Impact of Integrating Local Culture Into Language Materials on Communicative Ability of Malaysian Lower Secondary Learners

RADHA M K NAMBIAR
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
rads@ukm.edu.my

RUZY SULIZA HASHIM
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

RUHIZAN MOHAMMAD YASIN
Faculty of Education
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The importance of culture in learning a language is widely acknowledged even if the integration of culture into language learning and teaching materials has seen various opinions and approaches. Bearing in mind the ultimate aim of learning a language is for communication it is important materials developed for language learning consider content knowledge and linguistic knowledge. This paper discusses the impact of a supplementary reading module designed to improve communicative ability and cultural awareness with the integration of local culture. Focus group interviews were run over a three -year period with lower secondary students and English language teachers to elicit their perspectives on the value of the module and the benefits in helping to develop better communicative ability. Both teachers and students were asked similar questions about their opinions of the module, opinions about the lessons and on the use of English to teach the module. The responses matched with both claiming the module was interesting, attractive and varied in approach with a range of activities in each lesson that fostered communicative and collaborative skills. The findings imply improved cultural knowledge and awareness of local content did provide learners with ideas to harness which subsequently leads to improved communicative ability.

Keywords: Language materials, communicative ability; supplementary reading programme; cultural knowledge; cultural awareness

INTRODUCTION

Culture has always been considered an important element in the learning of a language (Nambiar & Anawar 2017, Nguyen 2017, Brown 2007, Kramsch 1998, Kramsch & Zhu Hua 2016, Kuang 2007) and should be taught in tandem with the language itself (Schulz 2007). The reality is that culture and language are intertwined and deeply rooted and complement each other. The issue here is which culture should be integrated into language learning matters and in what proportion.

It is pertinent to remember that the ultimate goal of learning a language is to communicate successfully with target language users whether, native or second/foreign language speakers (Pennycook 1994). Tseng (2002) maintains to be successful in language learning it is important for learners to "acquire cultural background knowledge in order to communicate, and to increase their comprehension in the target language (p. 13). In a world that is increasingly connected the need for effective and accurate communication is crucial whether in the political, economic, social, cultural or linguistic circle. The language we learn in our individual cultures comes with its rules and norms and this determines how we communicate and comprehend what we read and hear (Gudykunst & Young 2002). It is

hypothesized a combination of language and culture learning can ease interaction when speakers are from different cultural backgrounds (Damar 2013, Tseng & Chao 2012).

Some scholars emphasize the importance of understanding the culture which is mostly seen as target culture in a foreign language learning setting. Byram (1997) and Byram and Fleming (1998) state language and culture are inseparable and the linguistic and cultural norms of native speakers must be integrated into language materials. Sun (2013) states the main reason for learning a language is to understand the customs and traditions of speakers of the language and to also communicate competently with these speakers. Holme (2003) posits to be successful communicators both culture and language are important scaffolding to shape understanding of a language's nuances. Grosser and Nel (2013) contend being able to think in a language is a determinant of competency in that language while Cakir (2006) claims culture can affect a speaker's thoughts, emotions and communication. It is necessary to recognize what the main goal is when culture is integrated into the learning of a language.

An understanding of culture will help when communicating with speakers socialized in that culture meaning communicative competence is enhanced (Seelye 1993, Brown 2001, Canale & Swain 1980). In addition, there will be better motivation for language learning because when students have better cultural knowledge they develop a better understanding of their culture and a tolerance of other cultures (Skopinskaja 2003). Holler and Wilkin (2009) claim when there is shared knowledge among speakers, communication is easier and more meaningful and this is because of the correct and accurate use of the language.

There are also scholars who maintain it is not target culture that is important but the context in which the language is learned (Kachru 1986, Canagarajah 2016). Phyak (2010) expounds three additional views on the use of culture in language learning. The third view states that it is local culture that should be the focus of materials. Kramsch and Zhu Hua (2016) recognize that local culture helps shape identity for learners which facilitates the construction of meaning and an understanding of target culture. The fourth view takes a more drastic move and claims English being a lingua franca should be taught in a culture free context (Alptekin 2005, Jenkins 2005) while Phyak advises the use of target and local cultures to teach language with a focus on local culture.

While being cognizant of these varied views, the more important concern is to determine how best to integrate culture into language learning and to also understand the outcomes of this on 21st century learners. As Regmi (2017) propounds despite the differences regarding how or if local culture should be used in teaching English there is a necessity to integrate local culture and context into language learning to reduce the foreignness of the language.

This paper outlines the impact of the Your Language My Culture (YLMC) programme (described below) implemented in an east coast state in Malaysia to help improve communicative ability based on integration of local culture in the form of a supplementary reading module. Specifically, the paper will discuss the perspectives of the main gatekeepers on the value of the module and the lessons and the benefits gained from using these materials in the learning of English. The findings of this longitudinal study on the impact of this programme on English language learning will be drawn from the views and voices of learners and teachers to understand the outcomes for learning.

INTEGRATING CULTURE INTO LANGUAGE MATERIALS

Different approaches to integrating culture into language materials have been put forth (Saluveer 2004, Risager 2008, Stern 1992). Saluveer (2004) presents two approaches: the monocultural approach which focuses mostly on the target culture and the comparative

approach which compares students' culture with the target culture. The monocultural approach is not sufficient today as the cultures of the world have collided and there is free flow of cultural information. The comparative approach recognizes students' knowledge, beliefs and values can help them understand the target culture more effectively.

Risager (2008) proposes four approaches to teaching culture and these are intercultural, multicultural, transcultural and foreign-cultural. The intercultural approach states that culture is best learned when the student can compare the target culture with the local culture of the country in which the language is spoken. The multicultural approach focuses on the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the target culture and the local culture and emphasizes a balanced unbiased view of cultures. The transcultural approach is concerned with the need for mass communication and does not focus on associating the learning of a foreign language; which is seen as an international language with any culture. The foreign cultural approach focuses on the target culture only to develop competence and cultural understanding. The local culture is not considered important here.

Stern (1992, p. 223- 232) presents various approaches to teaching culture and these are:
- Creating an authentic classroom environment (displays and exhibitions of realia);
- Providing cultural information (cultural aside, culture capsule and culture cluster);
- Cultural problem solving (culture assimilator);
- Behavioral and affective aspects (drama and mini-drama);
- Cognitive approaches (student research);
- The role of literature and humanities (literary reading and watching films);
- Real-life exposure to the target culture (visits to the class by native speakers, pen-pals and visits to other countries);
- Making use of cultural community resources (everyday environment can be used as a resource).

There have also been approaches that center on teaching culture according to themes (Nostrand 1967), topics (McLean 1994), problems (Seelye 1993), tasks (Tomalin and Stempleski 1993), and skills (Bolt 2001). These focus on providing knowledge and understanding of the target culture and encouraging students to compare it to their own.

The YLMC approach is based on Stern (1992) and focuses on creating an authentic classroom environment by sourcing local cultural information and making use of the students' lives as resources to be exploited in language learning. The various topics presented are built around a range of tasks that require problem solving, cooperation, collaboration and various other skills. Students are encouraged to do research on local customs and folklore for instance, and display their understanding in the form of drama, poems, posters, video clips etc. In addition, the topics are selected to reflect issues that are also taught in other subjects in the curriculum to raise awareness of the importance of language in disciplines like geography, history, science and mathematics.

THE YOUR LANGUAGE MY CULTURE MODULE

Your Language My Culture (YLMC) is a supplementary English reading programme designed especially for secondary schools in the east coast of Terengganu in Malaysia. This five year programme is divided into two phases with the first phase involving lower secondary schools (Forms 1, 2 and 3) and the second phase with upper secondary schools (Forms 4 and 5) The programme for lower secondary students and teachers began in January 2016 and has just completed its first phase in 2018 and this paper will focus on this phase.

The programme was designed to upgrade the reading proficiency and cultural sensitivity of learners through the use of local culture materials and interdisciplinary materials.

Zawiah et al (2017) posits,

> "The pedagogical argument behind the YLMC project is that the use of local cultural content as a familiar reading schemata facilitates both English proficiency and cultural awareness….The main objective of the YLMC programme is to upgrade both English proficiency and cultural enrichment by providing local culture content through reading, leading to better performance of oral and written communication in English".

A series of modules were developed for Forms 1, 2 and 3 based on a culture matrix developed specifically for this study. These were to be used in tandem with the existing textbooks and were not meant to replace the textbook being used in school. The culture matrix comprised four tracks Heritage, About Language, Literature and Society and Values that were mapped against language activities and student outcomes. Each of these tracks were selected carefully after examining the existing textbook and the secondary school curriculum. The materials for each tract were sought from the state's rich cultural heritage, folk lore, history, geography, traditional arts and crafts and lessons and activities were planned using these. (see Zawiyah et al. 2017 for a full description of the matrix).

LEARNER OUTCOMES

To enable students to draw comparisons between the target culture and their own culture it is important they are given opportunities to develop the necessary cultural, knowledge, awareness and competence both cultures (Nguyen 2017, Fenner 2000). Nguyen (2017) posits three levels of learner outcomes when culture is integrated into language teaching and learning and these are cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and cultural competence.

Cultural knowledge is structured and systematic information presented about the target culture (Byram 1997) that is described by somebody else. The source of the information can be from people, customs, traditions, folklore, food, cultural products, literature, and everyday living. For this study the materials were designed to develop communication about local culture, target culture and to encourage discussion about other cultures. Recognizing that cultural knowledge can remain as information it was necessary to also think of how this knowledge can develop critical and creative thinking skills in the students. This can be done by raising cultural awareness which is knowledge of one's culture and the target culture. The cultural items in the module were arranged according to the four tracts identified and each tract was further divided into topics that facilitated the development of cultural knowledge.

Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) claim cultural awareness is gained from personal experience and essentially forms schematic knowledge. This in turn assists students to understand cues to use language in different cultural contexts and environments. Cultural competence is attained when students have the cultural knowledge, developed cultural awareness and are able to recognize similarities and differences between local and target cultures to mediate and interpret their own stand. Byram (2000) maintains being cultural competent suggests a recognition of relationships between different cultures and the ability to reflect, argue and construct critical views of the cultural issues.

The discussion of learner outcomes will use Nguyen's (2017) framework that draws on cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and cultural competence. Nguyen (2017 claims this framework "can be a useful reference for setting pedagogical objectives in teaching

culture for evaluating what learners gain from learning culture while learning a language" (p. 8) When students have cultural knowledge about the local culture, target culture or other cultures they can make comparisons and contrasts and this makes them culturally aware which subsequently means better cultural competence. The contention is that when the content used for language materials is familiar students can activate their background schema to develop a better awareness of the topic. Armed with this knowledge and awareness they can now approach and comprehend other texts and tasks and present their opinions and ideas confidently. This suggest better communicative ability which helps motivate learners to want to improve their level of proficiency.
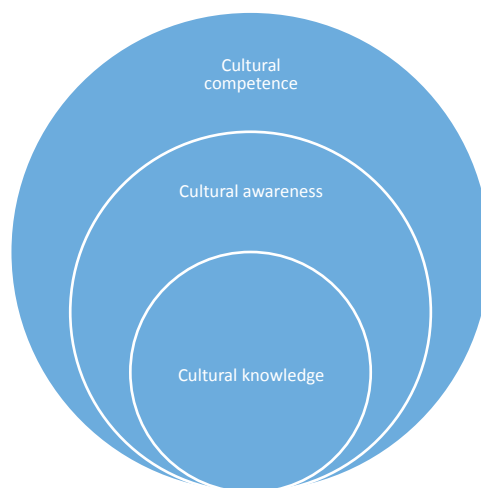

FIGURE 1. Learner outcomes in learning culture (Nguyen 2017)

METHODOLOGY

A total of 54 schools from the state of Terengganu participated in the longitudinal study and these comprised some 85 teachers and 3319 students. Purposive sampling was used to identify the respondents as teachers teaching English and students from Forms 1, 2 and 3 in the schools were seen as units of analysis. Pre and post questionnaires, observations and focus group interviews and individual interviews were conducted with the population identified. This paper will focus on the findings from focus group interviews and classroom observations conducted with 100 students from five schools in the state who had completed three years of the programme. The interviews were conducted about 3 times over a period of 3 years beginning with Form 1 students until they were in Form 3. In total these students were interviewed in groups of 6 or 7 so about 33 or 35 students participated in the 3 observations each year. Similarly, the findings from the individual interviews conducted with about 40 teachers who had taught in the programme will be discussed. Each year teachers teaching the Forms 1 2 and 3 classes who were using the supplementary module were interviewed individually twice. In total 40 interviews were conducted with either 3 or 2 teachers from each of the five schools.

The questions for the focus group interviews focused on students' opinions of the module and the lessons in the module, how beneficial these materials were in the learning and teaching of English and how they have personally benefitted from learning English with these materials. Similar questions were also used with the teachers to elicit their views on the

module, lessons and the use of English to deliver these materials. The types of questions and the categories for students and teachers are illustrated below.

Category of Question	Type of Question (Student)	Type of Question (Teacher)
Opinion about Module	Number of lessons completed	Number of lessons completed
	Frequency of use of book	Frequency of use of book
	Preference for the book	Preference for the book
Opinion about Lessons	Lessons that they enjoyed	Lessons that students enjoyed
	Lessons that they did not enjoy	Lessons that students did not enjoy
	Lessons that were difficult	Lessons that were difficult for students
Use of English	Lesson taught only in English or in Malay also	Lesson taught only in English or in Malay also
	Improvement in English use	Improvement in English use of students
	Difficult to learn English	Difficulty to learn English for students.

The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed before being analyzed according to the categories identified above. To ensure the accuracy and rigor of the analysis inter rater agreement was done. Each transcript was analyzed and the responses categorized by at least two researchers before a third researcher verified the categories. Any variation in categories were discussed by all three before an agreement was reached on the suitable category. This helped ensure the analysis of data into categories were done reliably and with better uniformity.

The observation schedule focused on the teaching approach, the integration of the cultural element, teacher student interaction, and inclusion of critical and creative thinking. The researchers made field notes while conducting the observations and these were used to shed light on the interview responses and the observations. The findings from these instruments will be discussed below according to opinions about module, opinions about lessons and use of English to deliver module.

The responses from the teachers and students pointed to the cultural knowledge they derived after using the module for three years. Based on their understanding of the topics and level of cultural knowledge the responses on topics they enjoyed, did not enjoy and found challenging also eluded to their cultural awareness. Their ability to handle the topics and awareness of the cultural element further enabled them to make comparisons between local culture and target language culture and this leads to cultural competence. When they have content knowledge they find it helps them develop better linguistic knowledge and motivates them to communicate in the target language using their local content knowledge.

FINDINGS

STUDENTS' FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

OPINIONS ABOUT MODULE

The Forms 1, 2 and 3 module had 12 chapters with each tract using local culture to design 3 lessons each. On average students completed about 6 lessons for each module and these came from all four tracts, Heritage, About Language, Literature and Society and Values. Considering this is a supplementary reading module this is considered a good indicator of use. Most students claimed they would use the module once in 2 weeks on the average and this was viewed positively. It is clear they learned new things about the culture and traditions in the state and recognized they did not know as much as they thought they did about local culture.

> *I love this book because it tell us more about Terengganu that we don't know before (S1).*
> *This book is very interesting because I can learn more about Terengganu culture(S2).*
> *I get a lot of input about culture and traditional things (S3).*

Students commented about the uniqueness of the materials drawing comparisons with the school textbook. They liked the colorful pages of the module with the attractive pictures and commented on the aesthetic appeal of the module.

> *The YLMC module is unique because it have many pictures that attract my attention to learn. I hope other books will follow the content of this book (S4).*
> *The book is colorful and interesting to use (S2).*
> *The design, pictures and layout of the module attracts my interest to learn (S5).*

Generally, the students did find the module interesting and enjoyable and a welcome change from the textbook. There seems to be a raised level of confidence in using English as a result of the module.

> *With the book I really enjoy when the teacher is teaching(S6)*
> *YLMC module make me feel brave to speak in English with my friends(S7)*
> *I feel confident to speak in English after using the module (S11).*

OPINION ABOUT LESSONS

Students were also asked to talk about the lessons they enjoyed the most and the lessons they did not enjoy and provide reasons for this. In addition, they were asked to indicate which lessons they found difficult in the book. Their responses on why they enjoyed the lessons were categorized into learning new vocabulary, the nature of activities that were fun and promoted interaction and experiential learning, and helped develop an appreciation for culture and traditions. Each student appeared to have a personal preference for the lessons in the modules and this suggests the topics were chosen well and catered to individual differences among the students of all 3 Forms.

> *From the lesson on Malaysian English I able to add some vocabulary(S20).*
> *I learn new words like regalia from the lesson on the Malay sultanate (S1).*

With teachers taking the trouble to prepare games and activities for the lessons students found completing these tasks enjoyable.

> *My teacher prepared a game for us from the lesson on Malaysian English and it was a lot of fun(S12).*
> *I know about so many types of Banasa Melayu as Terengganu accent. Sometimes it sounds funny (S14).*

What most students mentioned was how the lessons had their teachers preparing activities that involved group work and interaction while encouraging the students to learn by doing. It is clear that experiential learning is still a much favored activity among learners.

> *I like learning about nasi dagang and keropok lekor. I learned to make both of these foods. It was fun (S9).*

> *The lesson that really attract me to learn is on traditional Terengganu food because I really like stuffed squid. We made this dish in class with the teacher (S15).*
> *I liked learning about Azizulhasni Awang as he is a icon in this country. To celebrate his victory I made a banner for him to welcome him home. I learned about his life history as inspiration for the banner (S18).*

There were many comments that indicated an appreciation for local culture and tradition after using the module.

> *I love the lesson on Princess Ulek Mayang. It is because I can know that Terengganu has myths. Besides, I can watch the Princess Ulek Mayang video to appreciate the story better (S22).*
> *I enjoyed the lesson on the Terengganu Sultanate. I think this lesson is attractive because I can get knowledge about the genealogy of the Sultanate (S24).*
> *Personally I like the folk stories and cultural dishes featured in the book. It really helped me understand the traditions, customs and also restrictions in our state (S27).*

It is important to acknowledge that there were some lessons that students did not like and these were mainly because they found these dry and the activities difficulty. For instance, they did not like topics like Merdeka, Patriotism, Muslim Scholars, and Traditional Malay Houses.

> *I don't like the lesson on Merdeka. The letter to write to Bapak Kemerdekaan (Father of Independence) is so difficult as I don't know what to write to him (S4).*
> *I find the lesson on Merdeka and Patriotism difficult. Although there is the paragraph to find the answer but the words are tricky (S16).*

USE OF ENGLISH

Students had to indicate if only English was used to teach the lessons, whether they had any difficulty learning the language and their perceptions of whether they had improved interest and confidence in learning English. The analysis reveals most of the lessons were taught using the English language with teachers only resorting to use Bahasa Melayu to translate unfamiliar words for the students and sometimes repeat instructions. Overall there is better interest in learning English mainly because they are familiar with the content and have subject matter to use to talk.

> *I am familiar with Terengganu food so when teacher asks me to tell my friends about it I am able to do this in English (S14).*
> *Some of the topics are relevant to my daily life especially the one on food so I am able to interact with my friends in and outside class in English (S23).*

Students mentioned learning new words from the module which gave them more confidence to speak in English.

> *The module has helped me understand grammar and improved my vocabulary. I can use this to help when speaking in English (S30).*
> *Before this I found it difficult to speak in English because my knowledge of the topic was limited. But now learning about things that are familiar to me has made me brave to use English with my friends as I now have ideas (S13).*

TEACHERS' INTERVIEWS

OPINIONS ABOUT MODULE

Teachers were also asked to comment on how many lessons they had completed, how often they used the book and what they thought of the book. Teachers also maintained they managed to complete at least 6 lessons for each module and tried to use the module at least once in two weeks. While they did find the students were more responsive to the modules teachers felt they had to focus on the school textbook to complete the syllabus and prepare the students for the examinations.

They maintained the module was a good supplementary resource as the process of teaching and learning was more appealing to them and the students. The use of local culture they posit was a good idea as it enabled them to find additional resources easily and more importantly these were interesting to the students.

> *The use of local Terengganu culture in the module is very unique and is a new approach to help students in English class (T2).*
> *The activities, illustrations and video links encourage interactivity which is successful in attracting student interest (T1).*

Teachers also opined that the use of local culture was seen as refreshing as there was something common they could use to generate better interest in learning English.

> *There is a lot that I can share with students to help them to recognize their cultural history. It is obvious that they can also respond to these topics as they are familiar with them (T4).*

OPINIONS ABOUT LESSONS

Teachers were asked what lessons their students enjoyed and did not enjoy and why they thought so. They were also asked to state which lessons students had difficulty with and what was the problem. These responses were then compared to the students to see if the responses were credible.

Teachers also indicated students did enjoy the lessons that dealt with a range of topics that were interesting and current. For instance, the lesson on Azizulhasni Awang or Malaysia's Pocket Rocketman was done when the Olympics were taking place and students were very keen to follow the games and see how their local hero was faring. Teachers claimed there was some celebration in class when the national cyclist won the gold medal with students working on welcome home banners and messages.

It can be surmised that when students are interested in the topics they also learn new vocabulary which they can then use when exchanging ideas with their peers and when presenting in class. Even low proficiency students did show an interest in participating in class.

> *Weak students responded positively and were keen to participate in the activities (T6).*

One teacher talked about how when doing the lesson on Wood Carving using local flora and fauna she got her students to bring a bar of soap and carve a design on it. She claims the students enjoyed learning new words while carrying out this activity and produced some interesting designs based on their knowledge of local culture and tradition.

The activities in the module help me design activities that are interesting so learners can participate in class (5).

Teachers also maintained that students were eager to engage in group work and work with peers on tasks.

They really enjoy group work and the activities facilitate this. After discussing in groups they take turns to present their findings to the class and they really like this(T7).

The use of local culture is seen as helping students develop an appreciation for Terengganu culture while facilitating the learning of English.

As a teacher I am excited to share my knowledge of local culture with my students and get them to share their understanding. This I believe will instill a better awareness and love of their cultural heritage in them(T3).

USE OF ENGLISH

Teachers reiterated they mainly used English to deliver the lessons but used Bahasa Melayu to explain difficult words and concepts. At times they would have to repeat instruction in Bahasa Melayu especially for the weaker classes. This was to ensure everyone knew and understand what they were doing for the lesson. Teachers maintain that students are more comfortable and happy to use English even less proficient students are keen to practice using English with their knowledge of the familiar content. Students are happy to speak in English while carrying out activities in groups.

The use of local content helps my students produce ideas and communicate in English even if it is not perfect. They all seem to have ideas to put forth (T8).

Teachers said if they thought the topic would be too difficult for their students because of the syntax structure or vocabulary, they would not teach that lesson in class. Some of them introduced the topic using simpler passages instead. Some teachers even admitted they were not comfortable handling topics they had no knowledge about.

Some topics are too challenging for students so I don't cover the lesson (T10).
I try to simplify difficult topics with simpler passages I get from the Internet or tourism website (T2).
Teachers generally found their students to be more responsive and interested to learn using the YLMC module.

Since the module uses local content I find my students are more keen to interact in English as they have some knowledge about the topic (T4).
I find it easier to teach English using local content as students are more interested and responsive (T9).
Students are willing to respond when asked to answer questions as the topic is familiar even if they do not have complete knowledge about it (T8).

DISCUSSION

The students' and teachers' responses are largely similar in that their opinions about the YLMC module, the lessons in the module and the use of English are positive. The responses are also favorable to the use of local culture in language teaching and learning materials.

To introduce cultural knowledge, the materials for the modules were sourced from the state's history, heritage, culture, flora, fauna, handicrafts, literature, and sports personalities. The majority of the students are from the state and had some understanding of these topics when the lessons were carried out. It is this familiarity and schema that served as a source of information when they had to complete the tasks and activities even if they did not have in depth knowledge. With the little knowledge they had they were eager to participate in the discussions and activities. What was interesting was that even the students who were not so willing to participate because of limited proficiency were keen to display their knowledge.

Students found the module to be interesting, informative and aesthetically pleasing with colorful pages and layout in comparison to the school textbook which was seen as very examination oriented and boring. The students displayed interest in carrying out the various activities for each topic and were motivated to work with peers to solve the tasks. They opined these activities promoted fun and experiential learning. More importantly they developed an appreciation for local culture and traditions and were keen to communicate with their parents and grandparents about these (Sun 2013, Cakir 2006). When communicating with family members who are socialized in the local culture, these students also enhanced their communicative competence as they had to show an understanding of the local culture too (Brown 2001, Holler & Wilkin 2009, Skopinskaja 2003)

Teachers opined that using the module enabled them to source materials on local topics easily as they could refer to Tourism Board, the state's webpage, local museum and heritage centers. They could easily organize field trips to these places within the state of Terengganu and make the learning fun for the students. This use of realia and displays provided real life exposure to local culture with the use of community resources (Stern 1992). The use of local culture helped students develop a better appreciation of the rich heritage of the state and they were more responsive in class. They claimed using the module was refreshing as students responded better and there was better two - way interaction and participation in the class. Using local culture helped students be more critical and creative as familiarity helped them to respond to questions raised in class (Tomlinson and Masuhara 2004, Byram 2000). When only the school textbook was used to teach language teachers found students were not really interested in the lessons and they had to do most of the talking in class.

The findings indicate that students find the YLMC module to be an interactive and interesting module that encourages them to learn English. Teachers too claim the students are more excited to learn with the module as the topics are familiar and more relevant to them. It can be said that module was successful in helping improve attitudes and change negative perceptions of students to learn English. Having had to rely only on the school textbook and teaching English to be successful in examinations has caused the learning of the language to be very monotonous and uninspiring. When provided with an alternative text like the YLMC module, the teaching and learning of English has been given a breath of fresh air and helped motivate teachers and students (Skopinskaja 2003). It is especially interesting to note that even less proficient students are participating in class and attempting to communicate in English because they have some knowledge about the topic being studied. It is the use of local culture and the various tasks and activities in the module that has further promoted cooperative and collaborative learning, problem solving and other relevant twenty first century skills to make the learning of English more effective.

The module has successfully helped deliver cultural knowledge about Terengganu in an attractive and structured manner and the range of activities and tasks has stimulated cultural awareness among the learners. The familiarity of the topics has further encouraged students to want to learn more about their local culture and also to communicate in English (Tomlinson & Masuhara 2004). Students are also able to compare and contrast the local culture in the topics and relate these to target culture thereby strengthening their cultural competence (Byram 2000). After a three - year period the study reveals that communicative ability of lower secondary students did improve and there was renewed interest, motivation and willingness to read in English.

While there are promising revelations from the study there are also certain issues that need to be further addressed. There are teachers in the state who are not native to the state and they were concerned they did not have sufficient knowledge about the local culture to handle some topics in class. Naturally there were reluctant to appear incompetent in front of their students and opted to not teach these topics. However, there were also teachers who were willing to read up and get the students to educate them on these topics. In such instances, it was necessary to encourage teachers to share their limited knowledge with the class and get the students to handle the topics instead. A teacher with the right attitude is very important in helping to introduce culture into language learning and if teachers are concerned they may not be sufficiently equipped they will focus only on the language element. The success of using materials integrated with local culture depends on teachers drawing links between the cultural element and the linguistic element. In this way it is hoped to raise students' interest and motivation to learn the English language as familiarity with content can improve linguistic knowledge. There were instances of teachers not foregrounding the cultural element and how it is linked to language learning and this can be rectified with training on raising cultural awareness.

The findings are revealing in that certain measures need to be taken to help consolidate the use of local culture in language learning materials. Teachers need to undergo training on how to deliver the culture aspect together with the linguistic aspect in the best possible way. This will ensure students get the best of both and the module does not become another textbook. The raising of cultural awareness must be done consciously and teachers and students can play a role in this. In cases where the teacher is not from the state the students can be called upon to provide the background to a certain cultural tradition, game, practice or food. This will make students confident and build their competence in both language and culture. We believe the inclusion of local culture into language materials has proved promising and can help motivate students to learn English confidently and most importantly improve their ability to communicate.

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