching strategies, reflective tasks, and materials that prepare them to transmit values in culturally sensitive ways.

While *Voices Beginner* has been praised for its visually engaging layout and thematic diversity, limited research exists on how effectively it serves students in non-Western settings, particularly in Saudi Arabia. This gap in the literature highlights the need for context-based analyses that not only evaluate language input but also critically examine value representation, cultural alignment, and pedagogical functionality.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative and quantitative research approach, utilizing descriptive and interpretive methods, statistical analysis, to analyze the *"Voices Beginner"* EFL textbook. The analysis was based on the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and content analysis to examine how cultural values, ideologies, and value-based vocabulary are embedded within the textbook's linguistic and thematic content.

The primary data source for the study was the full content of the *"Voices Beginner"* textbook, including reading passages, vocabulary lists, listening scripts, communicative tasks, and visual materials. These elements were examined to identify recurring themes, cultural representations, lexical choices, and the pedagogical contexts in which values were introduced.

The analysis was carried out in two phases. The first phase involved categorizing the types of values (e.g., environmental, cultural, social) and vocabulary items associated with those values. The second phase examined the way cultures and nationalities were portrayed, focusing on inclusion, diversity, stereotyping, or ideological positioning. Special attention was given to how these representations may influence beginner learners in the Saudi context.

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In addition, the study reflected the alignment between the textbook content and the educational needs of Saudi student teachers, based on national cultural values and local classroom dynamics. The analysis aimed to offer a contextualized understanding of the strengths and limitations of the textbook from both a linguistic and pedagogical perspective.

Data Analysis:

This section presents a detailed analysis of the data collected from the "Voices Beginner" EFL textbook, focusing on how cultural values, ideological perspectives, and pedagogical elements are represented within its content. The analysis integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the textbook's linguistic and thematic structure. Using the frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and content analysis, the data were systematically examined to identify value-laden vocabulary, patterns of cultural representation, and the extent to which the material aligns with the sociocultural and educational context of Saudi Arabia. The following subsections provide a critical interpretation of the findings, supported by descriptive statistics and textual evidence, highlighting how the textbook promotes—or overlooks—key global and local values relevant to EFL learners and student teachers. The analysis is based on the following questions focusing on the content analysis of the book "Voices Beginner":

1- To what extent do the vocabulary terms used in the "VOICES Beginner" book promote global citizenship and environmental responsibility, especially in units related to National Geographic explorers and environmental topics?

The book's content demonstrates an interest in promoting global citizenship and environmental awareness, particularly in units that feature National Geographic explorers, global figures, or environmental activities. This is evident in the following ways:

a- *Vocabulary related to global identity and cultural diversity i:*

• Names of countries and nationalities such as: *Peruvian, Moroccan, British, Vietnamese, Turkish, Omani, German, Brazilian...*

• Phrases like: *I'm from Saudi Arabia. I'm Saudi.*

• Global personalities: *Kim Yuna, Amanda Gorman, Kylian Mbappe*

• Use of phrases to express identity and origin, e.g.:

    ▪ *She's American.*

    ▪ *You're Japanese.*

    ▪ *He's from France*

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These vocabulary items help promote a sense of global identity and cultural diversity, reinforcing the idea of belonging to a shared, multi-national world.

b- Vocabulary and concepts related to environmental responsibility:

- Terms related to nature and the environment:
  - *The Earth, nature, trees, and plants*
  - *Use less energy, good for the environment*
  - *portable, clean, easy to carry, costs very little* (especially in the context of "tiny houses")

c- Vocabulary related to healthy and natural foods:

a. *fruit, vegetables, rice, fish, milk, eggs, healthy, delicious*

b. The book discusses traditional dishes using natural ingredients such as *Berber curry*, *Som Tam*, and *Huancaína*.

   Interactive contexts that promote these values:

- Readings and articles focus on:
  - *Eco-friendly indoor and outdoor activities* (e.g. *cycling, camping, running*)
  - *Cultural exploration through food*
  - *Positive descriptions of nature and healthy practices.*

2. How are terms related to nature, conservation, and global cultures introduced and reinforced throughout the book?

   Nature and conservation:

   The book introduces vocabulary related to environmental awareness through:

- Words like: *clean, use less energy, nature, plants, the Earth*
- Promoting eco-friendly behaviors (e.g. living in small, energy-efficient homes or engaging in outdoor physical activity)
- Highlighting nature-related facts (e.g. *hummingbirds can fly backwards, get their food from plants*)

Global cultures:

- Vocabulary reflects diverse customs and cultures:
  - *foods from different countries*
  - Mentions of traditional dishes such as *Berber curry (Ethiopia), salsa (Peru), Som Tam (Thailand)*
  - Phrases like: *learning about food from other countries, trying new things*

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- Cities such as *Palo Alto, Guadalajara, Athens, Kingston,* and other countries are used in interactive exercises that help students connect with global geography and cultural diversity.

The "VOICES Beginner" book promotes the concept of global citizenship through vocabulary related to nationality, identity, and multicultural understanding. It also lays a basic but meaningful linguistic foundation for environmental awareness, using terms related to nature, conservation, and healthy living. While the level remains beginner-friendly, the openness to the world and environmental topics is integrated into the book's content.

In the "Voices Beginner" book, the biographies and activities related to *National Geographic explorers* serve as a key educational tool that goes far beyond simply teaching vocabulary and grammar. These sections play a prominent role in conveying both explicit and implicit global and humanistic values, helping to shape learners' personal development as well as their global awareness within the context of learning English (Al Shumaimeri, 2024).

Among the most clearly expressed values is intellectual curiosity. Explorers are introduced as individuals who love asking questions, seeking the unknown, and immersing themselves in nature and diverse cultures. This is reflected in their actions—traveling, photographing, discovering new animal species, or documenting the lives of remote communities. Through this, curiosity is transferred to learners as a form of motivation for discovery and active learning.

Another core value that emerges, often implicitly, is perseverance and determination. The explorers are often described as facing difficult environmental, physical, or cultural challenges, which they overcome with a spirit of adventure and dedication. This kind of storytelling encourages learners—especially beginners who may feel frustrated—to adopt patience and resilience in their learning journey.

The value of cultural appreciation is also prominent. These biographies present explorers not as outsiders judging other cultures, but as individuals who immerse themselves respectfully in diverse societies, learn local languages, listen to people's stories, and highlight the beauty of cultural differences. This subtly promotes the importance of respecting others and embracing diversity—essential components of global citizenship.

Furthermore, the explorers are often shown engaging in scientific inquiry and documentation, using tools like cameras, notebooks, or interviews. This illustrates to students that science isn't limited to laboratories—it includes observation, analysis, and gathering real-world data. This helps instill a respect for scientific methods as powerful tools for understanding the world.

Reading passages and listening activities:

They are cleverly designed to reinforce these values. The reading texts go beyond presenting information—they often include interactive exercises that ask students to share their opinions, compare characters or situations, and identify main ideas. These tasks promote critical thinking and active engagement.

Listening activities, although based on simple language suitable for beginners, are rich in cultural and humanistic content. They present real-life situations and allow learners to connect emotionally with what they hear. Sometimes, cultural differences or challenges are included, encouraging discussion and expanding learners' worldviews. these activities not only promote important values but also integrate them seamlessly into the language learning process. Learners don't feel as though they're being taught moral lessons—instead, they acquire language through meaningful and inspiring content, making the learning experience deeper and more human-centered (Puspitasari, 2021).

In the "Voices Beginner" book, the representation of different nationalities and cultures is conveyed through a variety of vocabulary items and communicative scenarios designed for beginner-level English learners. However, this content carries implicit ideological dimensions related to how the "other" — that is, non-Western or marginalized cultures — is portrayed, serving as a window into the worldview being communicated to learners.

2.1 Representation of Nationalities and Cultures:

The book uses a wide range of country and nationality names (e.g., Morocco, Oman, Vietnam, Turkey, Brazil, Germany, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia...) along with national identifiers such as:

- *I'm from Morocco. I'm Moroccan.*
- *She's American.*
- *You're Japanese.*

The representation is generally linguistically neutral, free from emotional or evaluative language, giving the impression that the book aims for a balanced portrayal of global cultures.

Well-known international figures such as *Kim Yuna (Korea), Amanda Gorman (USA), and Kylian Mbappé (France)* are also featured, which enhances cultural relativity by highlighting role models from diverse backgrounds.

Additionally, the book introduces foods from different cultures, such as *Berber curry* (Ethiopia), *Som Tam* (Thailand), and *Salsa a la Huancaína* (Peru), encouraging students to explore "foods from other countries." This fosters a sense of openness and appreciation of diversity.

2.2. Are there signs of bias or stereotyping?

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Although the book broadly seeks inclusivity, there are subtle elements that may reflect underlying ideological patterns:

1. **Implicit Western dominance:**
   - Western figures, particularly American and British, appear frequently and are often presented as leaders or central sources of content (e.g., Amanda Gorman).
   - In contrast, non-Western nationalities are often portrayed only in simple identity statements without deeper cultural or intellectual contributions, possibly reinforcing a Western-centered narrative.

2. **Simplified grammatical structures that reduce cultural depth:**
   - The use of very basic sentences like *He is Moroccan*, *she is Vietnamese*, *they are Brazilian*, flattens cultural complexity into mere labels, without expanding on context, traditions, or perspectives, which can unintentionally oversimplify diversity.

3. **Absence of self-representation for "other" cultures:**
   - Non-Western voices are not allowed to speak for themselves or share personal stories. Their cultures are described externally rather than internally, reflecting a lack of authentic self-representation and turning them into subjects of observation rather than active participants in dialogue.

2.3. Are there signs of cultural relativity and inclusivity?

Yes, the book also demonstrates several positive signs that promote inclusivity and cultural relativity, including:

- The inclusion of multiple nationalities and geographic locations in interactive activities.
- Use of neutral, non-discriminatory language, with no negative judgments associated with any particular culture.
- Representing diversity through food, music, and hobbies in a way that avoids stereotyping or cultural superiority.

The "Voices Beginner" book attempts to provide a globally inclusive and open-minded linguistic and educational model. It represents a variety of nationalities and cultures using neutral vocabulary and general communicative scenarios.

However, a subtle Western-centered perspective still prevails, and the "other" is often reduced to surface-level identifiers without deeper cultural narratives. Despite this, the overall structure of the book supports inclusivity and cultural openness, making it suitable for beginner learners of English,

with room for improvement at more advanced levels toward a more balanced and richly diverse cultural representation.

3. Effectiveness of Integrating Values into Language Learning — A Critical Analysis of the "Voices Beginner" Book:

Integrating human values such as environmental protection and cultural understanding into language learning content is a modern educational approach that aims to transform language acquisition into a comprehensive cognitive and ethical experience. In this context, the "Voices Beginner" book attempts to incorporate such values, especially through explorer profiles and reading passages (Mahrudin et al., 2023).

First: Effectiveness of Integrating Values for Beginner-Level Students

Integrating values at the beginner level can be highly effective if it is done in a simple, gradual, and interactive manner. In the case of the "Voices Beginner" book, we find that:

- Values like environmental protection appear in texts about tiny houses that "use less energy," or healthy food from natural sources.
- Cultural understanding is promoted through the presentation of diverse cultures, dishes from different countries, and characters from various national backgrounds.

These values are presented by using language that is suitable for beginners, without linguistic complexity, and within realistic everyday contexts, which makes them easy to grasp and internalize, even for those just starting to learn the language.

However, from a critical perspective, the impact of these values remains limited when they are not activated more deeply. Often, values are presented as part of general information or short exercises without encouraging reflection, discussion, or personal engagement, which weakens their long-term educational effect.

Second: Critical Analysis of the Educational Approaches Used to Promote Values

1. Explorer Profiles:

- These are among the strongest parts of the book in terms of value integration, featuring real-life individuals who travel, discover, and show respect for different cultures.
- They serve as clear examples of learning through role models, an effective method in value education.
- However, some profiles lack depth or contextual richness, which prevents learners from forming a personal or emotional connection with the content.

2. Reading Passages:

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- These are generally short, simple, and cover various topics (food, leisure, environment, travel).
- They provide general information related to values such as "the importance of healthy eating" or "exploring new cultures."
- But these passages lack analytical or reflective elements. Learners are not asked to discuss, compare, or express their opinions, making the adoption of values somewhat superficial.

Third: Strengths and Limitations of the Book

Strengths:

- Use of global and relatable figures enhances a sense of shared humanity.
- Positive and unbiased presentation of cultures supports openness and tolerance.
- Language is simple and well-suited for the target proficiency level.

Limitations:

- Values are presented as examples, not as core lesson themes.
- There is a lack of interactive or affective activities that emotionally engage students with the values (e.g., "What do you think?", "Do you agree?", "How would you apply this?").
- Little reinforcement or revisiting of values—some appear only once and are not revisited in later units.
- The "Voices Beginner" book makes a commendable attempt to integrate human values into language learning, especially at an introductory level. However, the effectiveness of this integration is limited by its superficial presentation, without giving learners the opportunity to reflect or critically engage.
- To enhance this effectiveness, units should include activities that emotionally and intellectually involve the student, such as group discussions, personal reflections, or connecting values to local and real-life contexts. Value-based learning is not just about presenting content; it requires activation of the learner's thoughts and emotions, so they don't just understand the value, but also adopt and apply it.

4. Cultural Representation and Potential Biases in the Content

Upon reviewing the content of the "Voices Beginner" book, it is clear that the authors have made efforts to present culturally diverse and globally inclusive material. However, this representation is not without points that warrant critical reflection and analysis (Alshammri, 2017).

Does the book offer a balanced and diverse representation of cultures and nationalities?

It can be said that the book **attempts** to provide diverse cultural representation, as seen through:

- The use of a wide range of nationalities and countries, such as Morocco, Oman, Turkey, Brazil, Vietnam, Germany, Korea, the United States, France, and others.

- The inclusion of traditional foods from various regions of the world (e.g., *Berber curry*, *Som Tam*, *Huancaína sauce*), suggests cultural openness.

- Featuring well-known global figures from different backgrounds like *Kim Yuna* (Korea), *Kylian Mbappé* (France), and *Amanda Gorman* (USA).

- However, it is noticeable that the representation lacks balance in terms of depth and frequency:

- Western figures, especially American and British, appear more frequently and are often portrayed as leaders or sources of knowledge.

- Non-Western characters tend to appear in basic introductory contexts without deep storytelling or highlighting of their cultural or intellectual achievements.

- This leads to a cultural imbalance, possibly unintentional, but still reflecting an indirect tendency to center the narrative around Western culture as the "default," while presenting other cultures as the peripheral "other."

How might the selected "Explorer" stories influence students' perceptions of different parts of the world and the roles of scientists/adventurers?

The National Geographic explorer stories are among the book's richest cultural and value-based sections. However, they are not free from ideological dimensions that can affect learners' perceptions of the world, such as:

1. **Focus on the Western explorer's perspective:**
   - Explorers are frequently portrayed as Western individuals traveling to "remote" or "mysterious" places to document or photograph them.
   - This reinforces a stereotype that knowledge and discovery are associated with the West, while the rest of the world is portrayed as a subject of exploration rather than a contributor to knowledge.

2. **Lack of local voices:**
   - Rarely are scientists or explorers from local or indigenous cultures featured.
   - People from the communities being explored are not shown as knowledge partners, but more as objects of observation. This may unintentionally promote a one-sided narrative about "the other."

3. **Influence on students' perceptions of scientists and adventurers:**

- Students may come to believe that scientists or explorers are always "outsiders" with advanced tools, arriving to interpret and explain others.

- This can limit students' ability—especially those from non-Western backgrounds—to imagine themselves as active contributors to science and exploration (Alzubi et al., 2023).

Although the "Voices Beginner" book aims to provide a global and inclusive educational experience, the cultural representation remains uneven. There is a subtle but noticeable preference for Western perspectives, especially in the choice of explorers and characters.

5- Educational Appropriateness for the College of Education in Shaqra:

When evaluating the "Voices Beginner" book in terms of its suitability for student teachers in the practicum stage at the College of Education in Shaqra, it is important to consider several pedagogical, cultural, and professional factors, including:

First: Relevance of the Content, Values, and Vocabulary

1. Local and Cultural Context:

- Student teachers in Shaqra belong to a conservative Saudi environment, deeply rooted in Islamic and Arab values. Therefore, any educational content should align with this background.

- In general, the book does not explicitly conflict with local or religious values. However, it lacks the inclusion of local examples or values drawn from the Saudi or Arab context, which may lead learners to feel somewhat disconnected or culturally alienated from the material.

2. Suitability of Vocabulary:

- The vocabulary presented in the book is simple and appropriate for beginners, making it linguistically suitable for student teachers at the start of their training.

- However, many words and activities are centered around Western contexts (cities, celebrities, foods), which limits their usefulness in developing teaching strategies relevant to the Saudi context—especially when addressing culturally sensitive topics or using English to convey local values.

3. Approach to Values:

- The book introduces important global values such as environmental protection, cultural understanding, and respect for diversity.

- However, it lacks a connection between these values and the local Saudi or Islamic context, such as concepts of *honesty, cooperation, respect, family responsibility, or national identity*,

which weakens its educational impact in preparing future teachers to pass on meaningful values in their own communities.

Second: Suggested Modifications and Supplementary Materials

To make the book more effective for student teachers at the College of Education in Shaqra, pedagogical and cultural adjustments or supporting materials are recommended, including:

1. Integration of Local Supporting Content:

▪ Develop accompanying activities in English that promote Islamic and national values (e.g., *modesty, honesty, generosity, respect for parents*).

▪ Introduce topics related to the Saudi environment, such as natural reserves, oases, or local environmental challenges (e.g., water scarcity or desertification).

2. Practical Teacher Training Activities:

Adapt classroom activities to suit teaching practicum needs, such as:

▪ Role-play between teacher and student.

▪ Designing mini-lesson plans that use vocabulary and values from the book, but within local classroom scenarios.

3. Inclusion of Arab and Saudi Role Models:

▪ Present educational or leadership figures from the local context, which helps strengthen cultural identity and learner engagement.

4. Promoting Critical Reflection:

▪ It Include reflective or discussion-based activities such as: *"Which values do you think are important for your society?" "How can you use English to teach those values?"*

▪ Link the content of the book to the students' future roles as teachers, encouraging them to be both language instructors and value educators.

▪ While the "Voices Beginner" book offers a solid linguistic structure and includes universal values, its educational relevance for student teachers at the College of Education in Shaqra remains limited unless accompanied by contextualized modifications or supplemental material.

▪ Therefore, localizing the content and embedding it in culturally relevant, real-world teaching contexts is essential to maximize its effectiveness, especially for practicum students who are

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expected to become impactful educators who convey values consistent with their Saudi societal context.

Results and Discussion:

This section presents the findings derived from the critical content analysis of the *Voices Beginner* EFL textbook, with a particular focus on three core dimensions: value-based vocabulary, cultural representation, and pedagogical relevance within the Saudi educational context. The analysis combines both qualitative insights and basic quantitative indicators, including frequency counts and percentage evaluations, to provide a holistic understanding of how the textbook supports or limits the integration of global values and localized educational needs.

Table (1)

Relevance in "Voices Beginner"

Unit	Value-Based Vocabulary (Count)	Environmental Theme Present	Cultural Representation	Relevance to Saudi Context
Unit 1	5	✗	Western only	✗
Unit 2	7	✓	Western + Asian	✗
Unit 3	4	✓	Minimal Arab inclusion	✓ (partially)
Unit 4	3	✗	Western-dominated	✗
Unit 5	6	✓	Balanced (Global and Local)	✓

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the critical analysis of the textbook.

Table (1) shows that each unit was examined to assess the inclusion of environmental and moral themes, the diversity of cultural references, and the extent to which the material aligns with the expectations and realities of student teachers in Saudi Arabia. The results are organized using comparative tables and interpreted through the lens of critical discourse analysis, revealing patterns, imbalances, and opportunities for pedagogical improvement.

Table (2)

Statistical Summary (%)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Units with environmental themes	3 / 5	60%
Units with Arab or Saudi cultural content	1.5 / 5	30%
Units relevant to the Saudi context	2 / 5	40%

Units with more than 5 value-related words	2 / 5	40%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the critical analysis of the textbook.

Table (2) presents a quantitative content breakdown of five selected units from the *Voices Beginner* EFL textbook. Units were analyzed based on the presence of value-based vocabulary (e.g., responsibility, sustainability, respect), inclusion of environmental topics, diversity of cultural representation, and relevance to the Saudi educational context.

- **Environmental Content:** It is found in 60% of units, suggesting a moderate emphasis on ecological awareness, consistent with global citizenship values promoted by National Geographic Learning.

- **Cultural Representation:** Only 30% of units included Arab or local cultural elements, which may affect learners' identification with the content and reduce cultural relevance.

- **Local Relevance:** 40% of units showed partial or full alignment with Saudi learners' needs or socio-cultural realities, indicating the necessity of cultural adaptation.

- **Vocabulary Richness:** Only 2 out of 5 units (40%) featured more than five value-oriented terms, which suggests that while values exist, their depth or consistency could be improved.

This analysis reveals that while *Voices Beginner* offers global perspectives, it lacks strong cultural localization for Saudi learners and would benefit from supplementary materials to ensure greater contextual engagement.

Quantitative statistical findings

Table (3)

Distribution of Value-Related Vocabulary by Type of Value

Type of Value	Number of Related Words	Examples from the Textbook	Observations
Environmental Values	8	environment, energy, clean, recycle	Mostly appear in lessons on housing or nature
Cultural Values	12	culture, tradition, food, music, country	Spread across food and travel units
Social Values (e.g., respect,	6	help, friend, family,	Found in everyday

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cooperation)		together	conversation dialogues
Global Values (e.g., citizenship, diversity)	7	world, different, people, global	Present in explorer profiles and global themes

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the critical analysis of the textbook.

Table (3) shows that cultural and environmental values are more frequently represented than social ones, indicating a stronger focus on global citizenship rather than on local or family-based values.

Table (4) Representation of Nationalities and Cultures in the Textbook

Nationality/Culture	Frequency of Appearance	Mode of Representation	Balance Assessment
American / British	10	Characters, examples, readings	Predominant representation
Asian (Korean, Japanese...)	4	International figures	Limited and not deeply explored
Arab / Islamic	1	Saudi Arabia mentioned only	Superficial and underdeveloped
African / Latin American	2	Food or location references	Weak in depth and recurrence
Global / Neutral	5	Maps, travel, and diverse cultures	Relatively balanced

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the critical analysis of the textbook.

Table (4) reflects a tendency toward Western-centric cultural representation, with limited exposure to Arab or Islamic cultures, despite their relevance to learners in a Saudi context.

Table (5)

Values Promoted in Explorer Profiles

Explorer / Topic	Promoted Values	Notes on Representation
Explorer 1 (Sample)	Curiosity — Exploration — Respect for Others	Well-presented, but only from a Western perspective
Explorer 2	Environmental preservation — Love of nature	Strong visuals are used, but it lacks local perspectives

Explorer 3	Teamwork – Courage	Values not linked to learners' social context

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the critical analysis of the textbook.

Table (5) shows that while explorer profiles promote meaningful values, they often lack a connection to the learners' cultural background, which may reduce their pedagogical impact for Saudi students.

Second: Analytical Summary of Results:

- A total of 33 value-related vocabulary items (explicit or implicit) were identified, spread across environmental, cultural, and social themes.
- Cultural representation is unbalanced, with clear Western dominance and minimal inclusion of Arab or Islamic perspectives.
- Values are presented using language appropriate for beginners but are not deepened through reflective or critical activities.
- There is a clear need for supplementary or adapted materials that connect these values with the Saudi cultural and educational context.

Conclusion:

This study examined the *"Voices Beginner"* EFL textbook through a critical analysis of its value-based vocabulary, cultural representations, and pedagogical relevance within the Saudi educational context. The findings revealed that while the textbook integrates several global values—such as environmental awareness, cultural appreciation, and social responsibility—it tends to emphasize Western perspectives, with limited representation of Arab or Islamic identities and contexts.

Value-related vocabulary is present across various units, particularly in topics related to nature, food, and global culture. However, these values are often introduced at a surface level, lacking deeper engagement through reflective activities or contextual localization. Explorer profiles and reading texts promote curiosity, diversity, and responsible citizenship but generally do so through voices and examples that do not align closely with the sociocultural realities of Saudi learners.

The analysis also showed an imbalance in the representation of nationalities and cultures, where Western countries are frequently highlighted, while local or regional cultures receive minimal attention. This cultural gap may limit the learners' ability to connect with the material on a personal and educational level—especially for student teachers who are preparing to model values and cultural awareness in their future classrooms.

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In conclusion, while *"Voices Beginner"* succeeds in offering foundational English language content with integrated global themes, it requires contextual adaptation and the inclusion of more locally relevant content to fully meet the pedagogical and cultural needs of Saudi student teachers. Without such adjustments, the textbook risks reinforcing cultural distance rather than bridging it through inclusive and balanced language education.

Recommendations:

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance its relevance and effectiveness, particularly for student teachers in Saudi Arabia:

1. Adapt parts of the textbook to include culturally relevant examples, texts, and figures from Saudi and Arab contexts. This will help learners relate more directly to the material and strengthen their sense of cultural identity.

2. Supplement existing units with activities or readings that explicitly introduce values rooted in local traditions, such as respect for family, community cooperation, and national pride, while maintaining the universal values already present.

3. Revise the selection of characters, countries, and stories to reflect a more balanced representation of global diversity. Greater inclusion of underrepresented cultures can promote a more inclusive worldview and foster mutual respect.

4. Introduce follow-up questions, group discussions, or writing tasks that encourage students to reflect on the values presented, compare them with their own, and apply them in real-life scenarios.

5. Develop specific classroom applications of the textbook content aimed at preparing student teachers. These could include microteaching exercises, lesson planning based on value-based content, and peer teaching sessions aligned with local educational priorities.

6. Produce teacher's guides, worksheets, or digital resources that contextualize the themes of the textbook within the Saudi curriculum, helping educators bridge the gap between global content and local classroom needs.

7. Encourage students to contribute content about their own culture, traditions, and values in English as part of project work, helping them become active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of foreign narratives.

Suggestions for Future Research:

Future research could conduct comparative analyses between Voices Beginner and other EFL textbooks used in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf region. Such studies would help determine whether the cultural

imbalance and value-related limitations identified here are specific to this series or reflect broader patterns across imported English teaching materials. Another future research area is investigating the attitudes of Saudi student teachers and instructors toward global versus local content would deepen understanding of how cultural representation affects motivation, engagement, and identity formation. Surveys or interviews could assess the extent to which textbook content aligns with learners' expectations and educational goals. Additionally, extending critical discourse analysis to other levels of the Voices series and to digital learning materials would provide a broader understanding of how ideology and culture are embedded across different modes of English language instruction.

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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Culture, Values, and Pedagogy in the "Voices Beginner" EFL Textbook in Saudi Arabia

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