Conceptual Representation of Culture in EFL Textbook Images: A Multimodal Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigated the types of culture presented in EFL school textbooks in Indonesia. Qualitative content analysis and the Kress & van Leeuwen's conceptual representation framework were employed to analyze the data in two textbooks widely used at the Junior high school level. The findings show that both textbooks portray a rather disproportionate representation of culture. Target culture is represented more dominantly in the global textbook, while the locally produced textbook emphasizes the presentation of source culture. This finding suggests that the former textbook, despite some localization, is intended to appeal to a wider global audience, while the latter implies an attempt to preserve local identity and localize the context of English language learning. Such imbalanced representation has the potential to impede students' acquisition of intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, there is an urgency for material developers to provide students with balanced cultural content, as well as an active role from the teacher to appropriately select learning materials to supplement the drawbacks of the textbooks.

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of multiliteracy proposed by New London Group (1996), which takes into account the development of technology and communication channels, the number of journal articles discussing multimodality has increased in the past three decades. As multimodality highlights the importance of how multiple modes, such as images, gestures, speech, and other

resources, function in meaning-making (Kress, 2003; Lim et al., 2022), the research scope of multimodality has influenced other areas, such as pedagogies and teaching materials.

A recent article by Hua & Le (2025) discovered that teachers used multimodal and technological tools as a significant strategy to foster cultural sensitivity. The integration of such resources also aligned with the current pedagogical orientation in Vietnam. Another study was conducted by Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak (2023), developing a multimodal framework used to analyze culture in EFL textbooks. The framework was designed to see how text, task, and image interplay in leveraging students' learning and meaning-making processes. The previous studies show that multimodality in language learning has drawn the researcher's interest as it provides an understanding of how various semiotic resources are used in meaning-making. Additionally, Li et al. (2023) emphasize the need for cultural content in textbooks to reflect both native and global perspectives, arguing that "a balanced representation fosters cross-cultural understanding rather than reinforcing stereotypes." Similarly, Lim, Toh, & Nguyen (2022) point out that "multimodal analysis is vital for understanding how visual and textual cues shape learners' interpretations of cultural knowledge." **

Motschenbacher (2019) found that multimodal cues can subtly privilege native-speaker norms, suggesting a need to interrogate representations beyond textual analysis. Kiss & Weninger (2017) argued that visual components "do not merely support language content but are themselves vehicles of ideological meaning." Jang et al. (2023) highlight that "English textbooks often embed conflicting ideas about multiculturalism, globalization, and national identity through multimodal elements." Further, Derakhshan (2021) emphasized that semiotic approaches to textbook images reveal how visual signs "encode assumptions about gender, culture, and power relations." In an Indonesian context, Ramadhani & Refnaldi (2024) found that "textbooks aimed at junior high students still lack inclusive representations of minority and non-Western cultures." Shah et al. (2025) introduced the concept of posthumanist discourse in EFL textbooks, arguing that visual design can privilege anthropocentric and Western ideologies. Smith (2021) also critiqued the racial and cultural representations in global ELT textbooks, noting their lack of contextual inclusivity.

Elshadelin & Yumarnamto (2020) emphasize that "while local textbooks tend to prioritize source culture, they often miss opportunities to introduce intercultural awareness through multimodal representation." Dewi et al. (2023) argue that multimodal designs in Indonesian EFL textbooks are often dominated by decorative visuals rather than meaningful cultural content. Arini (2023) further notes that the Merdeka curriculum's textbooks still display "limited exposure to global cultures," which may reduce learners' readiness for intercultural engagement.

The urgency to shift from traditional literacy to multiliteracy, which encompasses multimodality, centers on two main issues, global and cultural issues, as well as the development of technology that integrates multiple modes of communication (New London Group, 1996). As the world becomes more interconnected, students need to be equipped to be better global citizens by understanding different linguistic and cultural diversity, including its communication patterns, which might incorporate different registers and social variations (New London Group, 1996; Yoon, 2015). The shift to multimodal literacy is also influenced by the development of technology, which enables the integration of various modes in the meaning-making process (Bouchey et al., 2021; Toohey et al., 2015). Therefore, in the 21st-century learning landscape where technological advancement is prevalent, it is almost inevitable not to integrate multimodality into the learning process.

The study of language textbooks is a well-established subject of research within the field of applied linguistics, and it can be broadly classified into two traditions or approaches: material development and cultural artefacts (Weninger, 2020). The former explores textbooks as teaching aids in classroom instruction in a second or foreign language context (Lim et al., 2022), while the latter studies textbooks as artefacts of various knowledge representations of the world (Risager, 2020). The first approach focuses on establishing guidelines for developing, implementing, and evaluating language teaching materials that take into account both language acquisition theory and the particular needs and attributes of learners of the target language (Tomlinson et al., 2001).

The second approach sees textbooks as a type of product and cultural artefact that is governed by the state, serving as a reflection of and a means to shape values filled with ideology (Chen, 2002; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). This kind of research often adopts a critical perspective in its evaluations of language textbooks, emphasizing biases, exclusions, and misrepresentations in the portrayal of different regions of the world (Weninger, 2020).This study focuses on the second tradition in analyzing language textbooks as Risager (2021) argued that the learners of the second or foreign language may perceive a wide range of representations of the world in the textbook, which also leads to the development of communicative ability and language awareness in the students.

Language and culture inherently interconnect (Kovács, 2017; Prihatiningsih et al., 2021), and this interconnectedness plays a crucial role in education, enabling learners to critically analyze their own cultural identity and evaluate other cultures (Lee & Li, 2019). Not only does this process promote a positive outlook toward cultural diversity, but it also enriches learners' comprehension of diverse cultural traditions. Furthermore, studying culture and language becomes pivotal, especially in the EFL context, as there is a growing sense of diversity and connectedness in local and global settings (New London Group, 1996; Prihatiningsih et al., 2021). As for culture and textbooks, Uzum et al. (2021) stated that textbooks remain the predominant tool utilized to familiarize world language learners with a target language and its associated culture.

However, despite its significance, several studies show that there is an imbalance in the proportion of types of culture depicted in EFL textbooks (Li et al., 2023; Prihatiningsih et al., 2021; Sihombing & Nguyen, 2022). It is important to examine what culture represents, as Mahboob (2017) stated that textbooks can influence students' semiotic systems. Little attention is paid to how cultural representation is studied at the junior high school level, especially in grade seven (Prihatiningsih et al., 2021). Further, they argued that such a level is critical for students to construct their identity. In addition, Alfaya et al. (2023) suggested using others' theoretical frameworks to examine the culture presented in a textbook.

Furthermore, while numerous studies have examined cultural representations in either global or local textbooks, few have compared these within the same national curriculum using a multimodal framework. Even fewer studies have focused on how visual images alone shape learners' perceptions of cultural diversity in Indonesian junior high school contexts. This study fills that gap by investigating how two seventh-grade EFL textbooks portray culture visually using a multimodal approach. Thus, in response to the aforementioned issues, the present study aims to examine the cultural presentation in the Indonesian EFL textbook using a multimodal framework. This study differs from that of Prihatiningsih et al. (2021) in both the context and multimodal framework employed. This study examines cultural content presented in the seventh-grade textbooks used in the current *Merdeka* curriculum. This study also employed the multimodal

conceptual representation framework developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) to examine how visual images in textbooks construct culture, as well as Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) framework to analyze the types of culture represented. Considering these aspects related to the context and the framework, two research questions, hence, are formulated to guide this study: What types of culture are presented in the EFL seven-grade textbooks endorsed by MoEC in the *Merdeka* curriculum?; How are the representations of culture conceptually depicted in the textbooks?.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Representation in the EFL Textbook

As textbooks have the ability to mirror the cultural issues and ideologies that are inherent in an educational system (Gheisari & Akbari, 2022), studying the culture represented in an EFL textbook is of great significance. Uzum et al. (2021) stated that textbooks are an important artefact for introducing the target language and culture to language learners. Furthermore, Halliday (1978) suggested that it is unlikely to detach language from society. As language and culture are inseparable, studying the representation of culture as meaning in textbooks is important since it enables one to infer the ideology portrayed in certain curricula (Weninger, 2020). Below are the recent studies regarding cultural representation in EFL textbooks in both global and Indonesian contexts.

2.1.1. Global Context

Studies on cultural representation in English as foreign language textbooks have been increasingly articulated over the last five years, as can be seen in recent articles edited by Li et al. (2023), Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak (2023), Gheisari & Akbari (2022), Uzum et al. (2021), and Lee & Li, (2019). The previous research context is mainly situated in Asia (e.g., China, Mongolia, Israel, Iran, and Hong Kong), and only one research conducted by Uzum et al. (2021) is situated in North America (South-Central U.S.). The aforementioned articles analyze cultural representation in several dimensions, such as multimodal native cultural content, the interaction of task, text, and image, the classification of culture, and imagined communities and identities. The most common issue that underscores the EFL textbook from the previous studies is an imbalance of culture presented, either favoring the target culture or the source culture depending on the publisher's and writer's ideologies. Furthermore, the culture presented is also not relevant to the real-life experience students face. Such practice may lead to cultural bias if the stakeholders and the teacher do not try to fix the gap (Lavrentava & Orland-Barak, 2023).

2.1.2. Indonesian Context

Studies examining cultural representations in English textbooks are also increasingly prevalent within the Indonesian context (see, for example, Alfaya et al., 2023; Prihatiningsih et al., 2021; Putra et al., 2020; Sihombing & Nguyen, 2022). Previous studies show that locally published textbooks tend to portray the source culture more frequently than other cultures. However, a study conducted by Alfaya et al. (2023), which examined high school textbook in the current curriculum (*Merdeka* Curriculum), showed a contrary result. They found that the target culture was dominantly portrayed, while the local culture received the least attention among other cultures. In addition, besides cultural representation, the study on EFL textbooks also takes into account gender representation, as the study conducted by Adawiyah & Oktavianti (2023) discovered an imbalanced representation of gender portrayed in high school EFL textbooks. The previous studies in

international and local contexts indicate that examining culture in EFL textbooks remains an important topic.

The previous studies mentioned typically put an emphasis on either globally or locally produced materials, potentially overlooking the nuance in examining both textbooks within the same curriculum. The present study differed from the previous studies as it examined two EFL textbooks used in recent curriculum in Indonesia at the junior high school level.

2.2. A Perspective on Multimodal Textbook Analysis

Multimodality refers to the integration of many modes of communication, such as language, imagery, sound, music, and other semiotic resources, within multimodal texts and communicative occurrences (Anderson & Kachorsky, 2019; Leeuwen, 2012). The concept of multimodality in education refers to an expansive approach to literacy that takes into account the many different modes of communication that have become prevalent among students in this era of digital technology (Lim et al., 2022). As multimodality is regarded as both a desirable outcome of literacy learning and a fundamental component of semiotic tasks that facilitate learning through various forms of communication, the multimodal shift has influenced the study of language textbooks in published research (Weninger, 2020). This change occurs due to contemporary textbook design featuring images as a focal mode of representation, which also holds the same semiotic function as text (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). Hence, studying textbook with multimodal perspective becomes vital in current educational landscape.

The traditional assumption was that textbooks should emphasize isolated speech acts or interactions (Gheisari & Akbari, 2022). However, Halliday's (1978) theory of socio-semiotic and communication, which considers language and other meaning-making modes as a system of choices, alters the conventional understanding of communication (Grapin, 2018). Furthermore, the combination of social change and technological advancements which broaden the semiotic landscape has created opportunities for enhanced utilization of multiple modes (Bezemer & Kress, 2015; Erfanian Mohammadi et al., 2019). Such changes have led to the widespread inclusion of multimodal resources in contemporary textbooks, with images taking on a central role in representation (Bezemer & Kress, 2015; Weninger, 2020). Multimodal texts incorporate diverse semiotic resources, encompassing words, images, symbols, and animation (Lim et al., 2022). These texts are typically presented in a multimedia format and have a digital composition, although printed texts like posters and collages are also categorized as multimodal texts.

Studies on multimodal textbook analysis can be seen in recent publications (e.g., Elmiana, 2019; Lavarenteva & Oralnd-Barak, 2023). Elmiana (2019) conducted a study examining the pedagogical function of visual image representation using Kress & van Leeuwen's framework, representational, interactive, and compositional modes. The study found that the textbook examined has met the criteria of pedagogical objectives. Based on Wenninger's (2020) categorization of multimodal textbook analysis, the study falls into the category in which a multimodal framework is used to examine the independent function of images in a text. The study conducted by Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak (2023), however, focuses on how culture is represented and generates meaning through the interaction of task, text, and image. Thus, the study falls under the category that focuses not solely on the image but also its connection with the text and the task in a learning activity.

Another recent study conducted by Shah et al. (2025) which drew upon Kress & van Leeuwen's (2020) multimodal framework and Halliday's (1978) concept of metafunction showed that the participants and processes depicted in the picture could be used as a reference to elaborate on the relation among objects that convey ideational meaning. The study captured an image of a boy who was seen standing on the ground and stretching his arms horizontally, indicating a sensory, mental process. Further, they also implied that the picture is anthropocentric based on its spatial composition, which placed the text on the top of the image and nature background as a passive feature serving human interest. Thus, a multimodal framework enables the researcher to get an in-depth analysis towards the meaning represented in a picture.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This article examines the cultural representation of visual images from a multimodal perspective. Thus, qualitative content analysis was employed as it analyzes the content of the textbook to draw inferences from various data such as text, pictures, and symbol (Krippendorff, 2019). Weninger (2020) posited that research conducted through a multimodal analysis of language textbooks examines the interpretations conveyed through linguistic methods and non-linguistic modes of signification. He also classified the study of multimodal analysis of textbooks into two subcategories: a study independently examining the role of image and a study attempting to connect the intermodal relation between image and text. This study adopted the former approach as the aim was to examine the representation of culture depicted in the visual modes.

Kress & van Leeuwen's (2020) framework of conceptual representation was adopted to explore the data through a multimodal lens. Integrated into Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) cultural classification, Kress & van Leeuwen's (2020) model analyzes how culture is represented in an image through classification, analytical, and symbolic structure, providing a comprehensive framework to capture a diverse and inclusive cultural perspective. The integration of these models assists the researchers in discovering how cultural perceptions are depicted in an image, ensuring a thorough and nuanced examination of visual images in EFL textbooks.

As the first research question aims to discover the types of culture presented in the textbooks, this study categorized all images presented in the textbooks, including the cover for each chapter and the images in the enrichment section. However, regarding the second research question, the sample from each category was selected as Weninger et al. (2024) posit that it is impractical to analyze textbooks in their entirety. Hence, this study focused on the sample of images portrayed in the chapter for further analysis. Furthermore, an intracoder method was utilized to ensure reliability since a single coder coded the data. Intracoder reliability denotes the consistent approach employed by the researcher in coding (van den Hoonaard, 2008). To ensure consistency, the researcher utilized a clear coding framework based on established theories of Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) cultural classification and Kress & van Leeuwen's (2020) conceptual representation.

3.2. Materials

The data in this study was obtained from two Indonesian junior high school EFL textbooks currently in use in grade seven. The books were selected because they have been updated following the latest curriculum in Indonesia, the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The first book was published

by *Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan* MoEC in collaboration with Cambridge Publishing with the title *English in Mind*. The second book was also published by Pusat Perbukuan MoEC and was written independently without collaborating with outside parties. The title of the second book is *English for Nusantara*. It was also determined that our focus would be on these two textbooks commonly used in Indonesian junior high schools, based on insights from professional networks due to the lack of publicly accessible statistics on this matter.

Table 1: List of Textbooks

Title	Authors	Year of Publication	Publisher
English in Mind	Puchta et al.	2021	Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan, Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan dan Perbukuan, Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan
English for Nusantara	Damayanti et al.	2022	Pusat Perbukuan, Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi

3.3. Instruments

Since this research employed qualitative content analysis, the instrument was based on the theory construct used to develop categories to reduce or classify the data. Categories are either predetermined based on theoretical frameworks or specific interests (pre-ordinate categorization) or developed organically from the data during analysis (responsive categorization) (Cohen et al., 2007). This research used the former approach to develop coding instruction. Further, Mayring (2015) contended that qualitative content analysis does not employ completely standardized instruments as the category system and associated content analytical criteria are often established for the particular material concerning the specific research objective. Therefore, to establish analytical tools to answer research questions, this research employed the coding framework mentioned in the previous sub-section.

Table: 2 Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) Framework of Cultural Classification

Cultural Classification		Code
Target Culture	refers to the cultural elements in countries where English is the native language, including the United States and Britain.	TC
Source Culture	encompasses the cultural heritage that learners inherit from their society.	SC
International Culture	refers to a wide range of cultural practices and traditions in countries worldwide, including English-speaking and non-English-speaking nations where English serves as an international language.	IC

Table: 3 Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2020) Framework of Conceptual Representation

Structure	Category	Code
Classification Structure	*Covert taxonomy*: the visual co-classification of subordinates through a layout, specifically through a symmetrical arrangement.	CS.CT
	Overt taxonomy: a classification based on a chained structure that includes superordinate and subordinate participants.	CS.OT
Analytical Structure	*Carrier* (the whole): the main participant in an analytical process, which can be an object, a person, or an entity that is being described or analyzed.	AS.C
	Possessive attributes (the parts): the qualities, features, or characteristics that belong to, constitute, or describe the Carrier.	AS.PA
Symbolic Structure	*Symbolic attributive*: a process involving participants (often objects or people) that symbolize a particular quality, identity, or value, e.g. national flag, uniform, or religious symbol.	SS.A
	Symbolic suggestive: a process involving a more abstract and indirect transfer of symbolic meaning, e.g. color, sunrise, lightning ambiance.	SS.S

Table: 4 Table of Coding System

Sample of Coding	Interpretation
TC-CS.OT-AS.C-SS.A	TC means that the image is categorized as target culture.
	CS.OT is the abbreviation of classification structure and overt taxonomy, meaning that the image can be classified based on chained structure and categorized into human and non-human.
	AS.C is the abbreviation for analytical structure and carrier, indicating the participants of the image.
	SS.A is the abbreviation for symbolic structure and symbolic attributive, meaning that the image contains object that reflects a particular value.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The researchers followed several steps to analyze the data. First, after familiarizing with the visual data gathered from both textbooks, the data were coded based on Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) framework of cultural classifications to categorize the cultures portrayed in the textbooks. The coded data were then analyzed to determine their relevance to the research questions. After classifying the cultural representation from the visual images, the researchers synthesized the key insights by summarizing important findings. These findings were interpreted using Kress & van Leeuwen's (2020) framework of conceptual representation. The classification and interpretation results were compared with previous studies and relevant theoretical frameworks to establish the relevance and contribution to the field.

4. Results

The analysis of the number of images and different cultural types represented in the two English textbooks is presented in Table four and Figure 1. Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) cultural mirror is adapted to categorize the cultural types, including target, source, and international cultures. In *English in Mind*, the target culture is the most prevalent, with approximately more than half of the total proportion, followed by the international culture with around two-fifths of the images. The source culture is minimally represented, with fewer than five images. On the other hand, in *English for Nusantara*, the source culture is significantly prominent, with around 71%, whereas the target culture has a minor presence, with approximately five images. The international culture also features prominently, with about 35 images. This distribution indicates a rather strong emphasis on the target culture in *English in Mind* and a predominant focus on the source culture in *English for Nusantara*, highlighting different pedagogical approaches in cultural representation within these textbooks.

Table: 5 The distribution of images in Indonesian junior high school EFL textbooks

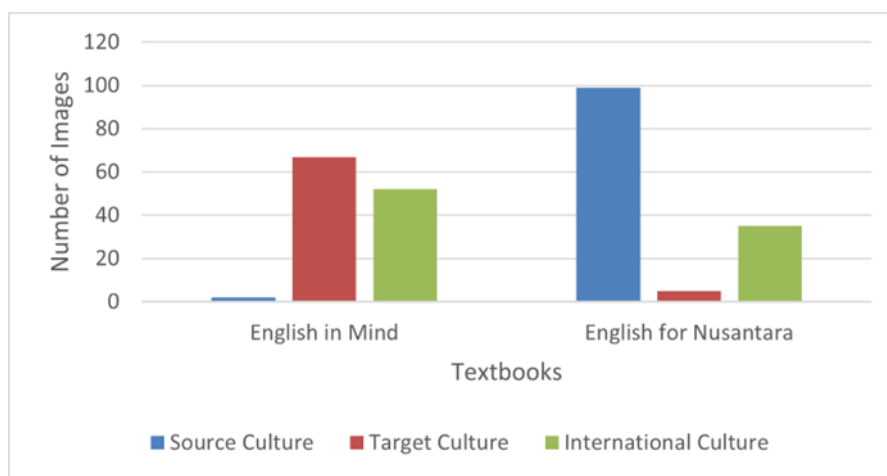| EFL Textbook	Number of Images	Number of Pages
English for Nusantara	139	264
English in Mind	121	133
Total	260	397

Figure 1: The Distribution of Cultural Types Portrayed in the Visual Images of Both Textbooks

The analysis of conceptual representation in the textbooks started with examining the classification structure of the images. Table 5 presents the distribution of types of images in the textbooks based on the classification structure. This finding shows that more than half of the images consist of humans as the main theme, followed by non-human, with around a quarter of the total proportion. Meanwhile, some images equally portray human and non-human, constituting more than one-fifth of the images. The data further indicate that the images

presented in the textbooks depict a realistic representation of student activities, emphasizing actions and social interactions as central themes.

Table: 6 Type of Images in Indonesian Junior High School EFL Textbooks

Images	Age	Gender	N
Human (54%)	Adult (32%) Teenage (68%)	Male (54%) Female (46%)	141
Human and non-human (21%)			54
Non-human (25%)			65

Furthermore, the human image data revealed that 32% depicted adults and 68% were children, which might suggest that the textbooks were primarily designed for lower secondary-level users. Regarding gender bias and stereotypes, the distribution of images revealed a slightly higher representation of males compared to females, with percentages of 54% and 46%, respectively. This slight difference might be due to some images, as seen in Figures 2 and 3, highlighting sports and performance activities dominated by males, such as football and cultural dance performances. The former image was taken from *English in Mind*, while the latter was from *English for Nusantara*. These images also show these books' tendency towards certain types of culture in representing such activity.

Figure 2: Football Club from England

Picture 5.7 Andre and friends dancing

Figure 3: Ethnic Dance Performance

4.1. Source Culture

Within the textbooks, both visual and verbal modalities convey cultural meaning. In English for Nusantara, the source culture is shown through textbook characters in Figure 4, representing female and male students with various physical characteristics and traditional attire from Indonesia. Regarding the analytical structure, the carrier is the diversity of culture and ethnicity across the Indonesian archipelago, which is represented by the traditional clothing worn by each character and is reinforced by the map of Indonesia portrayed below the character. The traditional attire and the map painted in the Indonesian flag serve as symbolic attributes of Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage. The text's narrative and visual representation suggest pride in cultural diversity and the importance of preserving local languages and traditions within the national identity.

Figure 4: Characters with Traditional Attire

Figure 5: Junior High School Student

Besides using traditional attire, the source culture in English for Nusantara is also portrayed through student characters wearing school uniforms, with approximately more than half of the images of the source culture. In Figure 5, the main character, Galang, is a carrier classified as a student based on his attire, which includes a school uniform. In the ministerial regulation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 50/2022, Article 5, junior high school students wear white shirts and dark blue pants or skirts. The presence of the school, SMP Merdeka, further classifies the setting as an educational environment. The image also provides specific identifiers, such as the location (Kalimantan) and the school's name, which contribute to categorizing the depicted elements. Furthermore, the Indonesian flag on the school building demonstrates national identity in terms of symbolic structure. This image is taken from chapter one, unit one which the language focus is to teach about introduction. The portrayal of the source culture serves as an input for this language function.

Figure 6: Junior High School Uniform

Another interesting finding from English for Nusantara is that the depiction of students wearing the veil is approximately 10%. Figure 6 shows three students, the main carriers, interacting in a classroom setting. All three students are wearing school uniforms, indicating their role as students at the junior high school level. One of the female students is wearing a hijab, suggesting a specific cultural or religious identity and symbolizing diversity and inclusion within the classroom. The image uses symbolic attributive elements (uniforms and hijab) to convey educational and cultural identities while suggestively promoting themes of social integration, diversity, and the inclusive nature of the school environment.
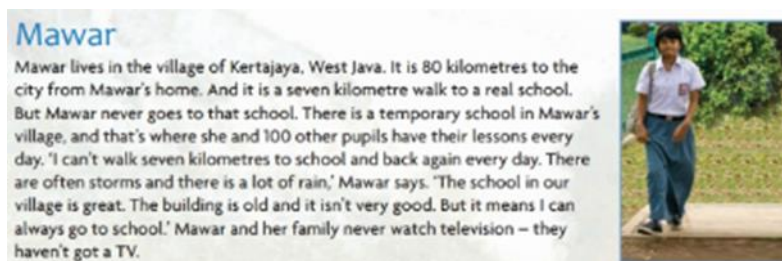
Mawar

Mawar lives in the village of Kertajaya, West Java. It is 80 kilometres to the city from Mawar's home. And it is a seven kilometre walk to a real school. But Mawar never goes to that school. There is a temporary school in Mawar's village, and that's where she and 100 other pupils have their lessons every day. 'I can't walk seven kilometres to school and back again every day. There are often storms and there is a lot of rain,' Mawar says. 'The school in our village is great. The building is old and it isn't very good. But it means I can always go to school.' Mawar and her family never watch television – they haven't got a TV.

Figure 7: Senior high school student

Meanwhile, in English in Mind, source culture is presented through the portrait of a student. Mawar, in Figure 7, is depicted individually in the photograph, emphasizing her as the main subject. Regarding analytical structure, Mawar serves as a carrier, representing students in Indonesia. It can be identified from her possessive attributes the shirt and the long skirt. The shirt contains symbolic attributes on the pocket, which indicates that the carrier is on high school level. The color of her skirt also supports the identification. Based on the ministerial regulation of The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 50/2022, Article 5, senior high school students wear white shirts and grey pants or skirts.

Overall, it is apparent that English for Nusantara, as the locally produced textbook, dominantly portrays source culture. while English in Mind, as a globally produced textbook, presents a minimal representation of source culture even though it has been localized to some extent. Further, both textbooks, regarding the symbolic structure, presents the school uniforms to reinforce the source culture.

4.2. Target Culture

The target culture has the smallest proportion of representation in *English for Nusantara*, with no human depiction. As seen in Figure 8, the primary carrier of this image is time, represented by a clock, grouped with the textual explanation in a cohesive way to elaborate on the idiom's meaning. Its possessive attribute, wings, is a visual metaphor representing the English idiom "Time flies". The wings represent speed and movement, attributes that are metaphorically linked to the passage of time. The relationship between the visual (clock with wings) and the textual explanation is complementary. The visual metaphor supports the textual explanation, making the abstract concept of time passing quickly more tangible.

Figure 8: Illustration of "time flies"

Figure 9: Student conversation

Target culture in *English in Mind* shares the biggest proportion among other culture types. Unlike in *English for Nusantara*, in which pictures are mainly portrayed through illustration or drawing, more than half of the images in *English in Mind* use photographs, and 86% of the portraits represent target cultures. It can be seen from Figure 9 that the central theme in the portrait is social interaction, in which the participants are Caucasian teenagers. The images depict events involving these individuals, suggesting their participation in a shared discourse. The first image classifies the participants in a casual social setting, as they are seated and engaged in conversation. Their casual attire and relaxed postures suggest an informal social interaction.

This image is taken from unit four, where the language function taught is asking and giving directions. This portrayal of the target culture is embedded to teach the language function.

Figure 10: The portrait of a British family

Another image in *English in Mind* that depicts the target culture is the family portrait in Figure 10. This image is taken from a section in unit 3 with the title *Culture in Mind*. This section appears in every odd-numbered unit to introduce either target or international culture. In this image, the analytical structure representing the carrier is a family in Britain. The participants identified as possessive attributes are the members of the family. The family members are grouped, indicating their familial and social unit. The text and images of the family members are integrated to provide a comprehensive narrative about their lives. The Union Jack in the background emphasizes their British identity and sets the cultural context for the narrative. It implies that despite their diverse origins, the Siddiqui family are integral to British society. The combination of the Union Jack, family photos, and the narrative positively portrays a multicultural family thriving in Britain. Target culture presented in English for Nusantara is minimal and relies on the use of illustration, while English in Mind predominantly uses photographs to depict target culture and contains 86% of portraits depicting Caucasians in social settings, which also integrates culture with language learning.

4.3. International Culture

International culture in both textbooks receives a fair share of representation, with 35 images in *English for Nusantara* and 52 images in *English in Mind.* Interestingly, more than 60% of international cultural images, such as objects and animals, are non-human. Figure 11 was taken from *English in Mind* in which the primary participants are the various types of pets (fish, cat, fighting cricket). The pets are grouped with textual descriptions explaining their significance in different cultures, such as fish in Britain and fighting crickets in China and Japan. The text suggests themes of cultural diversity and the varying relationships between humans and animals across

different societies. It highlights the idea that cultural norms and practices might influence pet preferences.

Figure 11: Pets in different cultures

Another finding in *English in Mind* which is worth discussing is the fact that more than one-fifth of the total visual images portray women with a veil, which is associated with a certain religious practice, Islam. As Figure 12 in the first image shows, three individuals (two wearing hijabs, one not) are sitting at a table, and a waiter is standing beside them. The individuals at the table can be classified into a group (customers), while the waitperson belongs to another group (service staff). Regarding analytical structures, the main carriers are the three customers and the waiter. The customers are depicted with menus, indicating their role as diners. The waiter holds a notepad and pen, possessive attributes indicating his role in taking orders. The customers' attire, particularly the hijabs, directly attributes them to a particular cultural or religious identity (likely Muslim). The image suggests a cultural interaction and inclusion scene, showing individuals from diverse backgrounds engaging in a common social activity (dining out). The second image suggests that the naming of the character wearing the veil refers to the source culture in which Islam is the majority religion in the region. However, this naming occurs only in one image in the vocabulary bank section, which is not in the main unit.

Figure 12: Restaurant Visitors Wearing a Veil and the Naming of the Characters Wearing a Veil

As for *English for Nusantara*, the international culture is depicted in the various tea cultures (British and Turkish tea culture) in Figure 13. The text groups these objects by discussing how tea is consumed differently in different cultures. An image of tea with biscuits is provided as it represents British tea culture, in which tea is often served with sweet and savory snacks. As for Turkey, tea could be a symbol of hospitality as it is served as a way to welcome a guest. The text describing British and Turkish tea practices symbolizes the importance of tea in these cultures. It also suggests themes of cultural identity and the social significance of tea, highlighting how tea is more than a beverage.
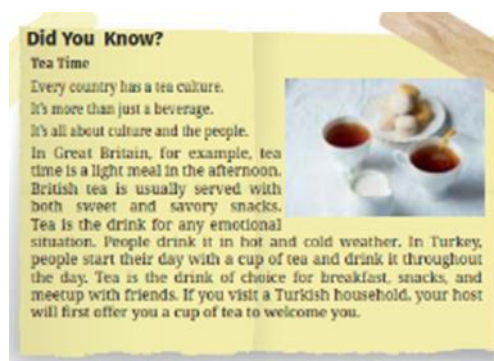

Figure 13: Tea Culture

Both textbooks share fairly the same portion of international culture, with more than half of the images portraying non-human objects. However, there are Images of veiled women in English in Mind, reflecting cultural and religious expression, while English for Nusantara showcases British and Turkish tea traditions to promote cultural identity and social relevance.

5. Discussion

The first research question of this study is to examine the types of culture represented in junior high school grade seven textbooks in Indonesia. The research identified various cultural types as classified by Cortazzi & Jin (1999) in a locally published and global textbook with some localization, encompassing source culture (Indonesian), target culture, and international culture. However, a rather imbalanced proportion of culture is represented in *English for Nusantara* and *English in Mind* textbook. The former textbook is laden with the source culture (Indonesian culture), in which more than 50% of the images portray students' illustrations in their school uniforms. Similar findings were also shown in studies conducted by Prihatiningsih et al. (2021) and Sihombing & Nguyen (2022). The study conducted by Prihatiningsih et al. (2021) concluded that the imbalance proportion with the tendency to portray more of the source culture might be related to the fact that the first textbook mentioned is produced locally. Similarly, McKay & Brown (2016, as cited in Sihombing & Nguyen, 2022) also stipulated that locally written textbook might have a tendency to depict source culture more in order to challenge the long-established tradition in English materials, which favor inner circle culture.

The second textbook depicted more of the target culture, with around 55%, while the source culture received a significantly smaller proportion, with less than 2%. It is also important to note that 52 out of 67 images are photographs covering various themes such as entertainment, social, politics, environment, and person. Imbalanced cultural representation dominated by target culture

is also found in the study conducted by Alfaya et al. (2023). Even though the textbook analyzed was produced locally in Indonesia, the target culture represented is almost 54%. In the European context, Motschenbacher (2019) conducted a multimodal representation analysis on textbook used from primary to secondary in Germany. The study shows that the textbooks across the level represent native culture more than non-native culture, with the representation becoming more prevalent for the British culture as the level increases. Rahim & Daghigh (2019) also discovered the imbalance representation, which favors the target culture in global textbooks used in Malaysia. Further, they stated that such emphasis on target and other cultures may overlook the importance of learners' own cultures in awareness-raising exercises.

While it is prevalent that there is an unequal representation in both textbooks, which favor target culture in *English in Mind* and source culture in *English for Nusantara*, further exploration is needed in order to examine authors' stances toward particular cultures. Weninger & Kiss (2013) stated that even though the textbooks are filled with ideology as it is considered a cultural artifact, the content and design of textbooks are influenced by various factors, some of which are more common than others. Finding in Alfaya et al. (2023) study is in line with Weninger & Kiss' (2013) claim that multiple factors need to be considered to infer writers' attitude toward certain cultures, not solely based on geographical consideration. The emphasis on source culture in locally produced textbook could possibly be related to several factors, such as minimizing the impact of foreign culture to nurture local culture (Widodo et al., 2018) or integrating the philosophy of national education (Rahim & Daghigh, 2019). Concerning the emphasis on target culture in global textbook, it is believed that commercial value, such as the marketability of the textbook, may influence the types of cultures depicted (Rahim & Daghigh, 2019; Uzum et al., 2021). Thus, when the goal of the textbook is a global market, it is possible for locally produced textbook to present a large proportion of the target culture than the source culture.

As *English in Mind* is a global textbook published by Cambridge and republished by Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan for the need of Merdeka Curriculum in 2021, it is comprehensible that the book's content is laden with target culture. Then, in June 2022, *Pusat Perbukuan* published *English for Nusantara*, a national textbook produced following ministerial regulation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology no 22/2022, which regulates the quality standards of the book. With the former book firstly intended for the global audience and the latter for the national audience, this suggests the reason for the imbalance proportion of cultural content portrayed. Such an imbalance representation of culture in both textbooks may hinder the development of intercultural communicative competence as it reduces students' opportunity to learn about other cultures (Li et al., 2023; Prihatiningsih et al., 2021).

The second research question attempts to answer how culture is depicted conceptually in textbooks through a multimodal lens by examining the visual images' classification, analytical, and symbolic structure. In *English in Mind*, 55% of the images belong to the target culture, in which 44 out of 67 images portray native speakers, which include British and American footballers, singers, actors/actresses, politicians, and citizens. Smith (2021), which used a critical multimodal analysis process in his study, found a similar finding that there was a persistent whiteness portrayed in the textbook in which 230 out of 244 characters are white. A similar finding was also prevalent in a study by Jang et al. (2023) in which three out of five textbooks portrayed more than 50% of white characters. The present study also found that the portrayal of white characters is prevalent in special sections in the textbook *English in Mind*, cultural in mind and read and listen section.

Further, the later section indicates the continuation of the story, which is carried out by consistent characters from Britain in seven units. This finding is similar to study conducted by Lee & Li (2019) in which the main reason why Britain was represented frequently was that British characters were portrayed as main characters along with Chinese. Further, they argued that such a portrayal, which tends to promote inner circle culture, may nurture cultural imperialism. While the large proportion of target culture representation may probably be beneficial for students who attempt to integrate into the native culture, the minor portrayal of source culture could hinder students' intercultural communicative comprehension (Motschenbacher, 2019).

Another noteworthy finding identified in *English in Mind* is the inclusion of 26 illustrations featuring a woman with a veil, a representation often associated with Islam's religious traditions, the majority religion in Indonesia. The representation of women dressing in an Islamic manner was similar to the finding in a study conducted by Tajeddin & Teimournezhad (2014) in Iran and Prihatiningsih et al. (2021) in Indonesia. The former finding suggested that the representation of Islamic dress did not refer specifically to Iran. This is similar to the 25 images portraying Islamic dress in English in Mind, which cannot be associated with Indonesia. However, in the vocabulary bank section, one image contains character names representing the common name in Indonesia with Islamic dressing style, Fauziah and Amanda. This naming practice is also found in the later study with the name Siti. The representation of the veil in women's dressing manner and the character's naming may suggest the attempt to localize the *English in Mind* textbook. López-barrios & de Debat (2014) defined that a localized textbook is a global one adapted to suit the student's background and the local curriculum. However, the representation of character associated with the source culture in the textbook is significantly lesser than the target culture.

Moreover, the type of image used to portray women in the veil is drawings or cartoons compared to the native speakers portrayed in the photographs. A similar practice was also found in a study conducted by Lavrenteva & Oralnd-Barak (2023). The study found that photographs were utilized to represent highly justifiable concepts; on the other hand, drawings and cartoons illustrate less conventional, plausible, or reliable ideas. Further, while Kress & van Leeuwen (2020) argued that photograph, drawing, and other visual modes are structured, in traditional notion, photography is often associated with facts instead of cartoons, which are often associated with opinion. Barthes (1984) stated that a photograph is inseparable from its referent, which denotes the occasion and reality. How people perceived painting and the like was transformed after the invention of the camera (Berger, 1972). Further, Berger (1972) highlighted the ability of drawings to use perspective in which such a feature entails more subjective interpretation. Thus, different depictions of images through photographs or drawings could potentially suggest different interpretations depending on the participant portrayed. In this case, *English in Mind* may suggest an attempt to impose the target culture's reality and tone down other cultures' representation.

Regarding *English for Nusantara*, the textbook is laden with source culture, with approximately 71% of the total representation. It can be seen by the depiction of the character, which represents an Indonesian teenager. The naming of the character denotes Indonesian culture such as Galang and Andi. Further, in the introduction section, the characters' name suggests an Indonesian setting. This finding was also identified in Prihatiningsih (2021), in which the characters were introduced first. Toledo-Sandoval (2020) also found that the textbook analyzed portrayed 47 common Chilean names associated with Spanish culture. Local culture naming might be considered an attempt to contextualise the learning material. López-Barrios & De Debat (2014)

identified aspects differentiating local or localized textbooks from global textbooks. One of the aspects is contextualization, which involves personalization, the selection of content topics, and pedagogical compatibility. One example of personalization is the inclusion of local references, which could be familiar individual, setting, factual event, and folklore. Awayed-Bishara (2021) conducted an ethnographic study examining linguistic citizenship in English as a foreign language classroom. The study found that the teacher criticized the unfamiliar portrayal of the target culture, including the characters' names in the EFL textbook, which was believed to cause the alienation of the learning experience. However, when the teacher included the Arabic names, such practice invoked students' interest in learning and made learning less stressful.

The aforementioned studies suggest that familiarizing EFL materials with students' backgrounds is vital to maintain students' interest and ease their mental state when learning a foreign language. Furthermore, Tomlinson (2013) stated that a textbook which is not engage the learner could potentially diminish the learner's sense of individuality, replacing it with a focus on linguistic comprehension at a fundamental level. Cultural content in *English for Nusantara* is filled with localization, as can be seen from the depiction of traditional attire and school uniforms throughout the units, with around 35%. Li et al. (2023) also identified the presence of native culture in depicting students' dress/style. The characters' naming and the presence of uniform and traditional clothes suggest that *English for Nusantara* is specifically designed for local use. Such representation might help the students reduce the unfamiliarity caused by immersing in foreign context in language learning. However, the emphasis on the dominant culture representation might be the result of an ethnocentric attitude as the authority, in this case, government or publisher, tries to impose the national and majority culture with minimal presentation of other cultures, especially non-dominant groups (Awayed-Bishara, 2015; Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2023). The study conducted by McConachy (2018), which gathered the students' responses in problematizing English textbook used, found a rather interesting view regarding ethnocentrism in language textbook. Despite the majority presentation of the target culture in the textbook, the students felt an ethnocentric view towards the author's stance in presenting Japanese culture. Hence, further research is needed to examine ethnocentric views in both textbooks dominated by target or source culture, which includes the students' perception.

The analysis revealed a consistent imbalance: English in Mind predominantly represented target culture (UK/US), while English for Nusantara centered heavily on source culture (Indonesia). This is similar to findings by Li et al. (2023), who observed a dominant representation of local cultures in Mongolian textbooks but a lack of global references. Likewise, Gheisari & Akbari (2022) observed contrasting ideological stances in public vs. private textbooks in Iran, where public textbooks heavily favored national culture. Furthermore, the ideological implications are further supported by Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak (2023), who noted that even the choice of image types—photographs vs. drawings—signals hierarchy and inclusion. Smith (2021) emphasized that image positioning, colour, and background detail contribute to symbolic inclusion or exclusion of cultures.

The use of images to reflect Indonesian cultural elements such as traditional clothing and school uniforms suggests alignment with Cortazzi & Jin's (1999) source culture category. However, the lack of international culture, especially in English for Nusantara, might limit students' intercultural development. Shah et al. (2025) propose a posthumanist framework in which textbooks should go beyond anthropocentric worldviews to promote planetary thinking and inclusive pedagogies. Arini (2023) observed that newer textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum

still insufficiently portray global diversity, confirming a broader issue across Indonesian textbook design. Dewi et al. (2023) noted that although visuals are present, they often serve decorative rather than pedagogical functions, reinforcing the need for intentional visual literacy. Prihatiningsih et al. (2021) also highlighted that even when source culture is dominant, it tends to overrepresent Java-centric values, marginalizing other local ethnicities.

Moreover, recent research indicates that students respond to cultural representation in textbooks in various ways, depending on factors such as their social background, exposure to foreign cultures, and the teaching methods employed by their instructors. According to Dervin (2022), intercultural learning is not a linear process but rather a dynamic interaction where students actively negotiate meanings based on their own cultural perspectives. Exposure to diverse cultures through textbooks can foster intercultural sensitivity, but if not presented carefully, it may also reinforce stereotypes or create resistance among learners. In some cases, students demonstrate a positive reception toward cultural diversity in textbooks, particularly if they have prior experience in multicultural settings (Derakhshan, 2021). However, in more homogeneous contexts, the representation of foreign cultures can create feelings of alienation or even resistance (Chao, 2011). For instance, in a study by Rahim & Jalalian Daghigh (2019) on Malaysian students, some learners found it challenging to relate to the dominant target culture in EFL textbooks, making it difficult for them to fully understand the social contexts presented. Additionally, research by Kiss & Weninger (2017) found that students often interpret images and texts in textbooks through the lens of their own cultural experiences and values. This means that even when textbooks attempt to introduce foreign cultures, students may still perceive them through their cultural framework, which can shape their understanding of cultural differences. To address these challenges, Smith (2021) suggests that teachers should adopt a critical cultural awareness approach, in which students are encouraged to compare and discuss cultural differences presented in textbooks with their own culture. Through this reflective process, students can develop a deeper cultural awareness and learn to appreciate cultural differences without feeling disconnected

Shah et al. (2025) propose a posthumanist framework in which textbooks should go beyond anthropocentric worldviews to promote planetary thinking and inclusive pedagogies. Arini (2023) observed that newer textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum still insufficiently portray global diversity, confirming a broader issue across Indonesian textbook design. Dewi et al. (2023) noted that although visuals are present, they often serve decorative rather than pedagogical functions, reinforcing the need for intentional visual literacy. Prihatiningsih et al. (2021) also highlighted that even when source culture is dominant, it tends to overrepresent Java-centric values, marginalizing other local ethnicities.

Unlike previous studies, this research offers a side-by-side multimodal analysis of global and local textbooks under the same curriculum. It expands the literature by focusing exclusively on visual cultural representation, drawing attention to the ideological weight images carry in constructing cultural narratives. Educators and policymakers must critically review textbook visual content to ensure it fosters intercultural competence. As Smith (2021) recommends, critical cultural awareness training for teachers can help them guide learners in deconstructing stereotypes embedded in textbook visuals. Lim et al. (2022) also urge textbook designers to collaborate with educators and cultural experts to avoid cultural essentialism and ensure inclusive multimodal representation.

6. Conclusion

Through a multimodal framework, this study examined the cultural presentation of two EFL textbooks used, English in Mind and English for Nusantara, by seventh graders in Indonesia. The findings show a rather significant imbalance in the representation of cultural types in both textbooks. *English for Nusantara* predominantly represents the source culture (Indonesian culture), with more than 70% of its images reflecting local cultural elements, such as characters' names, traditional attire, and school uniforms. This is consistent with previous studies suggesting that locally produced textbooks often have a tendency towards the source culture, either to nurture local identity and challenge foreign cultural influences or to adjust with the national curriculum. In contrast, *English in Mind*, a globally oriented textbook republished for the current Indonesian curriculum, considerably features the target culture, with around 55% of its images depicting elements from English-speaking countries, such as the UK and the USA. This focus on target culture aligns with the commercial objectives of global textbooks, aiming to cater the needs of broader international relevance. Target culture is often depicted through photographs, suggesting a representation of reality, while other cultures are portrayed through drawings, indicating a more subjective interpretation. This kind of alienation suggests the tendency to promote target culture.

The study also highlights the inclusion of diverse cultural elements, such as the representation of Islamic traditions through the portrayal of women in veils, suggesting an attempt to localize the global textbook to the Indonesian context. This localization, however, is minimal compared to the dominant portrayal of the target culture. While both textbooks aim to incorporate cultural elements into language learning, their contrasting emphases reflect their intended audiences and educational objectives. The findings suggest that this disproportionate cultural representation may deter the development of intercultural communicative competence among students by limiting their exposure to diverse cultural background. The study suggests the need for more balanced and inclusive cultural content in EFL textbooks and the teachers' participation to curate and select appropriate materials to enhance students' cultural awareness and competence in a globalized world. Future research exploring the relationship between task, text, and images is needed to understand better how culture presents and contributes to meaning-making. The study on the impact of these cultural representations on students' learning experiences and outcomes is also needed to capture a more holistic view of the issue. Future research should explore how students perceive and internalize these cultural elements and examine teacher-led interventions that foster intercultural understanding. Investigating the relationship between task, text, and images in EFL textbooks can provide further insights into how cultural meaning is structured and interpreted by learners.

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