



Analysis of Cultural Contents in CEFR- Aligned English Proficiency Textbook: Implications for material development for intercultural learning.

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ABSTRACT

Cultural dimensions of various educational materials, especially English textbooks, have become the subject of an increasing number of studies in recent decades. In an English Language Teaching context, the shift from only emphasizing the culture of the target language to adopting a more comprehensive and intricate perspective on the interconnections between language and culture is crucial to promoting intercultural learning among learners. This paper analyses the representation of cultural materials in reading texts in an English textbook for pre-sessional university students in Malaysia. A content analysis based on the intercultural communication competence framework was employed to examine cultural contents in *Pathways: Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking English CEFR-aligned* textbook. The findings indicate that a significant portion of English as the target culture is reflected in the reading texts, which highlight the role of English in globalization, preservation of cultural heritage, and promotion of innovation. While the reading texts do represent some international cultures, the source culture needs to be adequately represented. The results of the study suggest that L2 learners' ability to critically examine and contrast their own cultural experiences with the viewpoints of the target culture might be impeded if the textbook exclusively portrays the target culture while ignoring the source culture. To gain a better understanding of how learners' own culture influences their beliefs, perspectives, values, and responses to their experiences in a new cultural context, the findings underscore the significance of incorporating a greater quantity of cultural materials from the source culture into English textbooks in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Intercultural learning, ELT material development, English textbook, intercultural communication competence*

INTRODUCTION

In countries where English is not the native tongue, studying a foreign language could potentially serve as a highly effective means for learners to gain a multifaceted understanding of the world. Learners may benefit from contemplating alternative worldviews to their own (Mansilla & Jackson, 2012). In a world that is becoming more interconnected and diverse, global competence will emerge as an indispensable competency for individuals entering the twenty-first century. If educators are at the forefront of ensuring that students acquire global competence, then foreign languages are at the forefront of global education (Anoshkova, 2015). Additionally, research has revealed a positive correlation between second language motivation and global competence: Students who are more motivated to learn a second language are more likely to have a positive self-perception of global competence; conversely, discouraged students are less likely to perceive themselves as globally competent (Semaan & Yamazaki, 2015). Additionally, scholars have posited that proficiency in English and one's native language are substantial indicators of global competence, which subsequently exerts a substantial impact on the social connectedness, academic assimilation, and social integration of participants (Meng et al., 2018).

Discourse on intercultural learning and culture pedagogy became a crucial component of language acquisition in the 1960s. Since the year 2000, a greater number of scholars have examined the transition from a narrow focus on the target language's culture to one that embraces a more intricate and comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships between language and culture (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Consequently, new concepts emerged to complement the notion of culture, including transnationalism, globalism, hybridity, and multiculturalism (Aoumer & Ziani, 2022). Incorporating cultural content into language textbooks has become a central concern for language instructors, researchers, and authors of learning materials (Siddiqie, 2011). The classroom materials, such as textbooks, enhance the learning experience for students of all age groups, enabling them to gain knowledge about diverse cultures and enhance their ability to communicate effectively across cultures (Deswila et al., 2021). Moreover, as the world is getting increasingly multicultural and diversified, there is a higher emphasis on language materials in textbooks to reflect the knowledge and cultural variety (Risagen, 2018) that promote the growth of intercultural communication competence (ICC) which in turn can lower students' feelings of fear, unease, and confusion while interacting with other cultures (Neuliep, 2019).

With intercultural learning in focus, more researchers have developed a significant focus on the cultural dimensions of various learning materials, particularly in textbooks. Textbooks hold an essential position in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms. Existing studies have focused on cultural representations in English textbooks, mainly examining what cultural content is presented in the textbooks for primary and secondary students (Rodríguez, 2015). Nevertheless, the attention given to the effectiveness of textbooks in developing tertiary students' intercultural communication competence, in particular, has so far been limited. The purpose of this study is to examine the representation of cultural contents in reading texts in an internationally published ELT textbook, *Pathways: Reading Writing and Critical Thinking Second Edition (Level 3)*. This study has therefore attempted to address the following research question: What are the cultural components presented in reading texts of *Pathways: Reading Writing and Critical Thinking*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia's ELT Textbooks

Language teachers often rely on textbooks as teaching aids to prepare and conduct lessons. As an educational tool, textbooks offer teachers the advantage of saving time, improving teaching effectiveness, and providing them with a wide array of expertly designed resources (Nunan, 2001). Moreover, textbooks offer a systematic curriculum that effectively directs the learning process for both teachers and learners. Additionally, they function as a point of reference for learners to examine and strengthen their comprehension of the linguistic principles presented during class. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) propose several distinct roles of textbooks in language classrooms; textbooks function as a learning stimulus by providing examples of correct language usage and aiding in the acquisition of language skills; textbooks embody the designers' viewpoint on language and the acquisition of knowledge, facilitating the structuring of the educational process; textbooks enhance the diversification of teacher training by equipping teachers with valuable materials and effective ways; textbooks offer a well-rounded viewpoint that recognizes the intricacy of education while efficiently handling it. In sum, textbooks offer a well-defined structure that helps teachers and learners by offering a structured sequence of content and supporting consistent adherence to a syllabus (Ur, 2000).

In Malaysia's English language teaching (ELT) context, textbooks play an important role in supporting both language instructors and learners to achieve learning objectives (Roberts, 2020) and keep the standard of educational attainment (Misbah et al., 2017). Existing research has evaluated the cultural contents in ELT textbooks (see Lopez-Medina, 2016; Işık, 2018). A recent qualitative study by Roberts et al. (2020) of teachers' perception of ELT textbooks in Malaysia revealed that culture and cultural introduction contents are one of the eleven criteria that are deemed crucial for a good ELT textbook. Existing research is mostly on second language acquisition (L2), focusing on how to teach the materials, and there is a general lack of research on the materials themselves (Garton, 2021).

CEFR-aligned ELT Textbooks

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a well-established guideline that describes language learners' abilities to use language and categorizes what a learner can do using a six-point scale from basic users (A1) to proficient users (C2). Concerning the advancement of ICC, the CEFR framework regards intercultural competence as a crucial marker of second language learning. CEFR has also highlighted the cultural aspects of language instruction that aim to equip learners with intercultural skills and proficiencies (Council of Europe, 2001). CEFR recognizes the importance of cultural and linguistic variety at the individual level. It emphasizes that learners are social agents who use their language and cultural knowledge to participate in social and educational contexts:

The plurilingual approach emphasizes the fact that a person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learned at school or college or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contribute and in which languages interrelate and interact (CEFR 2001 Section 1.3). Plurilingual competence can be achieved by incorporating multicultural themes, which encompass global shifts

in linguistic and cultural paradigms, within the classroom setting can effectively prepare students to engage in global communication using the language appropriately (Rose & Galloway, 2019; Sevimel-Sahin, 2020). This multicultural initiative offers an avenue for students to embrace their own culture while gaining insights into other cultures, fostering a positive stance towards individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Köşker & Erdoğan, 2020).

As CEFR gains prominence within the curriculum and the global landscape becomes increasingly diverse, the question arises as to whether the learning resources in CEFR-aligned English textbooks adequately address ICC's objectives and provide a comprehensive representation of cultural knowledge. Existing studies have noted some concerns about mismatched cultural contents between the CEFR-aligned textbooks and the local cultures. Rahim and Daghigh (2019) analyzed the cultural contents of English textbooks in Malaysia and found that the textbooks offer zero content that relates to local culture. Similarly, Nazari and Aziz (2020), in their analysis of English textbooks, reported limited and unequal representation of cultural content. Another study by James and Aziz (2020) on the student's perception of the cultural components in their English textbooks reported that the students found that local culture was not emphasized in the textbooks. A recent study found that locally developed English textbooks consist of a wider spectrum of cultural materials and are more in line with ICC objectives than CEFR-aligned textbooks (Abd Rahim & Daghigh, 2020). Hence, there is immediate concern that the misrepresentation of the target culture as homogenous and static in the instructional materials of language teaching classrooms can perpetuate prejudice at the expense of multicultural communities (Canale, 2016, p. 235).

Intercultural Competence

The term "culture" encompasses a multifaceted idea that considers several dimensions (Kim & Paek, 2015). According to Peterson (2004), The elements of culture can be categorized into two distinct categories: big 'C' culture and little 'c' culture. These categories are further classified as visible and invisible components. The visible aspects of Big C culture encompass literature, classical music, and architecture, while Little 'c' encompasses invisible culture, such as ideas, perspectives, beliefs, and choices. In contrast to Peterson's (2004) view of culture, Moran (2001) defines culture as a dynamic and active phenomenon that individuals engage in daily, leading to the development of historical events and civilizations. The elements of culture can be categorized into five dimensions: products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons. These dimensions are valuable to assess how teachers facilitate learners' intercultural communication competence (ICC) in language textbooks. Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) refers to an individual's "ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment" (Chen & Starosta, 1999, p. 28). Young and Sercombe (2010) define ICC as a dynamic process through which individuals draw on and use cultural practices and resources from both their own culture and those that they may not generally associate with in their interactions with others. Chao (2011) proposed five categories of culture that can be included in textbooks and provide various opportunities to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence effectively. The categories were developed according to the suggestions from scholars promoting the development of intercultural communicative competence, namely, target culture materials, local/source culture

materials, international culture materials, intercultural interaction materials, and universality across cultural materials.

METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis (CA) was used as a method to identify appropriate patterns or categories of the cultural content of the main texts in the study being analyzed. The content could be words, pictures, themes, ideas, and any messages that are planned to be communicated, and the text can be written, visual, or spoken forms that serve as a medium of communication, such as books, pictures, films, and documents (Cohen et al., 2000). CA is usually considered an objective and reliable method in historical or educational research because explicit rules are followed during the procedure of classifying and arranging data (Cohen et al., 2000; Neuman, 1997).

The textbook evaluated.

This study evaluated *Pathways: Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking (Level 3)* English textbook. The textbook is published by National Geographic Learning (2020). The textbook is used in the Pre-sessional English Language Course at a public university in Malaysia. The textbook has been designed to accomplish can-do statements mapped to the CEFR level B2. The statements reflect learners' plurilingual repertoire. In sum, as learners develop their understanding of different cultures, they also make use of all the language skills they have to effectively communicate in a multilingual environment or in situations where others do not speak the same language.

Table 1: CEFR Can Do statements (Council of Europe, 2001)

CEFR Level	Can Do Statements
B2 (Independent User)	<p>Can describe and evaluate the viewpoints and practices of his/her own and other social groups, showing awareness of the implicit values on which judgments and prejudices are frequently based.</p> <p>Can interpret and explain a document or event from another culture and relate it to documents or events from his/her own culture(s)/ and/or from cultures he/she is familiar document or event from another culture with.</p> <p>Can discuss the objectivity and balance of information and opinions expressed in the media about his/her own and other communities.</p> <p>Can identify and reflect on similarities and differences in culturally-determined behaviour patterns (e.g. gestures and speech volume) and discuss their significance in order to negotiate mutual understanding.</p> <p>Can, in an intercultural encounter, recognise that what one normally takes for granted in a particular situation is not necessarily shared by others, and can react and express him/herself appropriately.</p> <p>Can generally interpret cultural cues appropriately in the culture concerned. Can reflect on and explain particular ways of communicating in his/her own and other cultures, and the risks of misunderstanding they generate.</p>

The textbook is used in an English language course designed for the upper intermediate level of English. At the end of the course, learners will be able to express themselves clearly on a wide range of subjects, which include topics on sustainability such as the environment, economy, and social issues, communicate fluently, and be independent users of the language. The learners have 18 hours of lessons weekly.

Units of analysis

In the study, two sets of coding schemes were employed to codify data. The descriptions of the coding schemes are discussed as follows.

1) Dimensions of culture

Moran's (2001) work on the cultural dimension is used to develop a coding scheme to analyze the dimensions of culture, which includes *products* that *persons* use in various *practices* in *communities* that present their *perspectives*.

Table 2: Description of cultural dimension coding scheme

Cultural Dimensions	Descriptions
Products	Refer to the big C that can be categorised into: 1. <i>Artifacts</i> : food, documents, language, money, tools 2. <i>Places</i> : buildings, cities, houses 3. <i>Institutions</i> : family, law, economy, religion, education, politics 4. <i>Art forms</i> : music, clothes, dancing, painting, movie, architecture
Practices	Refer to the little c which can be categorised into 1. <i>Operations</i> : manipulation of cultural products 2. <i>Acts</i> : ritualized communicative practices 3. <i>Scenarios</i> : extended communicative practices 4. <i>Lives</i> : stories of members of the culture
Perspectives	Refer to the <i>perceptions, beliefs, values and attitudes</i> that underlie the products and guide people's behavior in the practice of culture. They can be explicit but often they are implicit, outside conscious awareness.
Communities	Refers to the specific <i>social contexts</i> (e.g. national cultures), <i>circumstances</i> (e.g. religious ceremonies) and <i>groups</i> (e.g. different social clubs) in which members carry out cultural practices.
Persons	Refers to <i>individual members</i> who embody the culture and its communities in unique ways. Personal identity and life history play key roles in the development of a cultural person.

2) Cultural Categories

The coding scheme to examine the cultural categories was adapted from Chao's (2011) work. The coding includes target culture materials, local/source culture materials, international culture materials, intercultural interaction materials, and universality across cultural materials.

Table 3: Description of categories of culture coding scheme

Categories of Culture	Description
Source Culture	Malaysian cultures (Malay, Chinese, Indian)
Target Culture	English-speaking cultures (UK, USA, Australia, Canada etc)

International Culture	It includes cultures of all countries in the world (European countries, countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia) except for Malaysian and English-speaking cultures
Intercultural Interaction	It includes the comparison, reflection or awareness of the differences and similarities between the local/source and the target/international culture through activities such as case studies, problem-solving, and role play to help learner develop positive <i>attitude, knowledge, skills, and awareness</i> in intercultural communication
Universality across culture	It includes general knowledge/content that is not specific to any particular culture or country (The content is mainly related to linguistic knowledge and practice without focusing on any particular culture)

Data Analysis

Raw data was collected from the ten units of the student book *Pathways: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking* (Level 3, B2). The researchers were responsible for coding the content of the chosen textbook based on the coding schemes. To make the result of the data analysis reliable, the researchers discussed the coding components among each other and worked independently. Discrepancies were discussed to reach a consensus before presenting the final coding results.

RESULTS

The data extracted from the textbook analysis can be divided into two categories: Cultural categories and cultural dimensions. The textbook consists of ten units that cover diverse themes, including wildlife, environmental issues, technological innovations, transportation, globalization, urbanization, and internationalization. Each theme consists of two reading texts that focus on reading skills such as identifying main and supporting ideas, vocabulary, scanning, making inferences, and understanding infographics. The textbook also consists of writing activities that focus on giving reasons, writing introductions and conclusions, paraphrasing, and expressing agreement and disagreement, among others. Table 4 below illustrates the list of topics in the textbook. The textbook is divided into 10 units, which represent ten different themes.

Table 4: List of topics in the textbook

Unit/Themes	Text
Social Relationship	The Ape in The Office
	Gender In the Wild
Science And Investigation	Tech Detectives
	King Tut's Family Secrets
City Solutions	Living on Urban Planet
	The Urban Visionary
Danger Zones	Sensing Disaster
	Yellowstone's Smoking Bomb
The Travel Business	The New Face of Tourism
	Geotourism In Action
Information Design	The Rise of Visual Data
	Visual Culture

Global Challenges	A Need for Change Eight Steps to A Sustainable Future
Medical Innovations	The Healer of Cordoba Medical Frontiers
World Languages	The Future of English Vanishing Voices
Survival Instinct	Deadly Summit Breath of Life

Dimensions of Cultures

The results demonstrate that a significant portion, 31%, of the texts represent the cultural perspective which includes the beliefs, values, and attitudes that underlie the products and guide people's behavior in the practice of culture, while 25% of the materials feature the dimension of culture that reflect cultural practices which refer to actions and interactions among the members of a culture. Materials that represent the Big C or products of cultures account for 22% of the content, while materials on persons account for 14% of the content. The least cultural dimension represented in the content is cultural communities, with 8%. Table 5 below summarises the results of contents that represent the cultural dimension in the textbook.

Table 5: Content analysis of cultural dimensions

Dimension of culture	Frequency	Percentage
Products	11	22
Practices	13	25
Perspectives	16	31
Communities	4	8
Persons	7	14
Total	51	100

Categories of Culture

The cultural component represented in each text was examined to understand the distribution of cultural categories. Based on the analysis, there were 23 instances of cultural content. The dominant cultural content that appears in the textbook is universality across cultures, with 39%. Universality across cultures refers to materials that are not specific to any particular culture or country. The texts are mainly related to knowledge and practice without focusing on any particular culture. For example, the wildlife behavior of chimpanzees and elephants, the dangers of tourism, medical innovations, the narratives of K2 survivors, and the increasing trend of infographics. The second most dominant are international cultures and intercultural interaction cultures, with 22% percentage each. Intercultural interaction refers to the comparison, reflection, or awareness of the differences and similarities between local/source culture and the target/international culture through case studies. International culture refers to all of the world's countries. The target cultures have the least occurrence, with 17%. Table 6 below illustrates the categories of cultures as represented in the content of the textbook.

Table 6: Analysis of categories of cultures

Categories of culture	Frequency	Percentage
Source	0	0
Target	4	17
International	5	22
Intercultural interaction	5	22
Universalist	9	39
Total	23	100

DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study illustrate that contents related to the perspective dimension of culture contribute the biggest percentage in the textbook, followed by the practice, product, persons, and communities. The findings show that significant content material in the textbook focuses on the deep culture that promotes learners to develop their worldview based on their beliefs, values, and life experiences. These are in contrast with previous research, which reported an inadequacy of cultural elements related to deep cultures in textbooks (Rodríguez, 2015). Existing research found that most textbook contents were overwhelmed by products or surface cultures such as food, holidays, celebrities, or tourist places which could hinder students' development of intercultural awareness, (Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018).

In sum, the content materials that represent deep cultures, such as those related to the cultural components in the texts, are in line with CEFR's goals of developing plurilingual competencies. These competencies encompass the learners' ability to analyze and assess the perspectives and practices of both one's own and other social groups; interpret and elucidate documents from different cultures; critically evaluate the objectivity and impartiality of information in media; identify similarities and disparities in behavior patterns influenced by culture; acknowledge that assumptions made in a specific context may not be universally shared; correctly interpret cultural cues, reflect on communication strategies in one's own and other cultures, and prevent misinterpretations (Council of Europe, 2001). Material developer Developing these competencies is crucial for learners to navigate the complexities of a globalized world. By honing their analytical skills, individuals can better understand the diverse perspectives and practices that shape societies. Ultimately, these competencies foster intercultural understanding and effective communication across different cultural contexts.

The study also reveals that a significant proportion of contents related to universalist culture, intercultural interaction culture, and international culture were represented in the textbook. This is in contrast to the imbalance of cultural representation in English textbooks presented in previous studies, which have shown that most English textbooks rarely include international culture (Zhang et al., 2022). Studies reported that most English textbooks either focus primarily on language (grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, etc.) or contain cultural content limited to local or British-American culture (Shin et al., 2011). On the other hand, the results of this study reveal that no content from the source culture was included in the textbook. These are consistent with previous studies on Malaysian English textbooks, which reported that most imported textbooks offer zero or limited content related to local culture (Rahim & Daghigh, 2019; James & Aziz, 2020). Textbooks that are devoid of source culture may lead learners to focus too much on knowledge of the target culture or international culture and neglect intercultural knowledge and understanding of their own cultures.

CONCLUSION

The study incorporated Moran's (2001) work on five cultural dimensions and Chao's (2011) categories of culture to analyze cultural aspects featured in the content of a selected English textbook. In conclusion, the textbook dominantly presents contents that reflect cultural perspectives and cultural communities in comparison to cultural products. Materials that focus on deep cultural contents expose learners to the opportunities to engage with attitudes, viewpoints, or beliefs of diverse cultures as well as instill deeper knowledge about social activities, behaviors, norms, and values (Chang, 2022) can foster and solidify learners' intercultural awareness, which is one of the goals in the ELT (Chao, 2011; Rodrigues, 2015). Textbooks not only convey knowledge but also serve as a medium for communicating values. Although attitudes and values are abstract and ambitious, they are the essential educational values of the textbook and the purpose of global competence education, which cannot be neglected in the textbooks (Ping & Wang, 2023). While the analyzed textbook presents a considerable quantity of content on international cultures and intercultural interaction cultures, the source culture component needs to be included. The inclusion of source cultural materials is an indispensable element in the representation of any cultural type. Thus, it is necessary to take local ethnic identity and national identity into account. Hunter et al. (2006) postulate that the most critical step in global competence is to give a person a keen comprehension of one's cultural norms and expectations.

The study contained some limitations: firstly, only one English textbook was selected as a sample, and the analysis results can only partially reflect the overall situation of English textbooks in Malaysia. Secondly, this study only analyses the texts in the textbooks, excluding audio, videos, and images. Large sample analysis and textbook multimodal analysis can be conducted in future studies and might reveal different findings.

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