Impact of Local Culture-Based Reading Materials on Students' Skill Development and Confidence in English

Radha M K Nambiar[1], Noraini Ibrahim[2], Ruzy Suliza Hashim[1], Ruhizan Mohammad Yasin[3], Hazita Azman[1], Noraini Mohd. Yusof[2,*], Rashila Ramli[2], Rosniah Mustaffa[1]

[1]Center for Research in Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
[2]Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
[3]Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract This paper discusses the impact of a local culture–based longitudinal English language reading program on secondary school students' skill development and confidence. This program named as Your Language My Culture (YLMC) was the brainchild of a team of local university researchers from secondary schools in the state of Terengganu in Malaysia. Its main objective was to help in improving English competency while instilling local culture awareness among Malaysian youth. The underlying premise was that familiarity with cultural elements (in this case local culture) would provide the schema to facilitate learning and communicating in English. Three supplementary reading modules focusing on local culture and content were developed for use among students from Forms One to Three. After three years of exposure to the local content, a survey was carried out among teachers and students to examine the impact on students' skill development and confidence in using English language. Furthermore, focus group interviews with teachers and students were carried out concomitantly throughout the three-year period. The findings revealed an enhanced understanding regarding the manner in which the module utilization impacted the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English amongst these students. The responses obtained from the teachers and students alike depicted the students' skills that were sharpened, attributable mainly to their increased level of confidence.

Keywords Local Culture, Supplementary Module, Skills Development, Confidence Levels, Program Impact

1. Introduction

Language and culture are intertwined and complement each other; language is the vehicle through which "a culture transmits its beliefs, values, and norms" (Sun 2013, p. 317). Kramsch (1998) has similarly reminded that in the context of communication, both elements are inter-correlated and bound together as the speakers create experiences through language. In reality, they reflect one another as learning a language is best done in its cultural context, while acquiring a culture necessitates one to be capable of communicating in the language of the culture (Nambiar and Anawar 2017, Nguyen 2017, Kramsch & Zhua Hua 2016). Liddicoat et al. (2003) have further posited that learning to communicate in a language involves recognizing and being aware of how the culture is interrelated with the language.

Such notions are interesting reflections on the issue of language and culture and have since been generally taken to refer to the integration of a target culture in the target language. The integration of local culture in the process of learning a foreign language has only started to receive attention recently, and as I.A. Khan et al. (2017, p. 682) have stated, is "cynically questioned". We posit that the local culture is just as important as target culture awareness as the familiarity with local content will serve as a motivator and identity for students to "construct their own meanings and reflect on their own culture as well as the culture of the target language" (IGNA Wijaya 2018, p. 3). Furthermore, we agree with Regmi (2011) in that students and teachers alike have come with their own culture to language classrooms, and thus renders it important for both to be aware of the interplay between cultures. An understanding of the shared knowledge can help in easing communication and making it more meaningful (Normazidah Che Musa et al 2012, Holler & Wilkin 2009).

Besides, Phyak (2011) maintains that local culture should be the focus of language learning process alongside the target culture. Several prior scholars (Kachru 1985,

Kachru & Nelson 1996, Canagarajah 1999) have claimed that the presence of institutionalized varieties of English in practice results in the lack of need to teach target culture in these contexts. In the context of Malaysia, which is a multicultural and multilingual country, it is common to find speakers of Malay language, Tamil, and Mandarin of various major ethnic groups such as Malays, Chinese, and Indians to be in a classroom learning English language. In such situation, the reality is that the learner comes with the cultures of their first language, subsequently influencing the process of learning English (Romero & Manjarres 2017). Regmi (2011) has cautioned regarding the importance of acknowledging the culture of a first language when learning the second. The author has instead proposed for a progression from local culture and context toward the target language to reduce the foreignness of learning the language.

1.1. Local Culture and Materials Development

Incorporating culture into language learning classrooms is not difficult; it can be done easily and simply. One of the ways to integrate local culture into learning materials is by incorporating it in the language textbook, which is the domineering aid for language learning in the context of EFL and ESL (Ahmadi and Shah 2014). In this study, the local content was integrated into the supplementary reading module developed for the students and teachers. For instance, reading texts were based on the culture of the various ethnic groups (Malays, Indians, Chinese, Eurasians, Ibans, Kadazans, etc.) and taken from traditional folklore, cultural practices, food, games, dance etc. The language material development was to be carried out with a practical focus on the learners' culture and context rather than implementing a set of Western standards on all individuals across all circumstances and places. The content material in an English classroom should ideally not only focus on the linguistic aspect of the language but also on how the language can be used by learners in any immediate communicative event and surroundings they are engaged in.

Estuarso et al. (2017) have claimed that students are more interested in learning English when the materials provided are closer to their culture. Using local reading materials, it has been found can help in boosting their extrinsic motivation and engagement toward the material (IGNA Wijaya 2018, Royani 2013). It can also enhance their vocabulary and grammar knowledge for speaking purposes (Choudhury 2014, Mart 2012); and their organization, content, language use, spelling, and mechanics for writing skills (Haerazi et al. 2018, Mermelstein 2015). It is hypothesized that when students are comfortable and familiar with the materials used for learning, their classroom participation improves. Moreover, their background knowledge on the topic is activated with familiar content (Elmachtam et al. 2014), which is

reflected in their keenness to ask questions and provide answers when exposed to familiar content (Regmi 2011) and active participation in the classroom (O'Brien 2007).

Accordingly, the insertion of local culture in language materials allows the process of learning a language and exploring the culture of that language to happen simultaneously. It creates valuable opportunities for learners (Xu 2016, Mckay 2003) to practice the English language in the classroom, subsequently honing their skills.

1.2. Local Culture and Development of Skills

Local culture integration into language materials must take into account the manner in which the materials will contribute to the development of skills.

Reading texts focused on local culture allocate the learners with the vocabulary necessary to describe topics that are familiar to them. Vocabulary is generally the main obstacle for them in understanding reading texts; when the words are unfamiliar, learners lose interest in the text and topic. Therefore, the use of local culture and context as topics in such texts allows learners to embrace familiar words, and encourages further reading and willingness to make sense of the texts (Nambiar et al 2018, Kanoksilapathm 2015, Macalister 2008). In contrast, texts emphasizing unfamiliar topics can become a cognitive burden on learners, who find themselves struggling to relate to the topic and new words and that these texts are foreign and difficult to comprehend. Regmi (2017) states that integrating texts with the local culture will lessen the unfamiliarity and help students to read better. Additionally, providing attractive visuals can enhance content familiarity and help arouse a student's interest and curiosity (Tomlinson 1998). The inclusion of pictures depicting local crafts, culture, food, and flora from the state has aided in making the topics more interesting.

While the modules emphasized reading, other skills were not neglected; sufficient writing tasks and activities were designed for each level. Ratna Nurlia and Fitri Arini (2017) have claimed that embedding the local culture into an English learning classroom helps to generate better interest, and better writing on the part of learners. Students know their culture fairly well and are thus able to use this knowledge to produce ideas for their tasks, resulting in willingness to share their knowledge in writing. Integrating the local culture into writing tasks motivates these students as they generate more ideas on familiar topics and issues to harness in their writings (Mahardika 2018).

The truth is that in any learning environment, the skill most practiced and utilized is the listening skill, whereby Bress (2006) has stipulated that with better understanding there is better confidence. The best way to develop listening skills is by practicing with appropriate materials and activities. The use of local listening texts produced by non-native speakers will help the learners to develop the

skill without feeling demotivated when they fail to comprehend the speech of native speakers. It is important to begin the process by putting forth comprehensible input for listening before moving to texts by native speakers (Ahmadi 2016). According to Vandergrift (2006), listeners need to understand linguistic and nonlinguistic clues both to comprehend the input, rendering listening a cognitive-laden activity. Similarly, the presence of an accent in listening texts plays a key role in the process of comprehension. If it is unfamiliar, it may cause listening difficulties and make comprehension impossible (Buck 2001). Besides, pronunciation can cause significant problems too as the spoken language can vary from the written form (Walker 2014) Unfamiliar words in listening texts can cause the learners to lose interest and motivation, whereas known ones can make the process easier (Azmi et al. 2014, Graham 2006).

Integrating local culture in the English learning classroom can assist learners by providing them with new language forms. Beginning-level learners typically claim that they find it easier to speak in English using local terms from their culture, which further aids them to speak quickly. This suggests that having an existing knowledge about a topic provides comprehensible and relevant input (Krashen 1987) that learners can utilize in their language. Furthermore, Garcia (2011) has claimed that local knowledge is substantiated with the use of vocabulary and terms to help low-proficiency students in developing their fluency. These learners are not generally fluent and falter in the process due to the lack of the necessary vocabulary and ideas to communicate. When they are given terms from the local culture to use in their expressions, they seem to be able to produce speech in English easily as their critical language awareness is enhanced (Wang & Mansouri 2017, Asmaa et al 2015, Azman et al 2013). Wutun et al. (2018, p. 364) have also maintained that "new words from local culture have the capacity to break the 'foreignness' of the new language".

1.3. The YLMC Program

The YLMC program is a supplementary English reading program developed for secondary schools in Terengganu. The longitudinal program spans across five years from the lower secondary schooling years (Forms One to Three) until upper secondary schooling years (Forms Four and Five). Phase 1 of the program focused on providing separate reading modules for lower secondary levels, while Phase 2 implemented in 2018 emphasized on a project-based approach. The philosophy behind the program 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" (Zawiah et al. 2017).

Three separate modules have been developed for Forms One, Two and Three by using a culture matrix comprised of four tracks: Heritage, About Language, Literature, and Society and Values. The matrix was established after studying the existing curriculum, language syllabus, and school textbooks. The culture matrix plots the cultural coverage for the content for Forms One to Three and interfaces this with the language matrix taken from the syllabus. The types of cultural elements, issues and topics are selected after taking into consideration the learners' respective levels of maturity and proficiency for the three selected levels.

The Heritage track focuses on cultural issues related to survival and preservation so as to aid students in recognizing the rich cultural identity of local traditions. Specific crafts from the state of Terengganu such as wood carving, batik printing, songket weaving, boat building, traditional house building, and traditional rituals and ceremonies have been included in the modules. Meanwhile, the About Language module deals with local language issues, which include the Malaysian variety of English, Trenglish (Terengganu English), word borrowing, language for specific purposes, and social and digital identity. The students are thus provided insights into complex concepts that were made familiar for them to understand the problematics of language use. Then, the Literature track introduces literary reading materials, encompassing local myths, legends, poetry, songs, and drama. Therefore, students are encouraged to read these local materials and link them to representations in Western works. Finally, the track of Values and Society emphasizes the themes of patriotism, natural disasters (e.g., floods), local sportsmen and personalities in education, religion, and philanthropy.

For each track, three sets of issues and topics spanning across three lessons for each module were developed to be delivered within 12 lessons explored over a school year. Graded activities and tasks have been included for teachers to utilize based on the unique needs of their students. It is important to note that each lesson makes it possible to juxtapose references of similar issues and concerns from the local context toward national and international context. Therefore, the modules were designed to help create improved awareness of local culture and enable students to draw links with the international culture.

The YLMC program follows a structured lesson plan for the modules. Each lesson begins with a stimulus such as video or audio clips, pictures, reading text, and short poem to stimulate learners' interest in the topic, which may center on reading or listening. Students will then complete various graded tasks and activities on the topic. A sample lesson plan is shown below. Each lesson includes reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks and activities to ensure they are developed sufficiently while instilling learners' confidence in learning the language. This step rendered it possible to determine the impact of the modules after three years with regard to the development of skills.

This study explored the longitudinal impact of a

supplementary reading program in English introduced in 2016 to schools located in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia. Your Language My Culture (YLMC) program was designed to upgrade the reading proficiency and cultural sensitivity of learners through the use of local culture and interdisciplinary materials (Nambiar et.al 2018) The first cohort of Form 1 students who were currently in Form 4 had completed Phase 1 of the program, whereby they received the supplementary reading modules for Forms 1, 2 and 3. The modules integrated local culture into the reading texts to instill cultural awareness and knowledge about the state of Terengganu. Following this, the current paper would report on whether the program posed an impact on the students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, as well as the exceedingly important aspect of their confidence in using the English language.

Table 1.   Sample lesson plan of YLMC Program

Topic	Digital Footprint
Topic Exploration Skills involved – (**Speaking, Listening**)	Learning about Digital Footprint Study pictures (i.e. thumbprint) that represent specific views and identities and identify these.
Activity 1 Skills involved – (**Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking**)	Learning about Identities Think of qualities of a person Think of digital identities Watch a video on digital footprint and answer questions
Activity 2 (**Listening, Speaking**)	Distinguishing Fact from Fiction (Personal Reflections) Reflecting on who I am Sharing who I am with my class What have I learned about my friend?
Activity 3 (**Listening, Speaking, Writing**)	View a Video Watch a clip on how Facebook stores all information Identify the main ideas
Activity 4 (**Reading, Writing**)	Creating an Online and Offline Me Read a text and answer questions
Activity 5 (**Writing**)	Introducing myself on Facebook Think about what information they want to put online
Activity 6 (**Writing**)	Creating my Digital Identify Create a Facebook page to reflect who they are as the citizens of Terengganu. They are encouraged to use an icon from the state as their profile picture.

2. Methodology

A mixed-method approach was utilized to collect data, specifically by using surveys and focus group discussions. Two online surveys were developed – one for teachers and students each. The teacher survey contained questions on their demographic background, level of student participation in class during module utilization, their views on the topics explored in the modules, challenges encountered, the effect of the modules on teaching specific skills, and how valuable the modules were for the purpose of teaching English. Meanwhile, the students were asked to

respond to demographic questions, level of participation in class during module utilization, their views on the topics explored in the modules, difficulties faced, the effect of the modules on skills development, and their effect on learning English in general. Further focus group discussions were conducted with both groups to elicit in-depth data on the extent to which the modules were beneficial for the students in their reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities, as well as their confidence levels and willingness to participate in class.

The online survey was given to all teachers involved in the YLMC program from Form 1 till Form 3 and Form 4 students who were exposed to the program and its modules from Forms 1 to 3. It was administered after these key stakeholders participated in the program for three years. Meanwhile, the focus group discussions were carried out from the time the program was first implemented when students were in Form 1 until they reached Form 3, which were done twice annually with both groups. The data obtained from the online surveys were analyzed by using simple statistics, while the focus group discussion data were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The responses obtained from the teachers and students were linked to the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, whereby emerging patterns were identified and reported on accurately.

3. Findings

3.1. Profile of Teachers and Students

A total of 30 teachers consisted of 29 females and 1 male from 20 schools in the state of Terengganu participated in the survey. A majority of them (28) were English option teachers, while the remaining two were non-option teachers trained to teach Commerce and Principle of Accounts. They were asked to teach English since the subjects they were trained in were not offered in their respective schools. All participating teachers were first degree holders, whereby one had a diploma qualification and another two having attained their Masters. In terms of teaching experience, the majority had less than 20 years, with 8 teachers having taught as many as 30 years. The teachers came from various schools located in the coastal, urban, Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA-schools located in the interior of the state where the land was being developed for agriculture), rural, and elite categories, with the majority (38%) hailing from rural schools in particular. When asked on the frequency of module usage, a big percentage (60%) indicated that they only used the modules once a week, whereas 33% implemented them more than three times weekly, and the remaining 13% only incorporated them twice per week.

The distributed survey was completed online by 227 students encompassing Forms 1, 2, and 3 students from 13

schools who participated in the program, which were comprised of 68% female and 32% male students. All of them were required to sit for a national examination in Form 3, namely Penilaian Tahap 3 (PT3 – Form 3 Assessment). Figure 1 illustrates the achievements of more than three quarters of these students (74%) who participated in the YLMC program for three years. It can be seen that 21% scored an A, 24% scored a B, 25% scored a C, 18% scored a D, and the remaining 12% failed with either E or F scores (Figure 1). These results were acceptably good in consideration of the fact that these students were limited to their only exposure to the English language from their classes at school. The majority of the students (81%) mentioned not attending any tuition or supplementary classes for English, whereas only the remaining 19% had access to such classes.
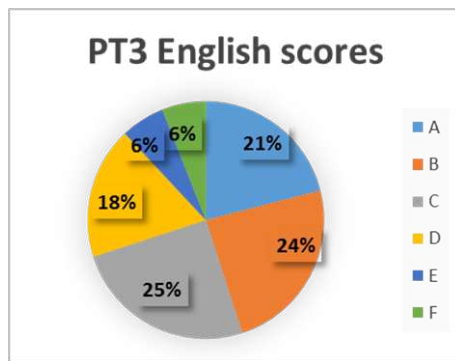

Figure 1.　English Scores in PT

The students asserted the modules were mostly used either once (43%) or twice (33%) per week, whereas 17% utilized them at least three times weekly. The remaining 7% claimed that they never used them or only once a month. Therefore, it could be assumed that many of them were exposed to a certain extent to the modules throughout their lower secondary years (Forms 1 to 3).

3.2. Level of Participation

The teachers were asked to comment on how active their students were when the modules were used, whereby the majority (97%) stated their students to be either active or very active. All teachers also indicated their liking for the topics included in the modules and found them interesting for their students. When asked to indicate their level of participation when the modules were used, most of the students (94%) claimed to be mostly active or very active, while a small percentage (6%) stated they were not active. A possible reason for the small percentage of poor response was because they found the vocabulary too difficult and did not attempt to participate in the class activity.

3.3. Knowledge of Topics in Modules

In recognition of the fact that not all teachers were native

to the state, it was necessary to establish how much of cultural awareness they possessed. Consequently, 71% stated that they only had a moderate amount of knowledge of the local culture before using the modules, while only 23% claimed to have such knowledge and the remaining 6% saying they knew very little (Figure 2). In response to the question whether the information on local culture was new to them, 56% responded with a 'Yes' whilst 44% indicated that they had prior knowledge. Regardless, all teachers insisted that their knowledge of certain cultural topics improved after the module utilization. It was interesting to note the manner in which the teachers benefitted from the modules, wherein the information about local culture was useful to them when imparting the knowledge to their students.
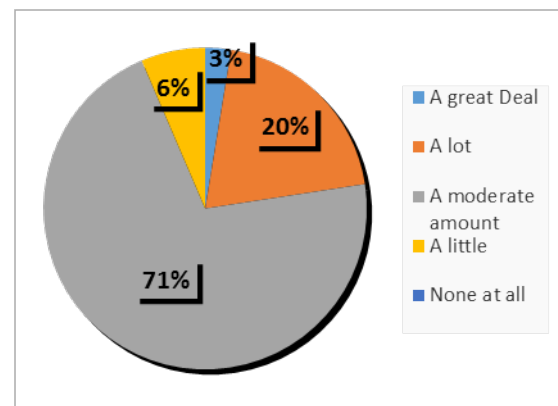

Figure 2.　Knowledge of local culture

Most of the students (93%) answered positively with regard to their knowledge about the topics visited in the modules, while a very small number (7%) did not find them interesting. This was mainly because they found the texts too challenging and their lack of knowledge of the culture in the texts. In response to the question on how much they knew about the local culture before using the modules, 66% indicated having limited or no knowledge, whereas only 34% claimed they had knowledge of the local culture. This was also confirmed by the students (56%) revealing that they found the information about local culture as new and novel. They mentioned specific topics included in the modules as new knowledge, such as the art of designing songket, boat making, and historical places in the state. Therefore, they claimed that the modules helped them to appreciate the local culture in Terengganu more.

3.4. Impact of Modules on Skill Development

All teachers (100%) responded positively when asked whether the module had an impact on the reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills of their students. Similarly, all students indicated their satisfaction that the modules aided them in developing such skills. Therefore, the following discussion focused on the responses obtained from the teachers and students during the focus group

discussions regarding the ways in which the module impacted the area of skills development.

3.4.1. Reading Skills

The teachers yielded responses centered on content familiarity to the students and the ease at which they could be attracted to reading the texts. They opined that students were more interested and paid attention in class because the reading texts were on topics that were familiar to them. Similarly, the students also claimed higher interest to read the texts about local culture in the modules.

The teachers and students both highlighted the process of learning new vocabulary and the manner in which these new words were and could be used in essays. Furthermore, the teachers claimed that they enjoyed using the modules as it provided an additional source of readings and made their classes more attractive as it was easy for them to source the material for usage in classes.

In general, the students attested their comprehension skills to be better and becoming competent readers by using the local texts. They also maintained that they successfully learned the correct pronunciation for learned words.

More interestingly, the students noted to have improved their thinking skills as they were constantly attempting to understand the local culture and link it with what they already knew. They also mentioned their capability to communicate with family members and friends about their new knowledge obtained from the texts included in the modules.

3.4.2. Writing Skills

The teachers and students both indicated that the new vocabulary learned from the local texts were utilized to enhance writing skills. The teachers proudly stated the use of new vocabulary by students in their essays, whereby some even displayed improved sentence structures and interesting expressions. Meanwhile, the students concurred and agreed that they found their writing skills to have had improved as they learned new vocabulary that can be used in their essays.

Moreover, the teachers commented on how their students included more ideas in their essays, which were rooted in the knowledge about local culture they learned from the texts. Concomitantly, the students also indicated that the background knowledge they had was supplemented by the local texts, providing them with new vocabulary and ideas that were utilizable in their writing. Accordingly, they claimed to have more ideas and were thus capable of writing longer essays.

Besides, the teachers highlighted the manner in which ideas, syntax, and vocabulary sourced from the texts were incorporated and experimented with by their students, by using different writing styles. Therefore, the texts encouraged the students to emulate applicable sentence structures, words, and phrases in their own essays. The

students mirrored such opinion and mentioned them being able to write better essays with higher accuracy.

Overall, the students implied that their familiarity with the local texts helped them to gain exponentially in terms of enhanced vocabulary and ideas, which were implementable in their essays and thus improved their confidence in their writing abilities.

3.4.3. Listening Skills

In general, the teachers and students both claimed to have observed an improvement in their listening ability with the use of the modules. Most teachers indicated that their students were keen and interested to participate in the listening activities centered on issues deemed as fascinating to them, such as folk songs and videos. In turn, the students mentioned that being exposed to these activities helped to hone their attention and listening skills and improved their capacity to focus in class.

Furthermore, both groups of participants commented on how listening to the videos and songs aided with the pronunciation of words. Teachers mentioned how students were able to pronounce certain phrases and words while students said they were able to say words more accurately by listening to the way they were said.

The students also revealed that they were more sensitive to speech in English and would try to understand the ideas. The topics that were familiar to them due to the local flavor meant that they could understand them, causing them to pay attention.

3.4.4. Speaking Skills

The teachers mostly commented on how students were comfortable to talk about the topics that they were familiar with, thus raising their confidence level. Taking into account these students were from the state of Terengganu and had awareness of cultural elements it was easier for teachers to get them to participate in class. This background knowledge meant teacher could get students to voice their opinions without having to provide them information on the topic first. This was important considering language lessons were only about 35 minutes only and helped teacher with time management.

Their familiarity with the words to be used in describing topics such as traditional dance helped to increase their interest and desire to attempt their participation in discussions and answer questions. Accordingly, the teachers and students stated that listening to the material included in the modules also helped with their pronunciation of words.

Besides, the students commented on how they were able to speak more fluently and confidently and were willing to volunteer answers in class. They indicated their improved ability to speak in the English language after learning new vocabulary, having better confidence, becoming more practiced in speaking while carrying out tasks in class, conversing in English with their peers, being able to

pronounce words accurately, and generally enjoying their use of the language.

3.5. The Relevance of the Modules and Challenges Encountered

The survey included two questions inquiring how relevant the modules were to the teachers and students, as well as the challenges they encountered. The responses to how relevant the modules were to teachers and students were analysed using percentages while the challenges were analysed thematically as this was an open-ended question.

The teachers were asked to comment on the extent to which the modules were relevant in helping them to teach English. Accordingly, 56.26% claimed that they were extremely relevant and very relevant, whereas the remaining 43.75% said that the modules were somewhat relevant. When asked to indicate how difficult the modules were, a whopping 96.88% indicated that the modules were a little difficult or not at all. This was a good response as the materials were required to be at a suitable level of difficulty for the students to benefit from them.

A majority of the students (99%) found the modules to be relevant in helping them to improve their learning of English. Meanwhile, 74.32% of them found them to be easy and fairly easy to understand, whereas 25.68% stated that the modules were difficult. Those who found them difficult were noted to be of the classes with weaker initial English skills, whereby their teachers had to translate everything in the Malay language. Therefore, there was only a small improvement in their English learning.

Furthermore, the teachers were asked to comment on the challenges they faced while using the modules. Again, the common response was that they found them to be interesting and easily used, but they were also required to finish the syllabus and thus did not have adequate time to exploit the modules sufficiently. There were also additional comments on the difficulty level of the texts in the modules. The teachers found that the students had problems with vocabulary, causing them to spend a lot of time explaining the words and cultural items even.

For many students, the vocabulary was a stumbling block as they underlined the reading passages as difficult to comprehend. For some, the topics were challenging as they were ignorant of the local culture, be it the traditional food, games, clothes or practices, rendering the lack of general knowledge to be a problem.

3.6. Conclusions

The findings collectively revealed an enhanced understanding of how the modules use over a three-year duration impacted the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills using the English language among the participating students. From the responses obtained from the teachers and students, it was apparent that students' skills were enhanced; this was mainly due to the increased confidence levels among them. Therefore, providing and creating opportunities for these students to be actively involved in classrooms help to stimulate their interest and improve their motivation to participate in class activities (O'Brien 2007, Mckay 2003, Xu 2016)

The teachers and students both highlighted the manner in which their reading ability improved as they learned new vocabulary and syntax, and then practiced using these elements in their essays. An interesting discovery was the teachers' admittance that using materials with local content made it easier for them to source extra materials and utilize them in their classes, thereby easing their workload. The students clearly found local content easier to manage and understand as being exposed to more of such texts kept them involved in the classroom. When there is a better understanding of the texts, students will naturally develop more confidence, which supports the works of Regmi (2011) and Tomlinson (1998).

Reading to write is the cornerstone of skills development; accordingly, these students were able to transfer their knowledge from the reading exercises to enhance their writing. The teachers found their students to be using the new words in their essays and experimenting with sentence structure by varying the writing styles, ranging from formal to informal accordingly. Furthermore, the students commented on how their grammar improved and they were able to construct better sentences, identify errors, and correct such errors while improving their spelling. The findings on enhanced reading ability and skills due to the inclusion of local materials supported previous outcomes by Haerazi (2018) and Mermelstein (2015) on how writing structure, spelling, and vocabulary were improved in their studies. This ability further increased the students' confidence levels and kept them motivated in the language class.

The inclusion of videos and songs in the modules helped students with their pronunciation. The teachers and students both had positive comments on how their listening ability improved, whereas the students specifically added that they could understand their teachers better in class, pronounce words more easily, and consequently developed better listening skills. This finding strengthened the idea of students' ability to focus and understand texts better upon being allocated familiar content, which in turn improved their confidence in such exercises (Vandergrift 2004, Azmi et al. 2014). The use of familiar content helped the students to be more confident in talking about these topics and sharing their knowledge of traditional culture content. Moreover, when students practiced speaking frequently in class, they developed better fluency and grammatical accuracy in the language. Their satisfaction with the topics included in the modules that featured local culture and content indicated that familiarity with content to be a step toward in improving student interest and motivation, leading to better confidence and ultimately, better achievement. These findings supported the idea that vocabulary, grammar, and spelling could be improved with

familiar topics taken from students' culture, as they were inevitably a part of their background knowledge (Choudhury 2014, Mart 2012).

The findings implied that the YLMC program definitely impacted the development of skills, namely reading, writing, listening and speaking as is evident from the comments of teachers and students in the focus group interviews. From the survey and focus group responses, the teachers and students both revealed almost similar views on how these skills were enhanced and improved from their participation in the program. Therefore, this was the first longitudinal study to be carried out in an entire state in the country, which examined the link between local culture integration into the school curriculum and the development of language skills and confidence among students from the perspective of the key stakeholders (i.e. teachers and students).

It is believed the findings highlight the need to relook into the idea that learning a language necessitates the learning of the language's culture concomitantly. We posit that learning a language is possible by integrating the local culture in the context in which the language is learned. This helps to reduce the 'foreignness' (Regmi 2011) of the language, rendering it less threatening and raising the effectiveness of learning by building the learners' confidence levels. We share the view of Holler and Wilkin (2009) that when there is shared knowledge in the form of familiar schema between student and text, communication is easier, and learning becomes more meaningful. With increased interest from the use of local materials (Estuarso et al. 2017), there is better motivation and engagement in learning (Mahardika 2018, Royani 2013), and ultimately, an improved confidence level among students.

The scope of this study was limited as the modules were not used as much as they could have been as teachers were more focused on using the textbook to complete the school syllabus and prepare the students for their final examination. Nevertheless, we find that the students' performance in the language has improved, allowing the hypothesis that with more frequent use of the modules, a marked improvement in the students' achievement levels should be observed.

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