

Article

Societal narratives in a Vietnamese rap song

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Abstract: This study explores the cultural and moral narratives in the contemporary Vietnamese rap song “Nau an cho em” by Den Vau. The research employs a corpus-based linguistic analysis to dissect the song’s lyrics, uncovering themes and messages that resonate with broader societal issues in Vietnam. The analysis reveals four key themes: the resilience and hope of children in Vietnam’s mountainous regions, the empowerment through education and self-improvement, the juxtaposition of natural beauty with hard realities, and the portrayal of community and collective identity. These themes highlight the song’s portrayal of the challenges faced by marginalized communities, the transformative power of education, and the importance of communal support and unity. The study demonstrates how contemporary Vietnamese music, particularly Den Vau’s work, transcends entertainment to offer profound insights into social commentary and moral reflection. It underscores the role of music as a medium for cultural expression and societal discourse in contemporary Vietnam.

Keywords: “Nau an cho em”; a corpus-based analysis; Den Vau; societal narratives; Vietnamese rap

1. Introduction

The Vietnamese music scene has witnessed a significant transformation over the years, particularly in its thematic diversity and the embrace of various musical genres. Among these, rap, or hip-hop, has carved out a distinctive niche, evolving from a fringe genre to a mainstream cultural force that addresses a wide array of social and cultural issues. This shift reflects a global trend but is particularly notable in Vietnam, where the genre has become a platform for artists to articulate their perspectives on societal challenges and narratives. Within this context, Den Vau stands out as a pivotal figure. His rap song “Nau an cho em” diverges from the more conventional themes of love and heartbreak, as noted in existing literature (e.g., Nguyen (2012)), to shine a light on the nuanced issue of love and support for children in Vietnam’s mountainous regions. This study aims to delve into and interpret the moral narratives embedded within this influential song, marking a departure from traditional Vietnamese music topics.

“Nau an cho em” distinguishes itself in the Vietnamese music landscape not just for its attention to the often-ignored plight of children in Vietnam’s mountainous regions but also for how it articulates these concerns. Den Vau, a prominent figure in Vietnam’s rap scene, has been instrumental in popularizing the genre across the country. His ability to blend sharp social commentary with the rhythmic and expressive qualities of rap music has garnered him a considerable following. Besides, some songs by Den Vau achieved significant popularity, amassing millions of views on YouTube within just some months, capturing the attention of roughly 50% of the

Vietnamese population. This remarkable reach underscores the profound impact and resonance of Den Vau's work with the audience, making it an exemplary subject for this research. In "Nau an cho em," Den Vau leverages this platform to foreground the challenges and resilience of these children, a subject that, despite its importance, receives limited attention in mainstream discourse (e.g., Le and Hutchinson (2022)). His lyrics are not just a call to awareness but serve as a poignant reminder of the societal obligations toward these vulnerable communities. This study seeks to unpack the linguistic intricacies and thematic depth of the song's lyrics, providing a richer understanding of Den Vau's approach to conveying moral lessons and social critique through his artistry.

2. Literature review

2.1. Music as a medium for cultural and moral expression

Several studies have established music as a significant medium for cultural and moral expression. Scholars like Kelly (2018) have argued that music is not just an art form but also a social construct that reflects and shapes societal values. In the Vietnamese context, Norton (2010) discussed how traditional Vietnamese music has historically served as a reflection of the country's cultural and moral ethos. More recent studies, such as those by Briain (2022), have focused on how contemporary Vietnamese music, especially genres like rap and pop, are evolving to address modern societal issues.

2.2. Vietnamese music and social issues

Research on Vietnamese music has traditionally focused on folk and traditional genres, with scholars like Norton (2010) exploring their historical and cultural significance. However, there is a growing body of work examining contemporary music. Olsen (2008) discussed the rise of modern genres like pop and rap in Vietnam and their role in addressing contemporary social issues. Specifically, they highlight how these genres are used by artists to bring attention to topics such as poverty, inequality, and, as in the case of "Nau an cho em," the challenges faced by marginalized groups.

2.3. Corpus-based analysis in music studies

Corpus-based analysis has become increasingly popular in music studies, particularly for examining lyrical content. McEnery and Hardie (2011) provided an overview of how corpus linguistics can be applied to study patterns and themes in song lyrics. In their seminal work, Baker et al. (2013) demonstrated how a corpus-based approach could uncover hidden meanings and socio-political commentaries in music. This methodology has been applied in various settings, including the analysis of protest songs by Eesuola (2015) and the study of gender representation in pop music by Avery et al. (2017). To enrich the corpus-based analysis in music studies, integrating metaphorical analysis following the conceptual framework developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and further elaborated by Kovecses (2013) provides a deeper understanding of how language, particularly metaphorical language, shapes our

comprehension and appreciation of song lyrics. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) asserted that metaphors not only influence linguistic expressions but also shape our thoughts and actions, suggesting that the study of metaphors in song lyrics can reveal deeper layers of meaning and cultural significance. Similarly, Kovecses (2013) offered insights into the cultural dimensions of metaphor, which can be particularly pertinent for analyzing songs that reflect or comment on societal issues, values, and dynamics. By integrating metaphorical analysis into the corpus-based approach, researchers can explore not just the overt themes and messages in music but also how artists use metaphors to convey complex emotions, experiences, and critiques. This combined approach allows for a more nuanced exploration of the lyrical content, revealing how songs construct and communicate cultural narratives and ideologies. For instance, examining how metaphors of battle and journey are employed in protest songs could offer insights into societal struggles and aspirations, while the analysis of metaphors related to nature and machines in pop music might reveal underlying attitudes towards environmental issues and technological advancements.

This literature review highlights the existing research relevant to the study, underscoring the importance of music as a medium for moral and cultural expression, the efficacy of corpus-based analysis in interpreting song lyrics, and the evolving nature of Vietnamese music in addressing social issues. The review sets the stage for an in-depth analysis of “*Nau an cho em*”, situating it within these broader academic discussions.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

The methodology of this study was a metaphor analysis, drawing upon the seminal works of scholars like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kovecses (2013). This approach centers on exploring the conceptual metaphors embedded within the song’s lyrics, focusing on how these metaphors serve as a bridge between linguistic expressions and the deeper moral and social messages conveyed in “*Nau an cho em*.” The choice to pivot to a metaphor analysis is predicated on the understanding that metaphors are not merely stylistic devices but foundational mechanisms through which human beings conceptualize the world and their experiences within it (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). By identifying and interpreting the metaphors used by Den Vau to depict the lives and struggles of children in Vietnam’s mountainous regions, this study aimed to uncover the underlying cognitive frames that guide listeners’ perceptions and attitudes towards these issues. Kovecses (2013) further elaborated on the role of metaphor in understanding and conveying emotional and social experiences, emphasizing the cultural dimensions of metaphorical thought. Applying Kovecses’s (2013) insights, this analysis examined how Den Vau’s lyrics tap into culturally specific metaphors that resonate with Vietnamese listeners, thereby fostering a collective empathy and understanding towards the song’s subject matter.

Besides, this study also used some corpus linguistics principles, as outlined by McEnery (2019), which advocate for the systematic study of language as expressed in corpora (bodies of text). In this case, the corpus is constituted by the lyrics of “*Nau an cho em*”. The analysis involves examining lexical choices, frequency of words and

phrases, collocations, and thematic clusters. This approach not only allows for the identification of the predominant themes and messages in the lyrics but also facilitates a deeper understanding of how language is used to convey complex moral and social narratives.

In conjunction with corpus linguistics, the study also draws upon cultural studies theory, particularly the work of Hall (2016), to frame the interpretation of the song's content. This theoretical perspective assists in contextualizing the lyrics within the broader Vietnamese socio-cultural landscape, recognizing the role of music as a cultural artifact that both reflects and influences societal values and norms. By integrating corpus linguistics with cultural studies, the study aims to uncover not just the linguistic patterns in the lyrics, but also their cultural significance and the moral lessons they impart.

This research design also incorporates elements of discourse analysis, following the approach of Fairclough (1992), to understand how the song constructs social realities and engages with issues pertinent to Vietnamese society, especially concerning the marginalized communities in the mountainous regions. This involves a detailed examination of the narrative style, rhetorical devices, and metaphorical language employed in the lyrics.

Through this multi-faceted approach, the study intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of "Nau an cho em," shedding light on how Den Vau's lyrics serve as a medium for moral education and social commentary, and how they resonate with the contemporary Vietnamese audience. This research design, thus, offers a novel way of understanding the intersection of language, culture, and morality in the realm of contemporary Vietnamese music.

3.2. Materials

The materials for the study consist primarily of the lyrical content of the rap song "Nau an cho em" by Den Vau, featuring PiaLinh. The song was released on 13 May 2023, and is available for download and streaming via various platforms as indicated in the link <https://Denvau.lnk.to/NACE>. The primary focus of the study, the lyrics of "Nau an cho em," provided the corpus for linguistic and thematic analysis. The lyrics were transcribed and analyzed for their linguistic content, thematic relevance, and representation of moral and social issues.

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis is centered on a thematic analysis of the song's lyrics. This approach involves a detailed examination of the text to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data (Braun et al., 2023). The process is conducted in several stages to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the lyrics' content.

Initially, the lyrics of "Nau an cho em" were transcribed in their entirety to serve as the primary data source. The transcription was scrutinized line by line to ensure accuracy and completeness, capturing not only the words but also the contextual and expressive nuances intrinsic to the song. The analysis began with a familiarization phase, where the lyrics were read repeatedly to gain a deep understanding of their

overall content and context. Notes and initial ideas were recorded during this phase. Following this, a systematic coding process was undertaken. Each line of the lyrics was examined to identify significant features or concepts relevant to the study's focus on moral and social themes. These codes were then collated into potential themes, which were carefully reviewed and refined. This involved a back-and-forth process between the coded extracts and the entire data set to ascertain if the themes accurately represented the patterns observed in the data.

The next phase involved defining and naming the themes. This crucial step required a careful consideration of what each theme captured and how it related to the research question and objectives. The themes were not just descriptive but were interpreted within the broader context of Vietnamese culture and society, drawing on theoretical frameworks from linguistics and cultural studies. Finally, the analysis culminated in the production of a detailed report. This report weaved together the thematic analysis with the theoretical and contextual background of the song. It presented a comprehensive picture of how the themes identified in the lyrics of “Nau an cho em” reflected and conveyed moral lessons and social commentary, particularly in relation to the challenges and experiences of children in Vietnam's mountainous regions. The data analysis, thus, not only shed light on the specific content of the song but also contributed to a broader understanding of the role of music in moral and social education in contemporary Vietnamese society.

4. Findings

4.1. The resilience and hope of children in Vietnam's mountainous regions

The study reveals a prominent theme centered around the resilience and hope of children in Vietnam's mountainous regions, juxtaposed with a reflective narrative on personal growth and social responsibility. This theme is interwoven throughout the lyrics, emphasizing the strength and potential of these children despite their challenging circumstances.

A key lyric, “Kìa mây, mây ngang đầu, kia núi, núi lô nhô/Cùng em trên con đường, đường bé xíu quanh co,” (look at the clouds, clouds right above, look at the mountains, mountains unevenly high/with you on this path, a tiny winding road) vividly paints the rugged yet beautiful landscape of the mountainous areas, portraying the daily journey of these children. The imagery of clouds and winding paths metaphorically represents both the literal and figurative challenges faced by these children. This portrayal aligns with corpus linguistics principles where specific word choices and imagery are used to create a thematic resonance that extends beyond the literal meaning of the words.

Further, the lines “Những nụ cười làm cho lòng đang bộn bề bỗng hoá ngay ngắn/Lên trên này thấy các em, anh mới thấy mình quá may mắn” (the smiles make my cluttered heart suddenly feel aligned/coming up here and seeing you all, I realize how fortunate I am) utilize discourse analysis elements by positioning the narrator as a reflective observer, who, through the simple joy and resilience of the children, gains a new perspective on his own life. This reflection is a powerful commentary on

gratitude and the realization of one's relative fortune, which is a recurrent theme in cultural studies.

Moreover, the song incorporates a narrative of nurturing and growth, both in a literal and metaphorical sense, through lines such as “Học cách bón thêm hạnh phúc để cành đó mọc ra những điều lành” (learn to fertilize with happiness so that branch can grow into good things). This lyric suggests a philosophy of cultivating happiness and goodness, akin to nurturing a plant, which metaphorically applies to the nurturing of children and, by extension, the future of the community. This aligns with cultural studies theory, which emphasizes the role of art in reflecting and shaping societal values and behaviors.

4.2. The empowerment through education and self-improvement

Another significant finding is the theme of empowerment through education and self-improvement, a narrative that flows through the song's lyrics and is deeply rooted in cultural values and societal aspirations.

The lines “Nấu cho các em ăn, em lấy sức nhặt từng con chữ/Khi có tri thức em thấy con hổ không còn hung dữ” (cook for these children, and they gather strength from picking up each letter/with knowledge, they find the tiger is no longer fierce) emphasize the transformative power of education. The metaphor of ‘picking up each letter’ symbolizes the gradual and diligent acquisition of knowledge, while the taming of a ferocious tiger through education underscores the belief in knowledge as a tool for overcoming challenges and fears. This aligns with the principles of corpus linguistics, where metaphorical language is used to convey complex ideas and values.

Additionally, the song portrays a message of communal growth and the collective responsibility of nurturing the younger generation, as seen in “Vì anh biết những đứa trẻ này, mai này sẽ xây dựng quê hương” (because I know these children, in the future, they will build our homeland). This lyric reflects a forward-looking perspective, recognizing children as the architects of the future. It resonates with cultural studies theory, which often examines how cultural artifacts like music can articulate collective hopes and responsibilities within a society.

Furthermore, the song incorporates elements of discourse analysis by using the narrative voice to establish a sense of communal identity and shared journey towards improvement. The lines “Tụi mình muốn trở thành người tốt và đang phải học để làm điều đó” (we want to become good people and are learning to do just that) convey a collective aspiration to become better individuals, recognizing that it is a continuous learning process. This notion of communal growth and shared learning journey is a powerful reflection of societal values and aspirations.

4.3. The juxtaposition of natural beauty and hard realities

Another salient theme that emerges is the juxtaposition of natural beauty and hard realities, and the role of community support in fostering resilience and hope. This theme is intricately woven into the lyrics, offering a nuanced portrayal of life in Vietnam's mountainous regions.

The lyric “Ở dưới xuôi, chúng mình gọi view này là view triệu đô, vậy thì ai mới là người dư dả?” (Downstream, we call this view a million-dollar view, so who really

is the wealthy one?) illustrates a striking contrast between the perceived value of the picturesque landscape and the actual hardships faced by the inhabitants of these regions. This contrast is a critical commentary on the disparities between urban perceptions and rural realities, a concept that resonates with cultural studies theory which often explores how cultural expressions can highlight societal inequalities.

Furthermore, the song underscores the theme of inner strength and collective support through lines like “Chúng mình làm và làm và làm, cũng chỉ để mong có ngày được thư thả” (we work and work and work, all just in the hope of a day of ease). This reflects the hardworking ethos of the community, emphasizing perseverance and the shared aspiration for a more relaxed and prosperous future. Such expressions align with discourse analysis by illustrating how language can construct social realities and collective identities.

Additionally, the song’s lyrics, “Và khi xem lại những hình ảnh này, những áp lực chợt biến tan/Những nụ cười mát như nước giếng khoan” (and when I look back at these images, the pressures suddenly dissolve/the smiles are as refreshing as water from a well), use vivid imagery to convey the refreshing and healing power of children’s smiles, symbolizing hope and the alleviation of burdens. This metaphorical use of language is a key aspect of corpus linguistics principles, where deeper meanings are conveyed through creative and symbolic language use.

4.4. The portrayal of nature as a source of inspiration and resilience

Another profound theme identified is the portrayal of nature as a source of inspiration and resilience. The song’s lyrics weave a vivid tapestry that connects the children’s experiences with the natural environment, emphasizing how these elements shape their character and outlook on life.

The lines “Trong đôi mắt đỏ em thấy bầu trời, em thấy núi đồi mặt hồ trong veo” (in those eyes, they see the sky, they see the clear-faced mountains and hills) metaphorically suggest that the children see the vastness and purity of nature in their own lives, reflecting an intrinsic connection with their environment. This perspective is significant in understanding the role of nature in shaping the identities and experiences of individuals in rural areas, a concept that resonates with cultural studies theory, which often explores how environment and culture are interrelated.

Moreover, the lyrics “Mong chân sẽ cứng và đá luôn mềm trên mỗi con đường từng ngày em qua” (hoping their feet will be strong and the stones always soft on each path they take daily) metaphorically convey the wish for resilience and ease in their journey. This line uses the natural elements of rocks and paths as symbols for life’s challenges and the children’s capacity to overcome them. This metaphorical representation aligns with principles of corpus linguistics, where symbolic language is used to convey deeper meanings and emotions.

Additionally, the song reflects on the interconnectedness of all elements of life, as seen in “Mặt Trời trong trái tim hồng, vang trong lòng một tiếng gà trưa/Mong cho cây lá lên mầm, mong cho trời thuận gió hoà mưa” (the sun in the heart, echoing in the soul a midday rooster’s crow/wishing for the leaves to sprout, hoping for favorable winds and gentle rain). These lines illustrate a harmonious relationship between the natural world and human life, emphasizing a deep-rooted sense of belonging and

harmony with nature. This aspect of the song employs elements of discourse analysis by constructing a narrative that intertwines human experiences with the natural world, reflecting a collective consciousness and appreciation for nature.

4.5. Community and collective identity

An additional significant finding is the theme of community and collective identity, which is beautifully interwoven throughout the song. This theme emphasizes the sense of unity and shared experiences among the people living in Vietnam’s mountainous regions, particularly in how they perceive and interact with the wider world.

The lyric “Ở dưới xuôi, chúng mình gọi view này là view triệu đô, vậy thì ai mới là người dư dả?” (Downstream, we call this view a million-dollar view, so who really is the wealthy one?) illustrates a collective perspective, highlighting a communal viewpoint rather than an individual one. This is an essential aspect of cultural studies theory, which often focuses on how cultural expressions can reflect and shape collective identities and perceptions. The song portrays a community that, despite economic challenges, possesses a wealth of natural beauty and cultural richness, challenging the conventional notions of wealth and prosperity.

Furthermore, the repeated use of the phrase “chúng mình” (we or us) throughout the song fosters a sense of inclusiveness and shared experience. This collective narrative is a vital component of discourse analysis, demonstrating how language can be used to create a sense of community and shared identity. The lyrics portray a collective journey of learning, growth, and resilience, emphasizing the importance of communal support and unity in overcoming life’s challenges.

Additionally, from the perspective of corpus linguistics, the repetition of communal terms and the consistent focus on collective experiences rather than individual narratives contribute to the overall thematic structure of the song. This repeated linguistic pattern reinforces the theme of community and collective identity, illustrating how linguistic choices can reflect and emphasize underlying cultural and social themes.

Table 1 presents a comprehensive summary of the study’s findings, neatly compiling the key data points, insights, and conclusions drawn from the research. It organizes the information in a clear and accessible format, allowing readers to quickly grasp the study’s outcomes, the relationships between variables, and the implications of these results for the broader field of inquiry.

Table 1. Summary of findings.

No	Themes	Linguistics data
1	The resilience and hope of Children in Vietnam’s Mountainous Regions	<p>“Kìa mây, mây ngang đầu, kìa núi, núi lô nhô/Cùng em trên con đường, đường bé xíu quanh co,” (look at the clouds, clouds right above, look at the mountains, mountains unevenly high/With you on this path, a tiny winding road)</p> <p>“Những nụ cười làm cho lòng đang bộn bề bỗng hoá ngay ngắn/Lên trên này thấy các em, anh mới thấy mình quá may mắn” (the smiles make my cluttered heart suddenly feel aligned/Coming up here and seeing you all, I realize how fortunate I am)</p> <p>“Học cách bón thêm hạnh phúc để cành đó mọc ra những điều lành” (learn to fertilize with happiness so that branch can grow into good things)</p>

Table 1. (Continued).

No	Themes	Linguistics data
2	The empowerment through education and self-improvement	<p>“Nấu cho các em ăn, em lấy sức nhất từng con chữ/Khi có tri thức em thấy con hổ không còn hung dữ” (cook for these children, and they gather strength from picking up each letter/With knowledge, they find the tiger is no longer fierce)</p> <p>“Vì anh biết những đứa trẻ này, mai này sẽ xây dựng quê hương” (because I know these children, in the future, they will build our homeland)</p> <p>“Tụi mình muốn trở thành người tốt và đang phải học để làm điều đó” (we want to become good people and are learning to do just that)</p>
3	The juxtaposition of natural beauty and hard realities	<p>“Ở dưới xuôi, chúng mình gọi view này là view triệu đô, vậy thì ai mới là người dư dả?” (Downstream, we call this view a million-dollar view, so who really is the wealthy one?)</p> <p>“Chúng mình làm và làm và làm, cũng chỉ để mong có ngày được thư thả” (we work and work and work, all just in the hope of a day of ease)</p> <p>“Và khi xem lại những hình ảnh này, những áp lực chợt biến tan/Những nụ cười mát như nước giếng khoan” (and when I look back at these images, the pressures suddenly dissolve/the smiles are as refreshing as water from a well)</p>
4	The portrayal of nature as a source of inspiration and resilience	<p>“Trong đôi mắt đó em thấy bầu trời, em thấy núi đồi mặt hồ trong veo” (in those eyes, they see the sky, they see the clear-faced mountains and hills)</p> <p>“Mong chân sẽ cứng và đá luôn mềm trên mỗi con đường từng ngày em qua” (hoping their feet will be strong and the stones always soft on each path they take daily)</p> <p>“Mặt Trời trong trái tim hồng, vang trong lòng một tiếng gà trưa/Mong cho cây lá lên mầm, mong cho trời thuận gió hoà mưa” (the sun in the heart, echoing in the soul a midday rooster’s crow/wishing for the leaves to sprout, hoping for favorable winds and gentle rain)</p>
5	Community and collective identity	<p>“Ở dưới xuôi, chúng mình gọi view này là view triệu đô, vậy thì ai mới là người dư dả?” (Downstream, we call this view a million-dollar view, so who really is the wealthy one?)</p> <p>“chúng mình” (we or us)</p>

5. Discussion

5.1. The resilience and hope of children in Vietnam’s mountainous regions

The findings of this study, focusing on the resilience and hope of children in Vietnam’s mountainous regions as depicted in Den Vau’s “Nau an cho em,” present both similarities and differences when compared to existing literature in the field (e.g., Gillen (2016); Norton (2010)). This discussion aims to juxtapose these findings with previous studies, underscoring the unique contributions of this study to the understanding of contemporary Vietnamese music and its cultural implications. Contrasting “Nau an cho em” with the composer Anh Viet Thanh’s “Vung la me bay” provides an insightful exploration into how different artists portray the complexities of rural Vietnam. While both songs delve into the intricacies of Vietnamese rural life, “Vung la me bay” tends to emphasize the emotional and cultural ties to the land, offering a complementary yet distinct perspective on resilience and hope in the face of adversity.

Previous research on Vietnamese music, particularly in rural contexts, has often highlighted themes of nature, simplicity, and traditional values. Studies like those by Gillen (2016) have emphasized the portrayal of rural Vietnam as idyllic and untouched by modern complexities. In contrast, “Nau an cho em” presents a more nuanced view of rural life. While it celebrates the natural beauty and simplicity of the mountainous regions, it also acknowledges the hardships and resilience required to navigate these landscapes. This dual perspective marks a significant departure from the predominantly romanticized portrayal in earlier music, adding depth to the

understanding of rural life in contemporary Vietnamese music. Furthermore, comparing Den Vau's approach to the depiction of resilience with that seen in traditional folk songs illuminates the evolution of thematic exploration in Vietnamese music. Traditional songs, often passed down through generations, focus on collective resilience and the strength derived from community bonds. In contrast, "Nau an cho em" personalizes the narrative, emphasizing individual resilience and the personal journey of overcoming hardship. This shift from a collective to a more individualistic portrayal of resilience offers a fresh lens through which to view contemporary societal challenges.

Furthermore, previous studies have often focused on the collective cultural identity as seen in traditional Vietnamese music (Norton, 2010). However, the reflective narrative on personal growth and social responsibility, as depicted in "Nau an cho em," is relatively unexplored in the context of Vietnamese music. This study brings to light how contemporary Vietnamese artists like Den Vau are using their music to not only reflect on societal issues but also to encourage personal introspection and growth. The use of discourse analysis elements to position the narrator as a reflective observer represents a novel approach in the analysis of Vietnamese music, emphasizing the role of individual experiences and perspectives in understanding broader societal themes.

Additionally, the theme of nurturing and growth in "Nau an cho em" aligns with cultural studies theory but extends it by incorporating a metaphorical understanding of societal development. To further exemplify this point, one can compare this theme with the works of artists such as Trinh Cong Son, whose songs often reflect on societal issues and personal growth amidst historical upheavals. Such comparisons not only contextualize "Nau an cho em" within a broader musical tradition but also highlight the innovative ways contemporary artists are addressing themes of societal development. While previous literature has discussed the role of music in shaping societal values (e.g., Turino (2008)), this study reveals how contemporary music can metaphorically represent societal nurturing and growth. This metaphorical representation of societal nurturing is a unique contribution of this study, highlighting how contemporary Vietnamese music is evolving to include deeper, more symbolic representations of societal issues and values.

5.2. The empowerment through education and self-improvement

The theme of empowerment through education and self-improvement presents a significant addition to the existing body of research on Vietnamese music and its cultural impact. This theme, while resonating with some aspects of previous studies (Dinh, 2023; Hess, 2019; Meeker, 2013), introduces a nuanced perspective on the role of education and communal growth in contemporary Vietnamese society.

Previous research on Vietnamese music has often highlighted the importance of traditional values and cultural heritage, with a focus on communal harmony and collective experiences. For instance, studies like Dinh (2023) and Meeker (2013) have emphasized the role of music in reflecting collective cultural identity. However, the focus on education as a transformative tool for individual and societal improvement, as seen in "Nau an cho em," marks a distinct shift. The metaphorical language used to

depict education's power extends the traditional narrative by emphasizing individual empowerment as a catalyst for communal advancement. This aligns with corpus linguistics principles but adds a new dimension to the understanding of contemporary Vietnamese music. To further deepen this analysis, comparing "Nau an cho em" with other musical pieces that explore themes of education and empowerment can illuminate the broader societal implications. For example, the song "Sang mot niem tin," composed by Nguyen Ngoc Thien, offers a different take on empowerment, focusing on self-acceptance and the importance of personal identity in the educational journey. This comparison not only enriches the conversation about empowerment through education but also showcases the diverse ways in which Vietnamese music addresses societal challenges and aspirations.

Moreover, the song's portrayal of children as future architects of society introduces a forward-looking perspective that is relatively underexplored in Vietnamese music studies. This perspective aligns with cultural studies theory, yet it uniquely contributes by highlighting the role of music in articulating a collective vision for future societal development, rooted in education and self-improvement (Hess, 2019). Incorporating insights from songs like "Bai ca tuoi tre" by Phan Van Hung, which celebrates the vibrancy and potential of youth in shaping the future, further emphasizes the role of music in fostering a sense of communal responsibility towards education and societal progress. This comparison elucidates the multifaceted ways in which contemporary Vietnamese artists use music to inspire a collective vision for the future, underpinned by the values of education and self-improvement.

Additionally, the emphasis on a shared journey of learning and growth, as portrayed through the narrative voice in the song, represents an evolution in the discourse surrounding Vietnamese music. While previous studies have noted the communal aspect of Vietnamese music (Norton, 2010), the explicit focus on collective learning and aspiration to improve adds a dynamic layer to the understanding of communal identity in modern Vietnamese society. Exploring the interplay between individual and communal narratives in songs such as "Viet Nam oi! Danh bay Covid!" by Minh Beta, which galvanizes collective action and resilience, offers a poignant example of how contemporary Vietnamese music is engaging with themes of education, empowerment, and societal progress. This aspect of the song utilizes elements of discourse analysis to construct a narrative of communal identity that is not just rooted in traditional values but also oriented towards collective growth and improvement.

5.3. The juxtaposition of natural beauty and hard realities

The theme of juxtaposing natural beauty with hard realities in "Nau an cho em" offers a distinctive perspective when compared to existing literature on Vietnamese music and culture. This theme highlights the complexities of life in Vietnam's mountainous regions, a narrative that is both similar to and distinct from previous studies in significant ways (e.g., Bates (2023); Nguyen (2018)).

Traditional Vietnamese music, as explored in earlier studies (e.g., Nguyen (2018)), often romanticizes rural life, emphasizing the beauty of the natural landscape and the simplicity of rural living. However, "Nau an cho em" goes a step further by

not only celebrating the natural beauty but also candidly portraying the challenging realities of life in these areas. The lyric contrasts the idyllic ‘million-dollar view’ with the actual hardships of the mountainous regions’ inhabitants. This portrayal is a nuanced addition to the field, as it highlights the disparities between perception and reality, a concept that has been less explored in traditional Vietnamese music studies. To enrich this analysis, it is constructive to draw parallels with other musical pieces that similarly balance the beauty of Vietnam with its socio-economic challenges. For instance, the work of songwriter Trinh Cong Son, known for his poetic and reflective songs about war, love, and the human condition, provides a poignant comparison. Songs like “Ca dao me” not only celebrate the natural and cultural beauty of Vietnam but also reflect on the pain and loss caused by war and separation. This comparison underlines the broader tradition in Vietnamese music of using natural beauty as a backdrop for exploring deeper societal issues, a theme that “Nau an cho em” contemporizes by focusing on the socio-economic struggles unique to Vietnam’s mountainous regions.

The community support and resilience, found in this rap song, reflect a collective ethos that is familiar in Vietnamese cultural narratives (Bates, 2023). However, the song’s approach in weaving this theme with the harsh realities of rural life offers a more holistic and realistic portrayal of these communities. This nuanced representation aligns with cultural studies theory but extends it by exploring how modern music can articulate the complexities of contemporary rural life. Comparing “Nau an cho em” to the anthemic works of modern Vietnamese pop artists like Son Tung M-TP, whose music often delves into personal and societal challenges within a rapidly modernizing Vietnam, can provide further insights. While Son Tung M-TP’s music predominantly addresses urban and youthful dilemmas, the juxtaposition in “Nau an cho em” of natural beauty with rural hardships illuminates a different facet of Vietnamese society, underscoring the diversity of experiences and challenges across different regions.

Furthermore, the song’s use of vivid imagery showcases a sophisticated use of language that goes beyond traditional lyrical expressions in Vietnamese music. This aligns with corpus linguistics principles, where symbolic language is used to convey complex ideas and emotions (McEnery, 2019), and provides a deeper insight into how contemporary Vietnamese artists are using music to address and articulate complex societal issues. This advanced use of language and imagery in “Nau an cho em” reflects a broader trend in Vietnamese music where artists are increasingly employing nuanced and layered lyrical content to engage with and reflect upon the realities of contemporary life, marking a shift towards more complex and socially aware artistic expressions.

5.4. The portrayal of nature as a source of inspiration and resilience

The portrayal of nature as a source of inspiration and resilience in Den Vau’s “Nau an cho em” offers a unique contribution to the existing body of research on Vietnamese music and its intersection with cultural narratives. This theme, while resonating with traditional Vietnamese musical themes, introduces a nuanced perspective on the role of nature in shaping individual and collective identities, especially in rural contexts.

Traditional Vietnamese music, as noted in previous studies (e.g., Norton (2010)), often incorporates elements of nature, reflecting the country's agrarian roots and the deep connection of its people with their natural surroundings. However, the way "Nau an cho em" integrates nature into the narrative of resilience and inspiration represents a novel approach. The lyrics go beyond mere depiction of nature, metaphorically linking the natural environment to the inner lives and perspectives of the children. This profound connection between nature and human experience is a distinctive aspect that enriches the traditional portrayal of nature in Vietnamese music, aligning with cultural studies theory while providing new insights into the contemporary rural psyche. To deepen the analysis, it is valuable to compare "Nau an cho em" with other Vietnamese songs that explore nature's role, such as "Bai ca dao moi truong" by Ngoc Le Ninh, which emphasizes environmental conservation and its importance to human well-being. While Ngoc Le Ninh's song uses nature to underscore a message of ecological preservation, "Nau an cho em" focuses on the metaphorical strength and resilience found in nature, illustrating varied but complementary approaches to engaging with nature in Vietnamese music. This comparison not only highlights the diversity in thematic treatments of nature within Vietnamese music but also showcases the evolving dialogue between humanity and the natural world in contemporary music narratives.

Furthermore, the use of nature as a metaphor for life's challenges and resilience showcases a sophisticated application of corpus linguistics principles (McEnery, 2019). This metaphorical representation of nature not only adds lyrical depth but also reflects a deeper understanding of the human-nature relationship in the context of overcoming life's challenges, a theme less explored in traditional Vietnamese music studies.

Additionally, the song's portrayal of the interconnectedness between the natural world and human life employs elements of discourse analysis to create a narrative that interweaves human experiences with the natural world (Fairclough, 1992). This analytical perspective is enhanced when considering works like "Xinh tuoi Viet Nam" by Nguyen Hong Thuan, which also celebrates the beauty and resilience of nature, yet through a more introspective lens. By examining these diverse expressions, we gain a fuller appreciation of how contemporary Vietnamese music reflects and shapes the nation's cultural and ecological consciousness. This approach highlights a collective consciousness and appreciation for nature, reflecting a communal identity deeply rooted in the natural environment, a perspective that adds a new dimension to the understanding of Vietnamese cultural and musical narratives.

5.5. Community and collective identity

The theme of community and collective identity adds a unique dimension to the existing discourse on Vietnamese music and culture. While previous studies have highlighted the importance of community in Vietnamese music (Cannon, 2013; Meeker, 2013), the way this theme is articulated in the song presents both similarities to and differences from these traditional narratives, thereby enriching the understanding of collective identity in contemporary Vietnamese society.

Traditionally, Vietnamese music has been recognized for its emphasis on

community and shared experiences, often reflecting the collective ethos of Vietnamese culture (Cannon, 2013). This is seen in the communal singing of folk songs and the portrayal of collective experiences in traditional music, as discussed in studies like those by Meeker (2013). However, “Nau an cho em” extends this narrative by not only portraying a shared community experience but also by challenging conventional perceptions of wealth and prosperity. The lyric represents a critical commentary on the disparities between urban and rural perspectives, a theme that has been less prevalent in traditional Vietnamese music studies. Expanding on this critical analysis, comparing “Nau an cho em” with traditional songs like “Ly ngua o,” which celebrates rural life and community spirit in a more idealized manner, illustrates the evolution of themes in Vietnamese music. While “Ly ngua o” embodies the collective joy and unity of the countryside, “Nau an cho em” offers a nuanced narrative that includes the struggles faced by these communities, providing a more complex and holistic view of rural life. This contrast highlights the diversity in thematic approaches to community and collective identity in Vietnamese music, showing how contemporary works contribute new perspectives to the ongoing dialogue about community values and societal challenges.

Moreover, the use of the inclusive term “chúng mình” throughout the song is a significant linguistic choice that reinforces the theme of collective identity. This consistent focus on the communal perspective, as opposed to individual narratives, aligns with the principles of corpus linguistics and represents a more contemporary approach to expressing collective experiences in Vietnamese music (Norton, 2010). This repeated pattern contributes to a deeper understanding of how modern Vietnamese artists use language to create and reinforce a sense of community and shared identity. To further illustrate the modern exploration of community in Vietnamese music, the song “Que em mua nuoc lu” by Tien Luan serves as a poignant comparison. This song delves into the collective resilience of a community facing natural disasters, embodying the shared struggles and triumphs through its narrative and melody. By juxtaposing these songs, we observe a broad spectrum of how community and collective identity are depicted in Vietnamese music, from the joys and unity of traditional themes to the contemporary acknowledgment of shared hardships and resilience.

Additionally, the song’s emphasis on the collective journey of learning, growth, and resilience, as seen in the communal narrative (Malarney, 2020), resonates with discourse analysis by illustrating how language constructs social realities and collective identities. This aspect of the song adds a new layer to the understanding of community in Vietnamese music, highlighting the evolving nature of communal narratives in reflecting contemporary societal challenges and aspirations. This evolving narrative is crucial for understanding the role of music in Vietnamese society, as it continues to adapt and respond to the changing dynamics of community life, offering a mirror to the complexities and beauty of shared experiences and identities.

6. Conclusion

The study embarked on an exploratory journey to uncover the deep-seated moral and cultural narratives embedded within the lyrics of a contemporary Vietnamese rap

song. Set against the backdrop of Vietnam's evolving music scene, where artists like Den Vau are increasingly using their platform to spotlight societal issues, this study aimed to dissect the layers of moral and cultural expressions in "Nau an cho em". Employing a corpus-based analysis, the study meticulously transcribed and examined the lyrics to identify linguistic patterns, thematic elements, and underlying messages.

The methods adopted in this study combined corpus linguistics principles with elements of cultural studies theory and discourse analysis. This multifaceted approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the song's lyrics, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the themes and their broader societal implications. Through this analysis, the study unearthed several key themes: the resilience and hope of children in Vietnam's mountainous regions, the empowerment through education and self-improvement, the juxtaposition of natural beauty and hard realities, the portrayal of nature as a source of inspiration and resilience, and the portrayal of community and collective identity.

Each of these themes revealed unique insights into contemporary Vietnamese society and culture. The theme of resilience and hope highlighted the strength and potential of children in challenging environments, while the theme of empowerment through education underscored the transformative power of knowledge. The juxtaposition of natural beauty and hard realities offered a nuanced portrayal of rural life, challenging conventional narratives. Lastly, the portrayal of community and collective identity emphasized the significance of shared experiences and communal bonds in shaping societal perspectives.

The implications of this study are multifaceted, extending beyond the realms of musicology and into broader cultural and social contexts. Firstly, the study highlights the transformative potential of contemporary Vietnamese music as a platform for social commentary and moral education. By dissecting the themes of resilience, empowerment, and community in Den Vau's song, this research underscores how music can effectively address and bring awareness to societal issues, particularly those pertaining to underrepresented communities in Vietnam's mountainous regions. This insight suggests a growing role for artists in shaping public discourse and societal values, encouraging more musicians to explore meaningful and socially relevant topics in their work.

Secondly, the study's findings offer valuable perspectives for educators and cultural theorists. The themes of empowerment through education and the portrayal of nature as a source of inspiration emphasize the importance of incorporating local cultural narratives in educational content. Such integration can enhance the relevance and impact of education, especially in rural areas, fostering a sense of connection and relevance among students. This study, therefore, contributes to the discourse on culturally responsive education, suggesting that integrating local music and narratives into the curriculum could be a powerful tool in enhancing learning experiences and outcomes.

Moreover, the study provides insights for policymakers and community leaders. The song's portrayal of the challenges faced by children in mountainous regions, coupled with the themes of community resilience and collective identity, emphasizes the need for inclusive and community-focused development policies. This underscores the importance of considering local narratives and cultural contexts in policy-making,

particularly in addressing the needs of marginalized communities. It also highlights the potential of using local cultural products, like music, in community development and engagement initiatives, fostering a sense of identity and cohesion within these communities.

In the broader context of cultural studies, the study extends the understanding of how contemporary music reflects and influences societal values and norms. By employing a corpus-based analysis, this research demonstrates the potential of linguistic analysis in unpacking the cultural and moral dimensions of music, offering a model for future studies in other cultural contexts and genres.

7. Limitations and recommendations for further studies

Despite its insights, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the scope of the analysis was confined to a single song, which, while rich in content, represents only a snapshot of the broader Vietnamese music landscape. This limitation raises questions about the generalizability of the findings to other songs and artists within the genre. Additionally, the study primarily employed a corpus-based linguistic analysis, which, while powerful in dissecting language use, may not fully capture the musical elements such as melody, rhythm, and harmony that contribute significantly to the song's impact and message. Moreover, the cultural and social interpretations derived from the lyrics are inherently subjective and may vary with different cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. This subjectivity suggests that the findings, though insightful, are one of many possible interpretations of the song's themes and messages. The reliance on a single song by Den Vau as the primary data source indeed narrows the research focus, potentially overlooking the diverse array of voices and experiences present in the broader genre of Vietnamese rap and hip-hop.

Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for framing the study's contributions and for guiding future research directions. Given these limitations, future studies could expand the scope of analysis to include a broader range of songs and artists, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the themes and narratives prevalent in contemporary Vietnamese music. Comparative studies involving songs from different genres or cultural backgrounds could also provide richer insights into the diversity of societal narratives and moral lessons in music. Additionally, incorporating musicological analysis alongside linguistic analysis would offer a more holistic understanding of how musical elements and lyrical content interact to convey messages and evoke emotions. Exploring audience reception and interpretation of such songs could also provide valuable insights, revealing how different demographic groups perceive and are impacted by these musical narratives. This exploration could significantly enhance the study's depth by incorporating the perspectives of listeners, thereby addressing the subjective nature of cultural and social interpretations. Lastly, interdisciplinary studies that combine musical analysis with insights from sociology, anthropology, or education could deepen the understanding of the role of music in societal discourse and its potential applications in various fields. Such an interdisciplinary approach would not only broaden the analytical framework but also enrich the study's findings with multifaceted perspectives, thereby overcoming some of the outlined limitations.

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