

## LOCAL CULTURAL ASPECTS IN THE KBSM ENGLISH LANGUAGE MATERIALS

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**Abstract:** Malaysian students come from various ethnicities and cultural communities since Malaysia is known as a multiracial and multicultural country. Therefore, issues related to the portrayal of local cultural aspects in KBSM English Language materials used in some Malaysian schools have captured the attention of researchers. This study employs a set of checklist which has been used as a guideline to analyze the cultural aspects in a curriculum in order to examine English Language Form 1 to Form 5 textbooks used in schools in Johor Bahru. The findings show that there was insufficient incorporation of cultural aspects into the English materials. Many of the available cultural elements were presented at a superficial level and not discussed within the holistic cultural experience. The findings suggest that the absence and the lack of certain cultural aspects in the materials may be due to the fact some cultural topics are avoided fearing sensitivity, and that they may be implicitly portrayed through, for example, value integration, moral and educational emphasis. This study recommends that language learning materials must be able to present the language learners' own culture and all the cultures that surround them and the materials must be useful and effective both as English learning materials as well as a tool for promoting cultural knowledge and understanding among Malaysian students.

**Abstrak:** Pelajar-pelajar di Malaysia terdiri daripada pelbagai komuniti etnik dan budaya memandangkan Malaysia merupakan sebuah negara yang dikenali sebagai Negara berbilang kaum dan negara berbilang budaya. Oleh kerana itu, timbul persoalan berkenaan dengan pendedahan aspek kebudayaan yang terdapat dalam bahan Bahasa Inggeris KBSM yang digunakan oleh sekolah-sekolah di dalam negara dan isu ini telah mendapat perhatian daripada para pengkaji. Kajian ini telah memfokus kepada satu set senarai semak yang telah digunakan sebagai garispanduan untuk menganalisa aspek kebudayaan yang terdapat dalam Buku Teks Bahasa Inggeris KBSM Tingkatan 1 hingga 5 yang digunakan di sekolah-sekolah menengah di Johor Bahru. Secara keseluruhannya, bahan-bahan tersebut mempunyai pendedahan yang cetek terhadap aspek-aspek kebudayaan dan ia tidak dibincangkan secara meluas dan mendalam. Kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa kekurangan aspek-aspek kebudayaan tertentu yang terdapat dalam bahan-bahan tersebut berkemungkinan disebabkan oleh faktor sensitivity sesetengah topik kebudayaan dan bahawa ianya mungkin didedahkan secara implisit, contohnya melalui penerapan nilai-nilai murni, penekanan-penekanan moral dan juga pendidikan. Kajian ini juga mencadangkan bahawa bahan-bahan pembelajaran bahasa perlu berupaya mendedahkan budaya sendiri pelajar-pelajar bahasa serta budaya-budaya yang wujud dalam persekitaran mereka dan bahan-bahan tersebut mestilah berguna serta efektif sebagai bahan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris mahupun sebagai alat untuk mempromosikan pengetahuan dan kefahaman kebudayaan di kalangan pelajar-pelajar Malaysia.

*Keywords:* KBSM English, local cultural aspects

### Introduction

### Statements of the Problem

There are various materials for English language teaching and learning that can be obtained in the market and from other various sources. Obviously, there are local cultural elements presented in most of the current English learning materials. However, one can argue whether they are sufficient and

comprehensive enough to tap on the culture of the English language learners. As known to the world, Malaysia is a multiracial and multicultural country. It is rich of cultural practices and traditions of many cultural communities. Therefore, the materials will not be able to present these cultural practices and traditions of all cultural communities that exist in this country. As a result, the cultural elements of the majority groups like Malay, Chinese, and Indian are commonly found. But, what happens to learners from other minority cultural communities in the country? Their cultural elements also need to be presented for the reason that they are all language learners and learning a language is learning cultures.

The English materials available also may not provide enough cultural information to the teachers in order for them to fully utilize cultural aspects that can enhance the learning of English among the learners. This is important especially when the English teacher does not really belong to the learners' community that he or she is teaching. How can a teacher teach a language to a group of learners without understanding the cultures that surround them and when language teaching must be incorporated with cultural elements? Here in Malaysia, we have hundreds of cultural communities including all the minorities. Let us take a situation for instance. A teacher from Kuala Lumpur is sent to teach English in the area of an Iban community in Sarawak. In this circumstance, the teacher most probably will fully depend on the cultural elements that are present in the English materials in order to make the connection and correlation of what he or she is going to teach and the learners' culture. So the moral of the story is clear that the presence of local cultural elements in the KBSM English materials is important not just for English language learners but also for English language teachers.

Although we live in a multiracial and multicultural society, the local and international mass media are still discussing racial misunderstanding and polarization in segments of our society. All the discussions of the sensitive issues are made worse when the international community interferes. As a result, all the impressions of harmony and peacefulness presented through the cultural elements in the English materials do not really hit the target. This happens when the learners are exposed to negative perceptions and at the same time, those can be negative stimulations toward learning English.

Since Malaysia is a multiracial and multicultural country, its stability and social cohesion are so much depending on harmony, understanding and tolerance among all members in all communities. Without these elements, then such word like 'harmony' is impossible to be possessed. A social community needs to have the respect to other social communities so that an impressive multiracial and multicultural country still exists on this planet.

In summary, in order to understand the problems better, one can ask the following questions:

1. How relevant are cultural aspects in the materials?
2. How can English language teaching be more effective in Malaysia?
3. Have the materials sufficiently incorporated the cultural aspects?
4. Are the available cultural aspects useful and effective in order to be used as English learning materials and as tool for understanding cultures?

The answers to the questions allow us to see the major role of the English language materials in incorporating the cultural aspects. They also inform us on the status of the English language syllabus, its materials and also the teaching of it.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

1. to determine the degree that the English language materials provide the wholeness of experiences of ethnic and cultural groups in Malaysia;
2. to examine the extent that the materials present the ideals and realities of Malaysian societies;
3. to discover the way the materials support ethnic and cultural diversity in Malaysia;
4. to ascertain the degree that the materials offer opportunities for participation in aesthetic ethnic and cultural experiences;
5. to find out the degree that the materials present the culture of the native speakers of English (C2) and make use of the learners' first language (L1).

## **Significance of the Study**

The textbook is the main source of teaching in many subjects. Many modern textbooks strive to give students at least a superficial knowledge base for understanding other cultures and people. The study on local cultural aspects presented in the English language materials is necessary for the reason that Malaysia is a multiracial and multicultural country. The learners' social background factors need to be taken into teachers' serious consideration. This study will enable to guide materials developers or textbook writers to identify proper cultural elements to be integrated into the materials.

Besides that, this study is important for English language teachers who need to fully utilize cultural aspects in order to enhance the learning process of the language. The English materials that they are using may not provide sufficient information on those aspects. This will, at the same time, bring difficulties to the teachers in order to link the cultural background of learners and English language learning. With the exposure to such matters and issues in this study, English teachers in Malaysian schools will have the awareness of the importance of culture in any second language classrooms.

The study also provides better understanding for English language teaching (ELT) practitioners as it links the teaching of English to broader but more important cultural dimension. There is a tendency among practitioners to confine ELT within the teaching of structures or grammar, neglecting its communicative aspects. Also learner factors and the differing needs as well as their sociocultural are overlooked.

Besides, the study also offers policy makers or curriculum planners useful insight into the area of teaching culture across the curriculum. We need to participate in the global society and curriculum can be a useful tool to impart cultural knowledge and skills.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The analysis of this study would be based on a set of textbooks used by secondary schools in Johor Bahru. The quantity and quality of the materials in the textbooks examined would depend on many factors, such as the limitations posed by the Curriculum Specifications designed by the Ministry of Education as well as the requirement by the publishers.

The description of the cultural aspects in the textbooks depends on the selected criteria in the checklist used in this study. There are other aspects in Banks' checklist as well as from other scholars. Those aspects may not have been examined.

Another limitation is due to the fact that cultural aspects can be implicitly portrayed. The cultural aspects were also sometimes presented in different forms such as value integration and moral education. It was thus difficult to identify or describe the aspect within the scope of this study.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Instruments**

This study utilizes a checklist adapted from Banks' (2001) checklist for multicultural curriculum to examine Form 1 to Form 5 KBSM English textbooks. Here are the questions adapted from the checklist which was used to evaluate the English materials:-

The checklist was adapted to fit the focus of this study. Banks' checklist was designed for the evaluation of multicultural curriculum. It has broader scope of inquiry and much more comprehensive criteria. Since the focus in this study is on the English language material within the context of second language learning (ESL materials), only relevant items from the checklist were selected to be used. The following criteria were taken into consideration when identifying and adapting Banks' guidelines for this study:

- In English language materials, cultural elements must be linked to the linguistic items intended for teaching.
- Integration of both culture and language has to translate into manageable content for classroom procedures.
- In Malaysian national English language curriculum, multiculturalism may not be explicitly stated or it may appear in different forms, such as value integration, moral emphasis, and broader educational emphasis.
- Multiculturalism may entail some sensitive issues that are sometimes avoided in public discussions.

## **Discussion**

### **Participation of the Whole Cultural Experiences**

According to Banks (2001), a multicultural curriculum must make the learners understand the wholeness of experiences of ethnics and cultural groups. Based on the findings, all the textbooks do not include the study of societal problems experienced by some ethnics and cultural group members that live in the same environment. The diversity is hardly even mentioned. Issues like racism, prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation are serious issues which have never being touched in the textbooks. Banks (2001) really emphasizes the presence of these aspects in all multicultural syllabuses. It will help learners to understand the wholeness of the experiences of all the cultural groups around them. When all these aspects are portrayed in the KBSM English materials, Malaysian ESL learners will become freer to express their ideas and perceptions toward what is really happening in their environment. Just let them view and interpret the situations or problems in their own beliefs and principles. Therefore, biasness towards certain cultural groups in this country does not exist. Living in this multiracial and multicultural country, they need to be open-minded in accepting the existence of other cultural groups in their big community. It will also help them to understand the roles of other cultural groups in the environment. The absence of these aspects in our KBSM English textbooks means all of these benefits are being ignored. Our students do not have the chances to understand the wholeness of experiences of ethnics and cultural groups in Malaysia and at the same time to see the beauty of it.

The findings also prove that the study of historical experiences, cultural patterns, and social problems of ethnics and cultural groups are not sufficiently included in the KBSM English Language Textbooks.

There is an exposure of few festivals like Deepavali, Christmas, Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Aidilfitri are given as the examples of festivals in Malaysia in Form 1 textbook. However, there is no information given about those festivals. There are four festivals are than given short description. These four festivals really reflect the cultural events practiced by few out of many other ethnics in Malaysia. This is somehow, the only ethnics' cultural distinctiveness in Malaysia portrayed in the KBSM Form 1 textbook.

In Form 4 textbook, there are some descriptions of Hari Raya Puasa and Gawai Festival celebration in Malaysia. This shows that only positive experience and cultural patterns of ethnics is portrayed in the textbook.

The appearance of group members from different ethnics in Form 2, 3 and 5 textbooks is just made nothing more than to represent some of the main ethnicities that really exist in our community. These findings however prove that the portrayal of historical experiences, cultural patterns, and social problems of ethnicities and cultural groups in the KBSM English Language materials are insufficient. At the same time it can be concluded that Malaysian ESL learners do not really understand what is really happening in their living and learning environment since it has never been a topic to be freely discussed with their English teachers in schools. This is for the reason that the textbooks used in their schools never include the study of historical experiences, cultural patterns and social problems of ethnicities and cultural groups in the country.

In all KBSM English Language Textbooks, nothing of any ethnic in Malaysia is judged as positive or negative. Students can only see the distinctiveness through the characters' names and the way the characters are illustrated such as their costumes. This brings us to one conclusion that Malaysian ESL learners are never given the chance to make interpretation and comparisons among ethnics that exist in the environment they live in. One easy example can be taken is that one case which really happens in our community now. The issue of HINDRAF, which is a social and societal problem contributed by some of the Indians in this community, can be discussed in terms of the reasons of its existence, reason why it has been illegalized, and its implication on our multicultural environment. Let the students have some ideas of what is positive and what is negative in all what they witness in their everyday lives. They need to be given the chance to think freely using their own criticality and perceptions towards all the cultural issues that exist in their environment. This is also why Banks (2001) views this aspect is important to be portrayed in ELT materials.

### **Presentation of Ideals and Realities**

Banks (2001) also emphasizes that a multicultural curriculum must be able to help students identify and understand the ever-present conflict between ideals and realities in human societies. None of the textbooks exposes anything related to value conflicts that ever happened in this multicultural society. Different ethnics sometimes have opposite values which may create conflicts among each other. Malaysian learners are not given the chance to identify and understand this phenomenon. Worse than that, they do not have the chance to have any idea about the confliction of values around them. Every culture consists of various good values. Malaysian students deserve to agree or disagree to whatever values they perceive. A lot of lessons can be learnt through values. Therefore, it is a disappointment to say that students are never taught to identify and understand any value conflict that exists in their environment.

It is quite obvious that many ideal situations are being presented in the textbook rather than the realities. Thus, students are not equipped with the exposure and awareness towards what is really happening in the society they are living in. Not even one case is found in the KBSM English Language Form 1 and Form 5 textbooks. A few cases do appear in the KBSM English Language Form 2, 3 and 4 textbooks, but those cases do not really answer the question of the checklist.

In Form 2 textbook, there is a revelation on the reality where our green heritage is being destroyed by men. There are also some pictures of men felling trees in the jungles and criticisms toward men's irresponsibility in preserving the nature. This is the only reality exposed in the textbook, which is not enough in order to instil students with the consciousness about what is really happening in the environment they live in. This case, though, has nothing to do with ethnics and cultural groups.

In Form 3 textbook, there is a revelation on the reality of some cases like dumping and draining toxic and domestic waste into the sea. These cases however reveal the reality done by all human beings as one big group of community instead of by specific ethnic groups. This happens in order to avoid discrimination to ethnics in the community. Issues like racism and religion are not once being mentioned.

In form 4 textbook, children of Down's and Dyslexia syndromes are exposed. Conditions that happen to Jeremy Lim, a dyslexic (page 215), and Kavadi, a Down's Syndrome child (217), are never viewed racially. Their races are never mentioned and no discrimination is given to them because they do not deserve to be ignored. All Malaysians are given the equal treatment since Malaysia is considered as one big multicultural community. No racial or religious emphasis is portrayed in the textbook in order to avoid diversity among Malaysians, yet to maintain the unity.

### **Support towards Diversity**

Besides that, a multicultural curriculum must also support ethnic and cultural diversity through promoting values, attitudes and behaviours. The study has found that all KBSM English textbooks contain quite a lot of values, attitudes and behaviours that support ethnic and cultural diversity. However, the appearance of this aspect in the textbooks is only in terms of the illustration of the characters in the textbooks.

In the KBSM English Form 1 textbook, there are some evidences can be found in the textbook that supports this statement. It is in terms of the graphic illustration of the characters in the textbook. Few Muslim characters in the textbook like Yati (page 3), Azlina (page 12), Suhana (page 13) and Nora (page 51) are illustrated as wearing baju kurung with a scarf or 'tudung'. This illustration shows students that Muslim girls have distinctive appearance from girls of other cultural groups. This also means that it is at the same time promoting values, attitudes and behaviours of one cultural group out of many other cultural groups in the society. However, not all Muslim girls' characters are illustrated as wearing baju kurung and a scarf. There are some Muslim girls' characters which being illustrated as just wearing skirts or without a scarf. Examples to be taken are Jamilah's character in page 39, Nora's character in page 51, and Faridah's character in page 138.

In the KBSM English Language Form 2 textbook, the same scenario can be seen. Few characters are illustrated with cultural costumes. For example, characters of Ani's in page 3, Kumar's mother in page 80 and Jaswant Singh in page 102 can be identified on their ethnics by looking at their costumes they wear. Ani's character is illustrated with baju kurung and a tudung, Kumar's mother wears saree, while Jaswant Singh wears a turban. Their distinctive appearance gives people ideas of in which cultural group they belong to. This also means that the textbook at the same time promotes values, attitudes and behaviours of some cultural groups in the society by putting a little emphasis on letting students to examine differences within and among ethnics and cultural groups.

In the KBSM English Language Form 3 textbook, there are some values, attitudes and behaviours promoted in the textbook but none of them support ethnic and cultural diversity. Still, the only value that is related to racial issue is that the one portrayed through the graphical illustration and characters in the textbook, where each group of friends consists of members from different races and ethnics. This is can be seen that there is no discrimination towards races and religions in schools in Malaysia.

In the KBSM English Language Form 4 textbook, there are a lot about Malaysian culture is presented besides through the graphical illustration of the characters. It is actually more to promoting tourism of Malaysia and at the same time promoting the beautiful various cultures of people called Malaysian. For instance, Chapter 5: Nature's Gift – My Homeland (page 74) tells a lot about the specialty and uniqueness that we have in Malaysia. So, through knowing the cultures practiced by at least some of the ethnics in their big Malaysian community, students will also learn the values, attitudes and behaviours of each culture. However, the differences within and among ethnics and cultural groups are not present in the textbook.

In the KBSM English Language Form 5 textbook, there is not much about Malaysian culture can be found. The textbook does promote values, attitudes and behaviours that support ethnic and cultural diversity in terms of only the real-life pictures and graphical illustration of the characters exist in the textbook. The characters are made distinctive through their costumes. For example, the appearance of a girl with a scarf or 'tudung' in page 149 tells her religion. This is the only cultural differences shown in the textbook. At the same time, this is how the textbook promotes values, attitudes and behaviours that support ethnic and cultural diversity.

The lack of emphasis towards cultural distinctiveness in the materials makes the value, attitudes and behaviour embedded in every ethnic and culture hardly to be seen by learners. Values, attitudes and behaviours shown through the illustration of characters may be insufficient in order to instil cultural awareness among the students. Besides, the illustration, the distinctiveness can also be seen through the names of the characters. Well, how much cultural awareness will be able to be provided for them through only the characters? Students do not have the opportunities to examine the differences within and among ethnics and cultural groups. The diversity that students have in the community is not seen anymore.

### **Opportunities for Participation in Aesthetic Experiences**

Banks (2001) also highlights the importance of students' participation in the aesthetic experiences of various ethnic and cultural groups to be present in a multicultural curriculum. In the KBSM English Language Form 1 textbook, Literature segment of each chapter in give students the opportunities to read a lot of poetries, short stories and essays. Eight out of sixteen Literature segments in this textbook make use of English literature. It also has two segments of literature adapted from Japanese folk tales and one adapted from Greek folk tale. Only five segments use local literature, where three of them come from the Malay literature, two of them are adapted from Asian literature and one from Sarawak literature. There is no literature of other main cultural groups like Indian and Chinese. Obviously, students' exposure towards literature of foreign culture is more than the exposure towards their own culture and other cultures in the environment they are living in.

In the KBSM English Language Form 2 textbook, there are three novels and two short stories used in Literature segments of each chapter. The novels are Potato People, The Phantom of the Opera and Robinson Crusoe. In the textbook, there are also one short story, How Dalat Got Its Name, and one poem, Why Did They Knock Down the Trees, Daddy? Among all, only the short story is taken from the local literatures. The rest is all taken from English culture's literature. There is no literature of other main cultural groups like Malay, Indian and Chinese. Obviously, students' exposure towards literature of their own culture and other cultures in the environment they are living in are insufficient.

In the KBSM English Language Form 3 textbook, there are two novels used for literature segments in the textbook, which are The Prisoners of Zenda and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. As obviously seen, both novels are foreign novels and students are taught the culture of the native speakers of English. No local cultural aspects can be learnt. There are no poems that reflect local culture aspects since they use poems of foreign cultures. There are, however, short stories from local cultural literature, which are Of Bunga Telur and

Bally Shoes, The Pencil, and How Dalat Got Its Name. Through these short stories, students can learn local culture, even though they cannot learn short stories from all the various cultures in the country.

In the KBSM English Language Form 4 textbook, there are four local poems used in the textbook for Literature segment. One of them is Monsoon History written by Shirley Geok-lin Lim. Through this poem, students can learn the culture of Baba and Nyonya family from Melaka. There are also other poems written by local poets such as Si Tenggang's Homecoming (page 15), Tropics (page 33) and Sewing Machine (page 52). This shows that students have the opportunities to participate in the aesthetic experiences of various ethnic and cultural groups by reading and hear the poetries of local ethnics and cultural groups.

In the KBSM English Language Form 5 textbook, there are three novels used in the textbook. Two of them 'Jungle of Hope' and 'The Return', which are local novels written by local authors. These local novels are used in almost all chapters in the textbook in the Literature segment. This shows that students have the opportunities to participate in the aesthetic experiences of various ethnic and cultural groups by reading and hear the poetries of local ethnics and cultural groups. There are no poems and short stories that reflect local culture. Literature segment is the segment that contains the most aspects of local culture portrayal in all the KBSM English Language materials.

In his Multicultural Curriculum checklist, Banks (2001) also states that students must be provided with opportunities to develop full literacy in at least two languages. This means Malaysian ESL learners need to be taught about the culture of the native speakers of English. Based on the findings, students, as English as second language learners, are not exposed at all to the culture of the native speakers of English. There are only Literature segments which use many English poetries, short stories and folklores. This aspect appears quite a lot through foreign literatures in all the KBSM English Language Textbooks Form 1, 2, 3 and 5. So students are exposed to the culture of the native speakers of English through them. Literature segment is the segment that contains the most portrayal of the culture of native speakers of English in all the KBSM English Language materials. For example, through reading the short story entitled 'The Neckalce' (page 194) in the KBSM English Language Form 5 textbook, students will be exposed a lot to the culture of the native speakers of English.

In the KBSM English Language Form 4 textbook, there is the appearance of five foreign personalities such as Jackie Chan, Mike Tyson, Michael Schumacher, Ralf Schumacher and David Coulthard in page 58 to 59, but there is nothing about those people's cultures. It is not even mention what are their races or religions. Students will surely be able to be exposed to the culture of the native speakers of English since there are a lot of English poems and short stories are used in the Literature segment.

### **Presentation of Target Culture and Use of L1**

It is also important that a multicultural curriculum to be able to teach ESL students through their native languages. In Form 2 textbook, there is the presence of a few Malay words in the textbook. In page 2, the terminology 'Mak' is used instead of 'Mother' and 'Abah' instead of 'Father'. In page 82, there is a usage of the word 'gotong-royong'. It also uses the word 'lalang' in page 83. Another example to be looked at is in page 116 of Form 5 textbook, there is a poster that contains Malay instruction "*UNDANG-UNDANG MELARANG MENJUAL ROKOK ATAU TEMBAKAU KEPADA ORANG DI BAWAH UMUR 18 TAHUN*". This, though, does not show that English is taught to Malaysian L2 students using their first language (L1). It is just the translation of the same instruction in English to Malay language. In Form 1, 3, and 4 textbooks, English is never taught to students using their native language (L1). There is no even a word of any language other than English exists in the textbooks. This shows that English is taught to Malaysian L2 learners using only English (L2).



Banks (2001) puts a very significant emphasis on the presence of local cultural aspects in all multicultural syllabuses. Based on the findings, the lack of local cultural aspects portrayed in the KBSM English Language Materials used in all secondary schools in Johor shows that English language syllabus in our education system cannot be described as a multicultural syllabus.

## **Conclusion**

This study has investigated the portrayal of local cultural aspects in KBSM English Language Materials used in this country with a beautiful gift of multiracial and multicultural community. This paper has made use of a set of checklist from Banks (2001) as the guideline to analyze the local cultural aspects portrayed through KBSM English Language Form 1 to Form 5 textbooks used in schools in Johor, the southern of peninsular Malaysia. As mentioned earlier in the introduction part of this paper, this study has set out to ascertain the aspects of local culture that are reflected in the KBSM English language materials used in this multiracial and multicultural country.

Based on the findings of the research, these following conclusions can be drawn:-

1. There is insufficient portrayal of cultural aspects in the KBSM English Language Form 1 to Form 5 Textbooks used in all secondary schools in Johor Bahru. There is a lack of exposure to all the local ethnicities and cultures available around the learners in their living and learning environment through the KBSM English Language Textbooks provided by their schools.
2. Cultural aspects were not evenly presented in all the themes or chapters throughout the textbooks of the KBSM English Language Form 1 to 5 Textbooks. They are presented mostly in Literature segments of each chapter.
3. There was lack of exposure to and portrayal of local cultural aspects in the materials in the textbooks. Out of all KBSM English Language Form 1 to Form 5 textbooks, Form 4 textbook contains the most exposure.
4. Local languages or the learners' first languages were not highlighted throughout the materials, suggesting their insufficient contribution to English language learning.

The result of this study indicates that Malaysian curriculum developers and materials writers have not fully utilized culture in language materials, generally, and second language learning, specifically.

According to Dat (2006), local EFL coursebooks are different from global ones. There are some aspects that need to be taken into consideration before selecting global materials. All the aspects stated are obviously related to learners' culture and environment. One point that has captured my agreement is the author's awareness towards cultural sensitivity in the learners' environment. Global materials are often likely to ignore the learners' local cultural aspects. There are, of course, a lot of things in our culture here in Malaysia that are different from other cultures especially the English ones. For instance, a man and a woman living together before marriage is out of our culture and of course will be an embarrassing thing to discuss about it openly especially to be presented in the KBSM English language materials. The same thing goes to some other issues like homosexual, illegitimate children, virginity loss before marriage, gambling and drinking which are viewed as very sensitive or impolite to be openly discussed in our culture. (Dat, 2006)

*“Coursebooks need to repair such misconceptions by allowing characters to demonstrate more diversity in appearances, behaviours, viewpoints and personalities.”*

(Dat, 2006)

As Dubin (1995: 17) highlights, writers should create characters who appear to be real people with recognizable ages, traits, backgrounds, among other features. When the characters are illustrated in a different way and look weird, communication becomes flawed and context loses its significance (Dat, 2006). Characters in the materials, in fact, must be illustrated and presented the same as how they are in the real life. Therefore, it is important that all illustration of characters in the KBSM English Language Materials to be parallel to or at least not too far to be different from the characters that exist in all the cultures in students' environment in order to let them find the learning is more meaningful.

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