

## **The Use of Cultural Elements in Primary School Textbooks Towards Reshaping Their Attitudes in Learning English: Malaysian Primary Pupils' Perception**

**Noor Iylia Abu Bakar**

Chinese Primary School Lawan Kuda Baru, Gopeng, Perak, Malaysia

**Hanita Hanim Ismail**

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

**Abstract:** The adaption of the Common European Framework Reference (CEFR) as a guideline in Malaysian English language education has led the Ministry of Education to replace locally-developed English textbooks with a selection of imported titles. While considering the significance of intercultural skills in the English curriculum, there is a need to look into the aspect of relevance in using imported texts to suit local cultural demands. This study is dual focal in nature; it investigated not only the impacts of cultural elements embedded in imported textbooks on Malaysian students' attitude but also gathered their perception on the aspect through survey research. For the purpose of this study, it specifies on the use of English Plus 1 – an imported textbook, published by Oxford University Press. A questionnaire which was adopted from Xiao (2010), was then distributed to 39 Malaysian pupils of suburban Chinese-type primary schools in Perak who were selected using a convenience sampling technique. The findings indicated that the use of English Plus 1 has impacted pupils' attitude where it was observed that their perception towards learning English became more negative due to the focus of the textbooks inclines towards a culture that was not familiar to Malaysians. The implications derived from this study suggest teachers' flexibility at adopting a range of teaching approaches that might also need to be creative in its nature in order to impart cultural information to the young learners. Simultaneously, a more pro-active solution could be taken at the administrative level by carefully scrutinizing the cultural elements embedded in imported texts to adopt cultural suitability for young learners.

**Keywords:** Cultural elements in textbooks, ESL textbooks, language acquisition, learners' attitude and perception, primary school pupils.

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## Introduction

As a *lingua franca*, English remains as one of the widely spoken languages across the globe that creates a dynamic spectrum between the native and other types of language users (i.e. second/foreign/international) at many levels. At one level, these language learners would probably understand a link between language and culture. In general, language serves as a vehicle that carries the culture(s) during any language learning experience (Duranti, 1997). A language is not taught without its culture (Byram, 1988); they are intertwined (Kramsch, 2013) because individuals use language not only to present facts and ideas but also to reflect their attitudes, which are gradually evolved through the way they live in societies. Although the importance of culture in teaching English as a second language (ESL) is widely acknowledged, new issues have emerged in the teaching and learning process (e.g. the categories of culture, the culture of the target users, and the scope of culture that the target learners should learn in the language classroom). As such, integrating target-native culture should be an essential part of language acquisition. This is especially important with the current evolving framework of English at the worldwide level. Language teachers must continue to associate this importance with the main roles of second language cultural learning, which are global cultural consciousness and intercultural citizenship. As such, Shin et al. (2011) argued that diverse voices and cultural opinions should be included in ESL textbooks to allow language learners to understand the diversity of cultural values and ethics. These ESL materials should include the target language culture along with the multiple foreign cultures, since this will likely assist learners in negotiating knowledge about both values – the native and target language speakers' in developing solidarity (Nguyen, 2011). An absence of either contributors would not accurately reflect the present English linguistic landscape (Jenkins, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2011). Based on Smith's (1976) definition of international language which is a language that allows people who do not have a common native language to communicate, McKay (2002) identified four characteristics in English presented as an international language. The characteristics of an international language are as follows: First, the international language is in need due to the advancement of global integration, which includes economic, scientific, cultural, and intellectual life. Second, it coexists with other languages in multilingual situations. Third, people from all strata of society study it. Fourth, it spreads through a large number of people learning the language rather than through speaker migration. As an international language, an essential function of English is to allow speakers to express their ideas and culture with others from a range of language and cultural backgrounds. These four characteristics support the pedagogical notion of English learning that English language learning should focus on increasing learners' capacity to comprehend cultures, including their own, and to communicate with individuals from different cultures successfully, called Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). It is this competence that allows successful and appropriate communication with culturally and linguistically different individuals (Savignon, 1997). Learning about various cultures helps learners become more open-minded about international understanding, improve communication with people from different cultures, and better understand his own culture by comparing it to other societies.

Recognizing the significance of English language proficiency within the current global learning challenges, the

Ministry of Education (MoE) devised the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025), which aims to reform the education system. Since 2013, MoE has incorporated the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) into the English language curriculum, resulting in adjustments to the syllabus, assessment, and materials to align with the global reference set. This has led to the use of English Plus 1 published by Oxford University Press – a foreign textbook, to replace the prior local textbooks for Year 5, starting 2021. Under the national identity aspect in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025), every child is identified as a Malaysian regardless of his ethnicity, religion, culture or socioeconomic status. Yet, some teachers observe that students are unable to fundamentally understand Malaysian culture at a satisfactory level based on the required criteria in the curriculum. This links to a possible reason for the given exposure. In one case, the adopted textbook focuses on the target culture, instead of source cultures. At times, students were sometimes unable to finish a discourse regarding local cultural information. This problem shows a mismatch between the curriculum objectives and students' actual performance on source culture understanding in Malaysia.

Culture and language learning is a broad concept that encompasses many variables, such as students and teaching materials (Tajeddin & Bahrebar, 2017). According to Gardner et al. (1985), an effort is linked with a desire to achieve the purpose of language acquisition and positive attitudes about language learning. The primary function of teaching materials in the foreign language classroom is to facilitate language acquisition where textbook contents appear to have a major impact on students. In some cases, textbooks may either directly or indirectly convey cultural values, known as 'hidden curriculum' (Cunningsworth, 1995). Most English teachers regard the textbook as essential references for their teaching, where the students are required to spend time in the classroom using them. This is because these imported textbooks were viewed to be connected with the CEFR goals for linguistic communicative proficiency (Chin & Rajaendram, 2017). Past studies on locally written English textbooks have indicated that these textbooks have broader cultural relevance with more inclination at fulfilling intercultural objectives, as compared to imported ones (e.g. Zawiah, 1999; Rahim & Manan, 2013; Hajar & Jalalian Daghig, 2019). In fact, the cultural content of imported ELT textbooks focuses primarily on target and foreign contexts, frequently neglecting learners' own cultures (Chao, 2011; Shin et al., 2011; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015). An interesting exploration over the relevance of choosing between foreign-based and local-based texts was issued by Haja Mohideen et al (2020) arguing a deficit in engagement if foreign texts are used in Malaysian language learning settings. Gray (2002) also asserted that ESL foreign textbooks have a particularly negative impact on learners in the outer and expanding circle settings, who rely on familiar contexts to connect their reality with the world of English, to comprehend 'the role of the local in the global.' Although numerous studies on foreign textbooks and culture are obtainable worldwide, the students' perspectives on incorporating cultural aspects in their English textbooks have yet to be explained in the Malaysian context, especially at the primary school. To date, little to no previous study has been conducted to analyze Malaysian students' perceptions of cultural aspects in English Plus 1. This research investigated the status of reference to various cultural categories in the ESL textbook currently in use, as well as students' views of cultural components in the textbook and students' attitudes toward learning English by asking three questions:

- (1) What are the students' perceptions on the use of foreign cultural elements in English Plus 1?
- (2) How do cultural elements in the textbook affect students' attitudes towards learning English?

## Literature Review

### Language and culture

Language serves a human technique of conveying thoughts, feelings, and desires via deliberately generated symbols (Sapir, 1921) that is non-instinctive and plays an important role in cognitive development, especially during the formative language competence development phase (Vygotsky, 1962). In fact, it is social in nature where it is subsequently internalised and becomes an important instrument in the moulding of cognitive processes related to creating the abstract symbolic system that would allow the child to organise thinking. Many experts believe that language and culture are inextricably linked (e.g. Kramersch, 2014) since they are both essential aspects of human existence for communicating. Language and culture are inextricably linked and form a human experience of communicating. According to Jiang (2000), language is a mirror of culture in the sense that individuals can observe a culture via its language. Language and culture can have a variety of connections, according to Wardhaugh (2002). One possibility is that social structure influences or determines language structure and/or behaviour. A second possibility is diametrically opposed to the first. Linguistic structure and/or behaviour can affect or be determined by social structure or worldview. Certain suggested language changes are based on this belief: if we alter the language, we can influence social behaviour. A third possibility is that the impact is bidirectional: language and society may affect one another. Certain language reforms can also be viewed as dependent on this viewpoint; the reforms are implemented in response to changes in societal norms. A fourth possibility is to believe that there is no link between linguistic structure and social structure and that one is completely independent of the other. Linnel (2001) stated that language is a recognised system of arbitrary vocal symbols that plays a critical role in preserving meaning and experience, as well as developing, elaborating, and transmitting acquired and shared ideas, values, practises, and behaviours as a culture. This is not the only vital purpose of language; it is also a tool for social adaptation, assimilation, and self-expression (Sitidoan, 1984). Language is vital in human life since it always facilitates the development of culture. In brief, there is a strong and essential link between culture and language. Culture affects and moulds language, and the latter serves as a main platform of spreading culture.

Language is not only a cultural product, but it is also a cultural symbol (Gleason, 1961) where it is a taught set of values, beliefs, and/or standards shared by a group of people (Greedy, 1994). Kuo and Lai (2006) echoed this, claiming that cultural knowledge is essential for acquiring linguistic competency because a society's culture can evolve based on the language spoken. Language should be conceived and incorporated as a component of a society's and culture's identity. Lado (1957) proposed that if specific components of a second language differ significantly from those of the learner's native language, the student is likely to struggle. Because languages differ in grammar, pronunciation, and structure, it may be presumed that learning a second language is enhanced if there are parallels between that language and the learner's mother tongue. Perhaps the diversity of languages

can be addressed and students' learning pressures alleviated through cultural assistance and understanding. Learners will get long-term advantages from their language learning experience if culture is included in language study (Omaggio & Hadley, 1986). Children who are provided cultural information, entrenched in a culturally rich setting, and exposed to culturally fundamental content may acquire a second language more easily because their prior knowledge of the second-language culture makes understanding easier. Culture must be explicitly included as a component of second language learning and teaching. Students will be successful in their target language acquisition only when cultural problems are included in the language curriculum and learning. Crozet and Liddicoat (1997) claimed that culture must be included in the teaching of language knowledge and abilities in order for students to learn to speak and write in culturally acceptable ways.

Many academics define culture in diverse manners. Condon (1973) stated that culture can be thought of as a way of life. There are several elements to culture. It encompasses the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that define a group of people at a particular moment; it also includes the beliefs, values, and tangible items that shape our way of life. Culture creates a foundation for each individual's cognitive and affective activity. It impacts individual assessment and attitudes and practical areas of life, such as the activities people are interested in doing in life. Culture is also a matter of routine, and it is routine that gives rise to tradition, which gives rise to culture. Locals begin with regular acts and progress to the formation of shared preconceptions. Condon went on to say that stereotypes give group traits to individuals only based on their cultural affiliation. People's thoughts, words, actions, and interactions are all influenced by cultural stereotypes. Anthropologists describe culture as "a people's or group's entire way of life." According to this definition, culture is a specific system that incorporates all social activities that bind a group of people together and subsequently differentiates them from others. Thanasoulas (2001) defines culture as all the accepted and regular modes of conduct of a specific group. It is that aspect of human existence that people learn as a product of belonging to a certain group; it is that aspect of learnt behaviour shared with others. This definition provides an understanding that culture is anything that is gained or learnt and handed down from one generation to the next. Culture is thought to be concerned with the tangible products from which a group of people defines itself, but the definition emphasises people's knowledge, ideas, and attitudes. As a result, foreign language acquisition is linked to culture learning, and culture has been implicitly taught in the foreign language classroom. Culture in language acquisition, according to Kramsch (1993), is constantly in the background in classrooms when language learners are seeking excellent communicative skills and pushing their capacity to make sense of the world around them. Over the years, the notion of culture learning has evolved for English language teaching and learning.

Grammar-translation was the dominant tendency in language instruction in the 1950s. During that time frame, foreign language instruction focused on grammar, vocabulary, and reading in the target language. As a result, evaluation took the shape of translation tasks, vocabulary lists, dictations, and fill-in-the-blank activities intending to measure language improvements. Instead of communicative and sociolinguistic ability, the emphasis was on cognitive comprehension and rote replicating language norms. Culture learning was incorporated into foreign language education in the 1960s. The pedagogical innovation of the time resulted in a greater emphasis on building students' practical language abilities, which could be employed in language

classroom instruction. Through this sense, culture was taught in foreign language teaching through the words and acts of daily people in everyday life (Kramsch, 1998). Many foreign language theorists proposed including culture in a foreign language course in the 1970s and 1980s because English learners should gain knowledge based on culture content in order to use a foreign language, and points of contact would improve students' ability to communicate appropriately in language use situations (Lado, 1957). According to Seelye (1984), when students are armed with this "super aim" for the teaching of culture, they will be able to establish perceptions and behaviours necessary to communicate within a society that speaks the target language. Since the 1990s, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) seems to be the dominant trend in language teaching. According to Byram (1997), ICC necessitates the promotion of specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills to complement linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence. Curiosity and openness are mentioned, as well as "readiness to suspend scepticism about some of the other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram, 1997). According to Lund's (2006) study, the above-mentioned perspectives within the literature have led us to the conclusion that foreign language acquisition consists of different aspects, comprising grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, and attitudes toward cultural competence.

### **The role of textbook in language learning**

Textbooks play a crucial role in the classroom and help to equip students for future education. Richard (2001) stated that textbooks are a key component of most language instruction and, in many cases, serve as the foundation for the input language. Textbooks are the most common source of learning materials for students. In addition to instruction, teachers provide critical impact on students' learning, which can assist them develop in acquiring the language. According to Roger (1989), the function of a textbook is to foster the learner's interest in books as well as the habit of utilising textbooks to enhance knowledge and look for information. According to Pearson (2014), an influential textbook was a combination of non-native teachers' teaching expertise and actual user feedback from the native tongue. When looking for source material, we must evaluate the collaboration between native and non-native perspectives. Given the justifications for incorporating culture into ESL learning, a consideration of textbooks is necessary. The various components in the textbooks serve in assisting the second language teaching and learning process in the classroom, emphasizing the importance of textbooks.

The textbook, according to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), "could be a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skinner, and an ideology". Aside from offering linguistic and subject contents that genuinely represent the ideology embedded in the ESL environment of a particular circle, the textbook may be a significant source of cultural components. Textbooks from around the world have varying cultural orientations, depending on whether they are based on source cultures, target cultures, or worldwide target cultures (Abdullah, 2009). Johar and Aziz (2019) claimed that using a foreign textbook as the primary English textbook may be a bit overwhelming, given its extensive cultural content, lexical density, layout, and a few other factors to consider. Global textbooks, according to Hooi and Knight (2015), are "irrelevant, culturally unsuitable, incompatible with the newest teaching technique, of mixed levels, and just generally fail to fit the various demands of their wide range of audience". Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2016) commented that the textbook's lack of cultural material of

Malaysia makes it detrimental since it gives students with inappropriate cultural knowledge, which ultimately fails to provide contextualised language practices and sufficient discourse competence. It is possible to infer that textbooks do play an essential role in English teaching and learning. The usage of textbooks may be helpful and productive for both students and teachers in a variety of ways. However, owing to teachers' and students' reliance on textbooks and the foreign textbooks used in Malaysia, the cultural elements of textbooks have a significant impact on students.

### *Students' attitudes towards learning language*

Attitude, both good and bad, is assumed to significantly influence students' performance in language learning. A student's attitude has repeatedly been recognized to be an essential element in second language acquisition methodology. Learning a second language is a reasonably major educational challenge that students encounter during their high focus in certain situations, while it is a direct path to bilingualism in others. Researchers appear to accept from both situations that “affective factors such as attitudes influence language learning” (Masgoret & Gardner, 2004). According to Karahan (2007), “positive language attitudes allow learners to have a positive perspective toward learning English”. A positive attitude is also regarded as assisting foreign language acquisition, whereas a negative attitude works as a psychological obstacle (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002). Empirical data supporting these hypotheses. Nikolov (2001), for example, discovered that students' unfavourable attitudes against Russia or Russians were to blame for their inability to learn or retain the language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) also show in their vast research that good attitudes about language improve competence. Many studies claim that attitudes are composed of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components (Wenden, 1991). Beliefs or perceptions about the social phenomena associated with the attitude comprise the cognitive component. The emotional component refers to one's sentiments and emotions about an item, such as 'likes' or 'dislikes,' 'with' or 'against'. Because of the behavioural component, various attitudes tend to drive learners to adopt specific learning behaviours. Rahimi and Hassani (2012) stated that in second language acquisition, researchers have primarily focused on two types of attitudes: attitudes toward language learning and attitudes toward the target language community. The first set of attitudes is educational in nature, whereas the second is more social in nature.

Attitudes toward language acquisition appear to be linked to the environment in which learning occurs (Krashen, 1997). It is fundamental for students to have a strong desire and a good attitude toward the target language when studying a second language. This is since many linguists have revealed that motivation and attitude are inextricably linked in influencing the effectiveness of second language acquisition (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Language learners who are more motivated and have a good attitude will be more successful, and conversely. According to Brown (2000), favourable views regarding oneself, one's native language, and one's target language group improve second language competency. He says that a good attitude assists a language learner and that a bad attitude can lead to a decline in motivation, input, and interaction, which leads to poor proficiency achievement.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This research intended to discover the suitability of cultural elements embedded in the textbook. However, to appropriate the applicability of the questionnaire, a study was administered to ensure the validity of the translated version of the questionnaire (Ruel et al., 2015).

Textbook analysis

Content Analysis was employed to study on the cultural elements in the textbooks, where these elements were related to the pupils' perception on learning English. The cultural elements were analysed based on 2 types: (1) Culture Origin: 1) Target culture (UK, US), (2) Source culture (Malaysia), (3) international culture (other than UK, US and Malaysia), and (2) Big C and little c. Big C includes music, literature, Art. (politics, economy, history, literature, geography, science) whereas little c concerns daily routines (food, holiday, living style, values).

### ***Questionnaire***

A questionnaire was self-developed and administered for this study. Prior research was carried out to build the questionnaire where the researchers reviewed past studies on the function of cultural learning, types of culture, categories of culture, and learners' cultural implementation in English teaching and learning areas in the past. These concepts were used to develop the questionnaire items. The questionnaire adopted a three-pronged approach, including the development of a 5-point Likert scale answer option, rank order questions and an open-ended response.

The questionnaire consisted of 3 main parts (28 items): Part 1 consists of 20 items investigating students' attitudes towards culture learning and English Plus 1 and their perception about the culture in the textbook. The respondents were required to express their opinions using the rating scale ranging from 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree). Meanwhile, Part 2 is made up of 5 items related to the importance of cultural aspects which requires the respondents to rank the options according to the degree of their perceived importance. Part 3 contains 3 open-ended questions concerning their expectations on cultural learning in terms of categories of culture and their attitudes towards learning English. They were also required to give reasons and support for their choices.

In order to facilitate better understanding about the questions in the questionnaire, dual language statements (English and Chinese) were provided. All items were first constructed in English and upon receiving approval from the supervisory committee to ensure content validity, the researchers then translated the items into Chinese. The translation was then thoroughly checked by three Chinese English teachers for the purpose of translation and content validity.



### *Sampling for the Questionnaire*

This study employed 39 Year 5 students (M=20; F=19) from a Chinese Primary school at Lawan Kuda as its respondents. Lawan Kuda is a small town in Gopeng, Perak – in the west coast of Malaysia, where the population is mostly made up of a more elderly community where the younger generation have relocated for better working opportunities in the bigger cities (e.g. Kuala Lumpur or Singapore). At present, the main economic activities are farming, plantation and animal husbandry, leaving the only available economic opportunity in small shop lots, food courts and farming.

The respondents can be classified into two different classes of a similar age. 38 of them are Chinese by race where Chinese is their main language spoken at home while one respondent is an Indian who speaks Indian at home. They were selected using a convenience sampling strategy. Their English proficiency was rated as weak to intermediate. In October of 2021, all the students will complete the English Plus 1. Upon selection, the respondents were given a briefing about the questionnaires.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

#### *Textbook analysis*

To answer the first and second research questions, the data from the textbook analysis were categorised into culture free categories, big "C" and little "C" cultures under target, source, and international culture, and further quantified using frequencies and percentages to provide support in answering research questions one and two. Quantitative statistics focused on the amount (percentage and frequency) of cultural material provided in the textbook. The qualitative data in the textbook focused on the kind (categories and types) of cultural material and the variations (themes) of big C and little C cultures.

#### *Questionnaire*

To answer the second and third research questions, data from the completed questionnaire was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) v.20. To answer both Research Question 2 (*What are the students' perceptions on the use of foreign cultural elements in English Plus 1?*) and Research Question 3 (*How do cultural elements in the textbook affects students' attitudes towards learning English?*), descriptive statistics was used to compute the frequency, average scores and standard deviations. To facilitate data analysis of both Research Question 2 and 3, an interpretation was provided to provide an understanding of the means (Table 1).

Table 1. Interpretation of Means

1.00-1.80	Strongly disagree
1.81 -2.60	Disagree

2.61-3.40	Moderately agree
3.41-4.20	Agree
4.21-5.00	Strongly agree

In addition, the rank order scores on individual items were calculated to determine their relative importance as perceived and expected by students. The data responding to the open-ended questions was also transcribed. Then, the information was analysed and summarized.

## Findings

### Students' perception towards learning English

The questionnaire enabled an early projection of responses regarding the respondents' perception on learning English. The findings in Table 2 answer the first research question on the students' perception on the use of foreign cultural elements in English Plus 1. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the respondents (95%) specified their preference of learning English. This analysis section is divided into 3 themes: (1) learning English within Malaysian context only, (2) learning English about Malaysia and other countries, and (3) learning English about other countries only.

Table 2. Students' perception on the use of foreign cultural elements and learning English

Items	Students' perception on the use of foreign cultural elements in English Plus 1 and learning English	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
1	I love learning English.	0	2 (5.1)	20 (51.3)	17 (43.6)
2	I love other subjects more than English.	5 (12.8)	15 (38.5)	15 (38.5)	2 (5.1)
3	I like to learn about Malaysia and Malaysia's culture.	0	4 (2.6)	20 (51.3)	15 (38.5)
4	I like to learn about other countries.	2 (5.1)	2 (5.1)	25 (2.6)	10 (25.6)
5	I like to learn about other countries more than Malaysia and Malaysia's culture.	0	9 (23.1)	20 (51.3)	10 (25.6)
6	I prefer to learn English with content	0	29	5	5

	about Malaysia only.		(74.4)	(12.8)	(12.8)
7	I prefer to learn English with content about other countries only.	12 (30.8)	20 (51.3)	7 (17.9)	0
8	I prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia and other countries.	0	0	30 (76.9)	9 (23.1)
9	I don't understand English lessons when the topic is about Malaysia.	5 (12.8)	30 (76.9)	4 (2.6)	0
10	I don't understand English lessons when the topic is about other countries.	2 (5.1)	7 (17.9)	25 (64.1)	5 (12.8)
11	I understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia only.	0	10 (25.6)	24 (61.5)	5 (12.8)
12	I understand English lessons better when the topic is about other countries only.	7 (17.9)	25 (64.2)	7 (17.9)	0
13	I understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia and other countries.	0	3 (7.7)	29 (74.4)	7 (17.9)

Based on *Item 3*, the majority of the respondents (51.3% agreed and 38.5% strongly agreed) like to learn about Malaysia and its culture and only 4 (2.6%) stating their lack of preference to learn about the country and its culture. Other than that, 61.5% agreed and 12.8% strongly agreed that they understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia only (*Item 11*). Similarly, the bigger percentage indicated their learning English about Malaysia and other countries, where only 7.7% disagreed (*Item 13*). It is also worth noting that all the respondents agreed that they prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia and other countries rather than just learn English with content about Malaysia only (*Item 8*). However, 74.4% did not prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia only (*Item 13*), thus the suggestion of combining both local and international culture in learning English.

Table 3. Mean scores of students' perception

Item	Students' perception	Mean scores	Level of agreement
1	I love learning English.	3.38	Strongly Agree

2	I love other subjects more than English.	2.38	Agree
3	I like to learn about Malaysia and Malaysia's culture.	3.28	Strongly Agree
4	I like to learn about other countries.	3.10	Strongly Agree
6	I prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia only.	2.38	Agree
7	I prefer to learn English with content about other countries only.	1.87	Disagree
8	I prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia and other countries.	3.23	Strongly Agree
9	I don't understand English lessons when the topic is about Malaysia.	1.97	Disagree
10	I don't understand English lessons when the topic is about other countries.	2.85	Agree
11	I understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia only.	2.87	Agree
12	I understand English lessons better when the topic is about other countries only.	2.00	Agree
13	I understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia and other countries.	3.10	Strongly Agree

Table 3 lists down the mean score of the levels of agreement about the perception of cultural contents in English Plus 1. Based on the data from the questionnaire, the results can be divided into 3 themes: (1) learning English within Malaysian context only, (2) learning English about Malaysia and other countries, and (3) learning English about other countries only. It is in Items 3,6 and 11 which concern the learning English within Malaysia context only. Respondents strongly agreed with Item 3 (*I like to learn about Malaysia and Malaysia's culture*) with the mean score of 3.38, that they could relate their preference to learn English when the topic is about Malaysia and its culture. For Item 6 (*I prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia only*), with the mean score of 2.38, students agreed that they prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia only. With a mean score of 2.87, the respondents indicated that they understand English better when the topic is about Malaysia only. Items 4,7,10 and 12 are about learning English in other countries only. Students strongly agree with item 3 that they like to learn about other countries. However, in Item 7 (*I prefer to learn English with content about other countries only*), the respondents disagreed that they prefer to learn English about other countries only. They also agreed that they did not understand the English lesson when it included a discussion on other countries. With the mean score of 2.00, some of the respondents agreed that they understand the English lesson better when the topic is about other countries only (*Item 12*). The theme of learning English about Malaysia and other countries can be found in Item 8 (*I prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia and other countries*) and Item 13 (*I understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia and other countries*) where the respondents strongly agreed that they prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia and other countries.

The respondents also strongly agreed that they understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia and other countries. There was a significant difference between *Items 11,12* and *13*. For *Item 11 (I understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia only)* and *Item 12 (I understand English lessons better when the topic is about other countries only)*, students agreed with the statements there but students strongly agreed with item 13. Students strongly agree that they understand English lessons better when the topic is presented by combining Malaysia and other countries. Majority of the respondents prefer to learn English with content about Malaysia and other countries, echoing that they understand English lessons better when the topic combines a discussion on both Malaysia and other countries. This is consistent with Lado (1957), arguing that if a second language's particular components deviate greatly from the learner's original language, learning is liable to incur, which explains for students' better understanding of English lessons when the content that they can easily relate with, which is in this case, cultural relatedness (Haja Mohideen et al., 2020). When students can relate with the content in the textbook, this makes learning easier to grasp which enables a closer engagement with their daily life. In some countries, English is a second language while in others, it is regarded as a third language where students need to learn in school. They are not able to associate with the culturally-embedded vocabulary and the usage of words in the sentences. Thus, it is important to enable students with a linkage of what they learn in the class with their prior knowledge or familiar contextual knowledge since English Plus 1 is a foreign textbook that is used for Malaysian primary Year 5.

Since most of the content in the textbook is not related to Malaysian content, it can be concluded that this type of content has affected students' perception in learning English. As indicated *Item 10* (Table 2), 76.9% did not understand the English lesson when the topic is about other countries, contradicting when the content of the lesson is about Malaysia where 92.3% respondents understand the lesson better. This result is aligned with Johar and Aziz's (2019) study on the usage of foreign textbooks in Malaysia where they concluded that a high percentage that making use of a foreign textbook as the fundamental English textbook might be intimidating due to its substantial cultural content, vocabulary size, layout, and a few other variables to consider. 92.3% of the respondents agreed that they understand English lessons better when the topic is about Malaysia and other countries compared to students that understand the English lesson better when the topic is about Malaysia only with 74.3% of the respondents agreed to it. Students did not want to learn just about Malaysia but they wanted the mix of Malaysia contents and other countries' contents. This finding is, to some extent, consistent with Brown's (2000) that stated the positivity toward oneself, one's native language, and one's target language group improves second language proficiency. Hence, it is important to have native content and target content in one textbook to ensure that students can learn English with what they have learned and at the same time, learn about other cultures.

### **Students' Attitudes on learning English**

In order to investigate the students' attitudes towards learning English when using English Plus, they were asked to answer a section that consists of 10-items, which is divided into two themes. The first theme (*Item 1-6*) elicited responses regarding the importance of learning different cultures from students' perspectives. The

second theme (*Item 7-10*) investigated whether the cultural content in the textbook affects students' attitudes towards learning English. Table 4 shows the findings.

Table 4. Students' attitudes towards learning English

Items	Attitudes	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
1	It Is very important for me to know Malaysian culture.	0	0	17 (43.6)	22 (56.4)
2	It is very important for me to know the culture of English-speaking countries such as England and America.	5 (12.8)	11 (28.2)	10 (25.6)	13 (33.3)
3	It is very important for me to know the culture of non-English-speaking countries such as Thailand, Japan, Brazil, etc.	10 (25.6)	15 (38.5)	10 (25.6)	4 (10.3)
4	It is very important for me to know about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in Malaysia.	0	7 (17.9)	17 (43.6)	15 (38.5)
5	It is very important for me to know about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles and customs in English-speaking countries such as England and America.	6 (15.4)	18 (46.2)	10 (25.6)	5 (12.8)
6	It is very important for me to know about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles and customs in non-English-speaking countries such as Thailand, Japan, Brazil, etc.	9 (23.1)	20 (51.3)	6 (15.4)	4 (10.3)
7	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in Malaysia only.	4 (10.3)	14 (35.9)	19 (48.7)	2 (5.1)
8	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in English-speaking countries such as England and America only.	5 (12.8)	19 (48.7)	15 (38.5)	0

<b>9</b>	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in non-English-speaking countries such as Thailand, Japan, Brazil, etc.	20 (29)	14 (35.9)	5 (7.3)	0
<b>10</b>	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in Malaysia and other countries.	0	2 (5.1)	20 (29)	17 (44)

In general, all respondents acknowledged the importance of knowing Malaysian culture. Yet, when it comes to knowing another culture, only 25.6% agreed and 33.3% strongly agreed that it is important to know the culture of English-speaking countries (e.g. the United Kingdom or United States of America) (*Item 1*). Meanwhile, only 35.9% valued the importance of knowing the culture of non-speaking English countries (*Item 7*). Here, we can observe a hierarchical ranking of importance over cultural importance; knowing Malaysian culture is far more significant than others. There is a range of opinions when it comes to knowing about other countries' cultures; some even disagreed. Thus, this reiterates the importance of inserting some Malaysian cultural elements into the textbook so as to motivate learning engagement. It was also indicated in the findings that 48.7% strongly disagreed (*Item 8*) that they love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in English-speaking countries such as England and America only. This indicated dissociation between learners' familiar culture to those that they can make connection with. 43.6% disagreed with participating in the activities during English lessons when the topic is about English-speaking countries only (*Item 4*). Only one student agreed with the statement that they like to participate in English learning activities when the topic is about non-English speaking countries.

Table 5. Mean scores of students' attitudes

Items	Students' attitudes	Mean scores	Level of agreement
1	It Is very important for me to know Malaysian culture.	3.56	Strongly Agree
2	It is very important for me to know the culture of English-speaking countries such as England and America.	2.79	Agree
3	It is very important for me to know the culture of non-English-speaking countries such as Thailand, Japan, Brazil, etc.	2.21	Agree
4	It is very important for me to know about daily living and cultural	3.21	Strongly

	patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in Malaysia.		Agree
5	It is very important for me to know about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles and customs in English-speaking countries such as England and America.	2.36	Agree
6	It is very important for me to know about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles and customs in non-English-speaking countries such as Thailand, Japan, Brazil, etc.	2.13	Agree
7	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in Malaysia only.	2.49	Agree
8	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in English-speaking countries such as England and America only.	2.26	Agree
9	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in non-English-speaking countries such as Thailand, Japan, Brazil, etc.	1.62	Disagree
10	I love to learn English when the topic is about daily living and cultural patterns such as food, holidays, lifestyles, and customs in Malaysia and other countries.	3.38	Strongly Agree

Table 5 displays the mean score for the levels of agreement about students' attitudes towards learning English. Items 1, 4 and 7 identified respondents' attitudes towards learning English when the topic of lesson is about Malaysian culture. With the mean score range from 3.56 (*Item 1*) to 2.49 (Table 7), responses from the participants indicated good on those statements asking about Malaysian culture in the English lesson. The participants agreed that it is important for them to know about Malaysian cultures through English lessons. They also agreed that they love to learn English when the topic is about daily living, cultural patterns and customs in Malaysia. Items 2, 5 and 8 discussed the participants' attitudes about the Target culture elements in the textbook towards their English learning. The participants agreed for all the 3 items with mean scores ranging from 2.26 to 2.79. Items 3, 6 and 9 discussed International Culture. The participants agreed with Items 3 and 6 that it is important to learn about International Culture. However, students disagreed with the statements that they love to learn English when the topic is about International Culture. Students strongly agree with the mean score of 3.38 that they love to learn English when the topic has the integration about Malaysian and other countries. This finding implies consistency with those of Brown's (2000) on attitudes towards learning English and the cultural content in the textbook.



Brown (2000) asserts that positive attitudes about oneself, his native language, and his target language group promote second language ability. Students feel motivated to participate in learning English when they feel confident and know about the topic. Since students are more familiar with the Malaysian context where they have prior knowledge about the topic, this will likely boost their confidence to engage in the lesson. This is supported by the statement from *Item 10* (that asks the students whether they like to learn English using English Plus 1 in the class. 77.9% of the respondents did not like to use English Plus 1 to learn English. Some of the responses received stated that they cannot relate the topic that discusses other countries with their prior knowledge. This might probably be because the participants believe that it is challenging to understand the meaning of the sentences and at the same time, they need to imagine the settings of the topic. These factors affect students' attitude towards learning English. Obviously, cultural elements in foreign textbooks affect students' attitude towards learning English. This supports the arguments that native elements and foreign elements should blend in a textbook. A good textbook cannot be solely presented in foreign cultural elements only or in native culture only.

The textbook must be presented with the combination of different cultures. Students feel comfortable to learn something that they are familiar with but at the same time they also want to learn new things and cultures they have never experienced before. The data from both textbook analysis and questionnaire responses may lead to the conclusion that somehow the target culture was the primary concern of cultural teaching and learning, while the source culture and foreign culture got only a little fraction of events. Despite their belief that target culture has been the most significant element for their English subject, this group of students showed a desire to learn regarding source culture in the English classroom. It has become worth mentioning that 100 percent of survey respondents said Malaysian culture (source culture) was highly important in their Language classroom. Students also expressed a desire to actually learn about Malaysian culture and expressed a willingness to do so in the English classroom. This confirmed the results of Zhang and Ma (2004), who revealed that more than 50% of local students favoured having cross culture in instructional materials, encompassing source and foreign culture, rather than only target culture.

Findings from the present study contradicts arguments forwarded by Crystal (1997) and McKay (2002), declaring that ESL learning should be altered and foreign culture should play a larger role in promoting students' International Communicative Competence (ICC). In the current era of globalization, English has become one of the worldwide languages due to political, economic, military, scientific, technical, and cultural connections with all nations across the globe Crystal (1997). In this modern global trend, English has been changed into a variety of Englishes, which play a significantly higher role in communications between non-native English speakers than native speakers in terms of frequency, quantity, and importance. According to McKay (2002), the relevance of cultural classroom instruction is to help students to appreciate the variety that abounds within all cultures, especially in this globalised day where tourism and migration are far more common than in the past. Consequently, Hatoss (2004) states that one of the specifications of intercultural communicative competence is that language learners develop a conscience of their own cultural context in an attempt to see it as a benchmark for acknowledging the paramount perspectives of target language speakers. According to student rebuttals, this

group of students is unfamiliar with their own cultural identity, but they recognise the crucial function that source culture helps in creating comprehensible input. Unfortunately, the results of the textbook evaluation and the students' questionnaire replies indicate that the textbook may not meet students' requirements in terms of source culture elements, since the textbook only contains 3.1 percent of source cultural components. According to Hatoss (2004), a major worry with language textbooks is that students are expected to characterise cultural distinctions with no intentional effort on the part of teachers to motivate them to recognise their cultural knowledge or improve their view of their own culture. One of the prerequisites for dealing with cultural material in a foreign language classroom is emphasised by McKay (2002). She emphasised the need of tailoring educational materials to help students to consider their own culture in relation to others, so supporting them in establishing a sense of intercultural conversation. One advantage of this notion is that it may induce cultural content in teaching materials to emphasise students' source culture, as well as the target culture and globalized society, in promoting the awareness of intercultural competence.

How doable would it be to discover source culture contents in foreign language textbooks, given that commercial textbooks are frequently written for global markets and frequently do not portray the desires and concerns of students in a specific country or area (Richards, 2001), particularly when it comes to cultural contents? One of the long-term goals of a commercial textbook is to be widely relevant in order to gain a good retail coverage rate. Through this general framework, a commercial textbook is unavoidably heavy on Target culture and potentially competent at showing worldwide cultures, but it is usually hard to provide a typical source culture specifically suited for one country. As a result, it stands to reason that locally-created textbooks authored by Malaysian educators should include more source cultural information than commercial textbooks published by English native speakers. We might also assume that one of the benefits of locally produced English textbooks is the exposure of source cultural materials. Because such textbooks, unlike commercial textbooks, may provide the source cultural materials more genuine and relevant for local learners. It is not to argue that local textbooks should be developed with all source cultures in mind while neglecting other sorts of culture. It is just to suggest that locally created textbooks may have advantages in terms of assisting English learners in learning how to speak about their source culture in English while studying language skills and the target culture. Up to this point, the target textbook discusses the cultures of big "C" and small "c," but given the respondents' need for additional cultural information, this may not be sufficient. Furthermore, given the strong linkages between small "c" culture and English fluency the focus on big "C" culture in English Plus 1 may need to be reassessed and acknowledged in order to develop students' interpersonal communication awareness.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research analysed a English Plus 1 primary Year 5 textbook in Malaysia to see what type of culture were covered in terms of target, source, and foreign cultures, as well as what sorts of culture were emphasized on in terms of big "C" and small "c" cultures. The target cultural contents were found to have a much greater frequency than the source culture and foreign culture. Based on the much greater proportion of target culture, it

is clear that the structuring of cultural materials is primarily aimed to improve students' awareness of the cultures of English-speaking nations. One of the 16 themes, "Holiday," for example, was observed by providing subjects such as summer vacation, Christmas holiday and winter break. The research also discovered that a preference for big "C" culture comprised education, social norms, history, and geography. There was a low proportion of cultural material with the small "c." It is possible to deduce that such limited provision of discussion on small "c" culture may be inadequate for the students to attain the goal of foreign language proficiency. The research's second goal is to examine students' perceptions of cultural elements stated in the textbook. The students were mostly in agreement that the culture of English-speaking nations was the central topic of English Plus 1. Meanwhile, they disputed that the emphasis in English Plus 1 was mostly on Malaysian culture and that of non-English-speaking nations. In terms of students' attitudes on the significance of culture and cultural and English learning, the findings revealed that the majority of students were eager to study both target and source cultures. As per the students' reasons, they viewed target cultural learning to be the most valuable part of their English, whereas source cultural learning was advantageous for them to understand Malaysian culture, allowing them to present Malaysia to foreigners in an intercultural competence context. Unfortunately, the majority of students were uninterested in learning about other people's cultures. In other words, the students did not regard foreign culture as an important component of their English subject.

The outcomes of this research may provide useful information for language classroom teaching and learning, as well as for producing instructional materials. The present study's results reveal students' preferences for both target and source cultures. However, the activity in the textbook contains just a limited amount of Malaysian culture. International authors of instructional materials should consider including cultural variety in textbooks as a way to address current lack of learning engagement, as those experienced by Malaysian students. At the same time, local textbook publishers should feel compelled at expediting Malaysian English learners' skills to express Malaysian culture by including more local cultural knowledge in textbooks. Furthermore, textbooks should give guidelines and explanatory explanations to teachers on how to impart cultural topics. As a consequence, instructors will be more conscious of the importance of cultural materials, and students will be introduced to the cultural information communicated by this affidavit. Because there was a limited percentage present in small "c" culture, writers of course resources should re-evaluate the proportion and mix of kinds of culture, with a focus on building students' language competence. In terms of topics, it was assumed that textbook writers should pay more attention to subject areas such as values, norms, holidays, gestures/body language in order to improve students' social skills, such as sociolinguistic competence and thinking skills. Special attention should be paid to the teachers' teaching approaches in order to impart cultural information to their students, as well as assist students in analysing and eliminating any barriers to cultural learning. It is critical that teachers make an extra effort to motivate pupils to learn about and become more aware of their own culture. As a result, the students are able to acquire a self-awareness of their own culture, allowing them to utilize the source culture as a basis for evaluating the contrasts and variety that exist within all cultures.

The current research looked at the English Plus 1 Year 5 English Textbook for primary Year 5 students in Perak, Malaysia. Even though research revealed some findings about the cultural contents of the big "C" and small "C"

under focus, as well as source and international culture, the conclusions on cultural orientation were based on just one textbook. To acquire a better and more complete perspective, a whole sequence of English textbooks from Year 1 to Year 6 should be explored to get a better picture of the English education journey for primary school in Malaysia. Other varieties of textbooks, such as local textbooks and commercial textbooks, should also be evaluated. In terms of cultural categories and types, it would be useful to study the cultural contents offered in commercial textbooks and local textbooks. The findings might be useful in the field of textbook editing for cultural teaching and learning. Another topic of research is the content of textbooks from the perspectives of cultural, context, and linguistics. It is argued that regardless of whether textbooks are developed to allow students to use the language in real-life situations, students must also comprehend the difference between language, context, and culture, as well as function with and delve deeper through some of the elements of setting that play a role in situations of language use (Kramsch 1993).

As this study targets a specific Year 5 primary kids from one school in Perak, Malaysia, it is hard to generalise or make inferences about comparable attitudes and perceptions across other Malaysian Year 5 primary students. The questionnaire answers may give restrained and constrained recommendations from such a tiny group. Thus, it would be beneficial to do a comparable study with a bigger number of subjects from different levels of students to see if students with different levels of English proficiency have different attitudes and views about culture learning and cultural materials in textbooks.

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