

# THE ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL CONTENT OF 'PULSE 2' ESL TEXTBOOK FOR FORM 1

YUGESWARI A/P ARUMUGAM

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THE ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL CONTENT OF  
'PULSE 2' ESL TEXTBOOK FOR FORM 1

YUGESWARI A/P ARUMUGAM



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DEKAN  
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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the cultural categories displayed in the Pulse 2 EL textbook for Form 1 syllabus, investigate how foreign cultures and topics are introduced to Form 1 students, and identify the perception of Form 1 ESL teachers on the textbook specifically on the foreign contents. This study employed mixed-method research with applied convergent parallel design. The first phase of the data collection involved quantitative analysis using a questionnaire that was administered to 30 Form 1 ESL teachers. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics via SPSS software. The qualitative data were collected through theory-based content analysis of the textbook and semi-structured interviews with five Form 1 teachers from schools in Batang Padang, Perak. Based on the findings, it is evident that all the eleven criteria by Byram et al. (1994, 51-52) and Risager (1991, 182-183,188) were present in the Form 1 syllabus, thus proving it to be culturally rich, especially with UK-centric contents. Besides, the researcher found an imbalance in the portrayal of cultural categories in the Form 1 syllabus and no reference was made to the Malaysian context. Designing personal materials, making comparisons between target and local cultures, and using resources such as visuals and web-based learning are the most common pedagogical methods utilised by Form 1 teachers in introducing the foreign content to their students. Although the teachers have positive perceptions on the general aspects of the textbook, they disclosed a mixed perception on the foreign cultural content. In conclusion, the Pulse 2 EL textbook hinders its functions in assisting the Form 1 teachers with the rich portrayal of foreign content. The finding is hoped to serve as a reference for stakeholders to make meaningful decisions in localizing and revising the CEFR-aligned textbooks in Malaysia.



## ANALISIS KONSEP BUDAYA ASING PADA BUKU TEKS BAHASA INGGERIS 'PULSE 2' UNTUK TINGKATAN 1.

### ABSTRAK

Kajian ilmiah ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tentang kategori budaya asing yang terdapat dalam buku teks Bahasa Inggeris 'Pulse 2' bagi silibus Tingkatan 1 dan menyelidik cara budaya asing dan topik daripada buku teks tersebut diperkenalkan oleh guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris kepada pelajar Tingkatan 1 serta mengenal pasti persepsi guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris terhadap buku teks tersebut khususnya terhadap budaya asing. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah gabungan dengan reka bentuk 'applied convergent parallel'. Fasa pertama pengumpulan data melibatkan analisis kuantitatif menggunakan soal selidik yang diberikan kepada 30 guru Bahasa Inggeris Tingkatan 1. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif melalui perisian SPSS. Data kualitatif pula dikumpulkan melalui analisis kandungan buku teks berdasarkan kriteria dan temu bual berstruktur dengan lima orang guru Tingkatan 1 dari beberapa buah sekolah di Batang Padang, Perak. Berdasarkan dapatan kajian, buku teks 'Pulse 2' terbukti mencerminkan kesemua sebelas kriteria oleh Byram et al. (1994, 51-52) dan Risager (1991, 182-183,188) dalam sukatan pelajaran Tingkatan 1 khususnya budaya asing daripada UK. Selain itu, terdapat ketidakseimbangan dalam penggambaran kategori budaya asing dalam sukatan pelajaran Tingkatan 1 dan tiada rujukan dibuat terhadap konteks Malaysia. Merancang bahan sendiri untuk memenuhi keperluan pelajar, membuat perbandingan antara budaya asing dan budaya tempatan dan menggunakan sumber seperti visual dan pembelajaran berasaskan web adalah antara metodologi yang dikongsikan oleh guru-guru Tingkatan 1 dalam memperkenalkan kandungan asing kepada pelajar mereka. Walaupun para guru mempunyai persepsi positif mengenai aspek umum buku teks, mereka juga menunjukkan persepsi yang pelbagai terhadap budaya asing. Kesimpulannya, buku teks Bahasa Inggeris 'Pulse 2' sedikit sebanyak menghalang fungsi sepenuhnya dalam membantu guru Tingkatan 1 kerana terdapat banyak gambaran budaya asing. Oleh itu, penemuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi rujukan kepada pihak yang berkepentingan untuk membuat keputusan yang bermakna dalam menyetempat and menilai semula pemilihan buku teks yang diselaraskan dengan CEFR di Malaysia.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CE	Cambridge English
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CLT	Central Limit Theorem
EL	English Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
KSSM	<i>Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah</i>
MELTA	Malaysian English Language Teaching Association
MoE	Ministry of Education
MCO	Movement Control Order
SBELC	Standards-Based English Language Curriculum
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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- A Circular from Ministry of Education on the Usage of Pulse 2 EL Textbook, 2017
- B Content Page of Pulse 2 EL Textbook
- C Letter of Request for Validation of Questionnaire
- D Questionnaire
- E Semi-structured Interview
- F SPSS Output for Questionnaire



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



This chapter discusses the background and statement of problems underlying the context of the current study. This is followed by the aims and research questions that lay the present study's foundation. Then, the significance of the study is also highlighted. Finally, the operational definition of terms used in the study is also explained.

A textbook is a critical component of most language programs, as it serves as a source of linguistic input for students. However, textbooks are not always properly produced, and they do not always align with the curriculum of educational programs and student needs (Richards, 2001 and Minh-Nguyen, 2015). Thus, textbooks should be carefully chosen and assessed, as the information gathered will aid students' learning,



teachers' adaption of textbooks in the classroom, and policymakers' decision-making process.

The bold decision to utilize foreign textbooks in Malaysian schools received mixed views from the stakeholders (Nazari & Aziz, 2020; Ya Shak et al., 2021). One concern is that the cultural content in the imported textbooks, Pulse 2 in the case of this study, is deemed as limited relevance to Malaysian students (Ya Shak et al., 2021). Since studies related to the cultural content of the Pulse 2, EL textbook are still subjected to rigorous research in Malaysia, the present research is conducted to analyze the cultural categories presented in the textbook for the Form 1 syllabus. It also investigates how foreign cultures and topics from the Pulse 2 English language textbook are introduced to Form 1 students. Finally, to explore the Form 1 ESL teachers' perceptions on the Pulse 2 English language textbook, specifically on the foreign cultures and topics.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

Malaysia is formed of multicultural heritage. Although Malaysians speak Malay, English is also used in many parts of Malaysian professional and social contexts (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025). It is an unavoidable fact that the English language is necessary for maximum employability in the global workforce, and in recognition of this, the Malaysian government, through the Ministry of Education (hereafter MoE), has aligned the English language curriculum at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels with the Common European Framework of Reference



(CEFR). Zuraidah (2015) stated that the core view of language learning in the CEFR is essentially focused on using language to perform communicative acts in social or private contexts. The English language can be described in terms of four broad categories: reception, production, interaction, and mediation (David, 2006). It is also stated that the process of engaging with texts requires language users to draw on a range of communicative language competence, which includes linguistic, socio-linguistic and pragmatic, to negotiate flexibility in a variety of contexts. The CEFR also functions as a reference to give a detailed description of learner level by skills. It is a useful guide for school administrations, syllabus writers, teachers and trainees, and advanced learners (Introductory Guide to CEFR for English Language Teachers, 2013). Therefore, the curriculum, known as the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) in Malaysia, is now CEFR-aligned and contextualized (Ya Shak et al., 2021). It was revised utilizing descriptors from CEFR-related resources to help instructors, parents, and students better understand what students should be able to do at each level and to help teachers customize their teaching and learning sessions accordingly. Additionally, Nurul & Azlina (2019) argued that applying CEFR in Malaysia is consistent with Cambridge-level English and is generally regarded as a means of developing globally competitive students. Additionally, it is a thorough, methodical, and integrated approach to English language learning (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2023).

Henceforth, the EL curriculum and pedagogy reform have to be supported by the use of International aligned and CEFR-compatible teaching and learning materials (English Language Education Reform in Malaysia, The Roadmap 2015-2025). Therefore, in 2018, Year One and Two pupils and Form One and Two students started

the curriculum with the imported English language textbooks. Primary school students use *Super Minds* from Cambridge University Press, while secondary school students use MacMillan's *Pulse 2* (MoE circular, 2017: JPNJ.SPA (05)/600-3/32 JLD.21(76) in Appendix A. *Pulse 2* is said to provide an integrated approach to skills so that students can develop receptive and productive skills while perfecting their communication competence (Macmillan Education; English Language Teaching, 2017).

However, some stakeholders are critical of the homogenization of international textbooks due to the lack of local material, making it difficult for students in non-native contexts such as Malaysia to connect the world of English to their own (Rahim & Daghigh, 2019). Additionally, Professor Dr. S. Ganakumaran, former president of the Malaysian English Language Teaching Association (MELTA), indicates that teaching English to Malaysian students is challenging, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, without having to explain the international culture and contemporary practices that are unfamiliar to both teachers and students (The Star online, Feb 4, 2018). Therefore, while there is no immediate access to the target culture, teachers and the teaching materials play a significant role in supplying cultural information. This is pertinent, as textbooks play a crucial part in providing students with rich cultural knowledge as they function as a medium for cultural representations (Celce-Murcia, 1998 and Richards, 2001). Tavares & Cavalcanti (1996) emphasize that teaching culture is vital because it heightens students' awareness and develops curiosity towards the target and home culture. Hence, this study will examine how the CEFR inspired *Pulse 2* EL textbook represented cultural categories in the Form 1 syllabus.



### 1.3 Problem Statement

As aforementioned, the Malaysian government selected the Pulse 2 EL textbook since it is recognized as CEFR-compatible teaching and learning material for Malaysian students and schools (English Language Education Reform in Malaysia, The Roadmap 2015-2025). However, researchers have highlighted concerns and issues related to using the Pulse 2 EL textbook amongst students in Malaysian secondary schools.

Concerns raised about the use of the Pulse 2 textbook include the textbook's high lexical richness, high price points, and a lack of congruence between international and local material. According to Ya Shak et al., (2021), the lexis in the textbook is excessively complex and rather high for Malaysian pupils, particularly those from rural areas. This issue is also emphasized in various researches (Johar & Aziz, 2019 and Goh & Aziz, 2020). In addition, various academicians, non-governmental agencies (henceforth NGOs), and politicians have highlighted the exorbitant price point of the Pulse 2 EL textbook of RM38.00 per copy. For example, Zairil Khir Johari, the state assemblyman of Tanjong Bunga and the Democratic Action Party (henceforth, DAP) Penang Vice-Chairman, mentioned that the price point of the textbook is five times more compared to the textbooks by local authors (The Star, 2018). Another point of contention highlighted is the alignment or lack of alignment of the Pulse 2 EL textbook content with the local content, particularly with the objectives of Malaysia's language programs and English curriculum (Ya Shak et al., 2021). Zairil also mentioned that the Pulse 2 EL textbook has "zero local content" and is enriched with an extremely strong British context (Chow, 2017). Finally, the use of the Pulse 2 EL Textbook has brought into question the credibility of local authors in producing textbooks that are on par with





international-level textbooks (Nazari & Aziz, 2020). Local textbooks provide students and teachers with digital audio, visual materials, and supplementary materials via CDs or online applications to facilitate learning. Despite the fact that the Pulse 2 EL textbook has references to online or digital content on every single page of the textbooks, students and teachers were not given access to any of this material. However, the MoE still selected imported textbooks.

Another major concern highlighted is the cultural content of the Pulse 2 EL Textbook. The lack of local content and focus on English-speaking countries' cultures undermines students' sense of belonging as Malaysians (James & Aziz, 2020). Besides, Sabbiri (2017) also stated that imported EL textbook, in this case, the Pulse 2 EL textbook, is perceived to be irrelevant to local students in terms of content because of the imbalanced and mismatched cultural aspects. A study conducted by Rahim & Daghigh (2019) revealed that the Pulse 2 EL textbook offers zero content related to Malaysian culture. Similar findings were reported by Nurin & Jazlina (2019), whereby they concluded the proportion of cultural content in the Pulse 2 EL textbook to be unequal. Furthermore, they argued a potential threat of using imported textbooks that encourage vast global exposure since the context differs totally from the locally produced one. It is also pointed out that students from rural areas will acquire the language in a familiar context better than in an unfamiliar context. On the contrary, the secretary-general of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) stated that foreign content (in textbooks) could be meaningful for students to explain the other cultures and thus, urge them to do more reading (The Star online, Feb 4, 2018). Dr. Surinderpal Kaur, the Deputy Dean of postgraduate studies at the University Malaya Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, also assures that it is acceptable to have dynamic



content in the textbook, but only having a mixture of Malaysian cultural content and “a little bit of everything else” of the world, global culture and identity would make an English textbook valuable (The Star online, Feb 4, 2018).

The cultural representation in the Pulse 2 EL textbook presents difficulties and challenges for both students and teachers who use it. Sabbiri (2017) backed this up by stating that students, particularly those from rural to suburban backgrounds, struggle to relate to the textbook due to a lack of prior understanding regarding the foreign subject. Additionally, Nazari & Aziz (2020) stated that this issue creates hurdles for teachers, as they struggle to connect linguistic and cultural information to their students' lives.

Although there are abundant researches on cultural challenges teachers and students face in using the Pulse 2 EL textbook, the current study does not aim to add to the literature. In contrast, it aims to analyze cultural categories in the Pulse 2 EL textbook. Henceforth, the present study will discuss the culture categories in the imported textbook, ‘Pulse 2’, newly introduced at the secondary level in Malaysia. Therefore, the aim of this study is to focus on the different types of cultural categories presented in Pulse 2 and the challenges faced by ESL teachers while teaching the target culture in the Malaysian context. Additionally, this study will examine the tactics employed by ESL teachers to make cultural content more meaningful in order to foster intercultural communicative skills.

## 1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyze the cultural content of 'Pulse 2' English language textbook for Form 1. Therefore, the three main objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To analyze the cultural categories presented in the Pulse 2 English language textbook for Form 1 syllabus.
- ii. To investigate how the foreign cultures and topics from the Pulse 2 English language textbook are introduced to Form 1 students by the ESL teachers.
- iii. To explore the Form 1 ESL teachers' perceptions of the Pulse 2 English language textbook, specifically foreign cultural content.

This study aims to answer the following three questions:

- i. What cultural categories are presented in the Pulse 2 English language textbook for the Form 1 syllabus?
- ii. How are the ESL teachers introduced to the foreign cultures or topics from the Pulse 2 English language textbook introduced to Form 1 students?
- iii. What are the perceptions of Form 1 ESL teachers on the Pulse 2 English language textbook, specifically on the foreign cultural content?



## 1.6 Significance of the Study

As stated in Section 1.1, the objectives of this study are to analyze the cultural categories presented in the Pulse 2 English language textbook for Form 1 students; to investigate how EL teachers introduce foreign cultures and topics from the textbook to Form 1 students; and to investigate ESL teachers' perceptions of the foreign cultures and topics presented in the textbook.

The researcher has personally selected the Pulse 2 English language textbook to be analyzed because of her teaching experience as a secondary school teacher. The researcher believes textbook analysis will help propose practical implications for both textbook authors who will write them and teachers who are using these books. Although textbooks generally carry many positive credits, it is vital to remember that textbooks are often implicitly prescriptive and, thus, might control classroom practice methods, processes, and procedures (Allwright, 1984). Furthermore, international textbooks are frequently produced for worldwide markets, which means they may not be appropriate for Malaysian classrooms and may require adaptation, particularly in terms of cultural categories, to fulfill the students' needs. Given that the Pulse 2 EL textbook is new to the Malaysian educational system, it will be interesting to investigate and analyze the textbook to ascertain the cultural categories and values it contains, as well as how Form 1 ESL teachers can assist students in improving their ability to comprehend the textbook and the cultural content in which it is employed. Additionally, this study aims to educate Form 1 ESL teachers in their classroom training on how to best approach the cultural categories in the Pulse 2 EL textbook. Furthermore, this study can provide information

to policymakers; in this example, the Ministry of Education, in order to streamline future EL textbook selection and development in Malaysia while avoiding backlash.

## 1.7 Definition of Terms

The following are the definitions of terms used in this study.

### 1.7.1 Textbooks in the Malaysian ESL Context

Tomlinson (2011) defines textbooks as materials used to help teachers teach students.

While, Awasthi (2006) explains that a textbook is a teaching and learning material for both teacher and the learner to rely on in teaching and learning. Cunningsworth (1995) defines a textbook as a practical resource for self-directed learning and an effective source of presentation of materials, a source of ideas, reference for students, and a syllabus, where they reflect language objectives. Lahdesmaki (2004) states that an ESL textbook is also merchandise that promotes studying English and forms the image of the English language and culture.

In Malaysian schools, textbooks generally have an authoritative culture, which gives them the authority to define what the English language and its study are (Hooi, 2015). Students who are involved in school-based assessment in Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM) will use textbooks (Zuraidah, 2015).



The textbook used in this research is Pulse 2 EL. Since 2018, it has been designated as the core textbook for pupils in public secondary schools aged 13-14 (Form 1 and Form 2). Previously, Malaysian authors wrote indigenous textbooks that followed the Malaysian syllabus. To determine whether the current imported textbook meets students' contemporary needs, an examination of the cultural contents is necessary.

### 1.7.2 Pulse 2 English Language Textbook

Michele Crawford wrote the Pulse 2 EL textbook in 2014 under the publication of Macmillan Publishers Limited. The book was later made into special students' edition and first published in Malaysia in 2017 by *Kumpulan Desa Fikir Sdn. Bhd* for the Ministry of Education (MoE), Malaysia. The students' book includes a six-page starter unit, nine ten-page units, three collaborative projects, and an external exam trainer focusing on listening and speaking tasks. Moreover, this book includes a cultural awareness reading text that highlights an aspect of living in several English-speaking nations. Each grammar practice incorporates a focus on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), including a variety of disciplines. In Malaysia, the major teaching resources is the CEFR-aligned Pulse 2 EL textbook for Form 1. Hence, the Pulse 2 EL textbook was chosen as the subject of the current study.



### 1.7.3 Culture

Culture has a long history, and its meaning for individuals and societies has evolved over time. The term 'culture' refers to the implicit norms and conventions of a society that are passed down through time but are adaptable in nature (Elomaa, 2009). Alsheenqeeti (2019) defines culture as an agreement between members of a particular society regarding the values, rules, role expectations, and meanings that guide their behavior. Other than that, language and culture are inextricably linked, as they are heavily embedded in education with the help of linguistics and teachers. Undoubtedly, when language is immersed within a specific cultural context through textbooks, students can learn about the culture indirectly while learning the target language (James & Aziz, 2020). Byram et al. (1994) support the claim that a language cannot be supplied in isolation from culture; otherwise, a purported basic goal of language learning would be negated. Additionally, it is advocated for the acquisition of language and culture concurrently rather than separately, as this encourages growth. Therefore, in this study, culture is defined as the elements such as the community's beliefs, values, behavior, and daily communication that embed the Pulse 2 EL textbook.

### 1.7.4 Categories of Culture

For this study, the cultural categories are defined through the criteria by Byram et al. (1994, 51-52) and Risager (1991, 182-183, 188) in order to identify whether the cultural content in the Pulse 2 EL textbook adhere to the principles of intercultural learning and teaching. Byram et al. (1994) suggested nine cultural categories for the analysis of





cultural knowledge, namely “social identity and social groups”, “social interaction”, “belief and behavior”, “socio-political institutions”, “socialization and the life-cycle”, “national history”, “national geography”, “national cultural heritage”, “stereotypes and national identity”. Whilst, Risager (1991) added another two cultural categories, which include “international and intercultural issues” and “point of view and style of the textbook author(s)”. Hence, eleven cultural categories are used as a foundation for analyzing the Pulse 2 EL textbook.

## 1.8 Limitation of Study

The Pulse 2 EL textbook is an international textbook. Implementing CEFR in Malaysia and using this CEFR-aligned textbook began in 2018. Its implementation is still new, and, more importantly, it is a directive from the MoE. Although numerous controversies are highlighted in the media on the use of Pulse 2 EL textbook and the top-down approach directive, it should be highlighted that it is too early for any judgments.

The second limitation of the study is that the current study will only explore the Pulse 2 EL textbook, and the cultural analysis will only be conducted on six (6) units from the Pulse 2 EL textbook, including the starter, which covers the Form 1 syllabus. Hence, the results of this study are not conclusive on the overall implementation of the Pulse 2 EL textbook, nor do any international textbooks.



## 1.9 Summary

Overall, this chapter has introduced the current study on the analysis of cultural content of the Pulse 2 EL textbook. This chapter discussed the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms. The second chapter deals with CEFR and cultural contents in detail illustrates the conceptual theories, and critically assesses the literature reviews.