

Cultural Representation and User Perceptions in Indonesian English Textbooks: A Mixed-Method Analysis

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Abstract. This study is urgent because English textbooks in Indonesia play a central role in shaping readers' linguistic development and intercultural awareness, yet existing materials are still insufficiently evaluated in terms of how culture is represented and perceived. A qualitative approach with a mixed-method analysis was employed. First method was conducted for analysing cultural content on three English educational textbooks: *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VII and VIII, and *Think Globally, Act Locally* for Grade IX based on the frameworks of Cortazzi and Jin (1999), Silvia (2014), Moran (2001), and Yuen (2011)'s cultural model. Second method applied thematic analysis on result of a semi-structure interview involving 18 respondents who are actively engaged in an academic setting from 6 different educational institutions in Indonesia to gain their cultural views on English textbooks. The findings of cultural types (the origin of culture) showed 156 appearances in total, comprising 60 (38.5%) appearances of source culture, 6 (3.8%) of target culture, 7 (4.5%) of international target culture, and 83 (53.2%) of culture-free content. Moreover, cultural elements (the forms of culture) showed 156 appearances. Of these, 107 (68.5%) were categorized as product, 43 (27.5%) as practice, 2 (1.3%) as perspective, and 4 (2.5%) as person. Thematic analysis on the data of semi-structured interview shows cultural contents were inseparably integrated in English educational textbooks for users' better understanding of English mastery and inclusive culture. Ultimately, this study recommends English educational textbooks should emphasize the integration of culturally inclusive materials to enhance readers' English skill and promote the English non-native speakers' engagement through culturally relevant instruction.

Keywords: *perception, cultural content, English textbooks*

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INTRODUCTION

Culture represents the identity of one or more communities, characterized by aspects such as language, cuisine, beliefs, clothing, lifestyle, beverages, and ways of thinking. It encompasses the ideas, customs, skills, and arts, along with material objects that influence daily life (Kuprikov, 2022), as well as intellectual, spiritual, and social norms, and individual behaviors (Boruah, 2020), and reflecting human creativity and social organization (Makhmudova, 2022). Thus, culture is a collective property shared among members of a community and expressed through various forms like rituals, artifacts, and institutions. Cultural content is categorized into two main components: cultural types (the origin of culture) and cultural elements (form of culture). The cultural types include (1) source culture, (2) target culture, (3) international target culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999), and (4) culture-free (Silvia, 2014), while the cultural elements consist of (1) person, (2) practice, (3) product, and (4) perspectives (Moran, 2001; Yuen, 2011). Simply, culture is a shared system reflecting the identity of a community through its beliefs, practices, artifacts, and ways of thinking, encompassing both cultural types (source, target, international, and culture-free) and cultural elements (persons, practices, products, and perspectives).

Source culture refers to the culture that represents learners' own background, in this case, the culture of Indonesian learners, such as *Gordang Sambilan*, *Sampuraga*, *mudik*, *Borobudur*, and *gudeg*. Target culture refers to the culture of countries where the target language (English) is spoken as a first language, such as *Hollywood*, *Thanksgiving Day*, or *Big Ben*. International target culture encompasses cultures that originate from countries other than the source (Indonesian) or target (English-speaking) ones, for instance, *kimono*, *anime*, and the *Sapporo Snow Festival* from Japan; *kebab* from Turkey; and *sari* and *Bollywood* from India (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Meanwhile, culture-free refers to cultural aspects that are not tied to any specific nation or community (Silvia, 2014), such as *shoes*, *television*, or *the internet*. However, once an item or concept is associated with a particular country or community, it becomes part of that culture, for example, the *kimono* cannot be considered culture-free *dress* because it is distinctly identified with Japanese culture. This study examines the ways in which cultural contents are presented in English educational textbooks and investigates how respondents perceive these cultural contents within the context of English textbooks they use.

Previous studies had revealed cultural content in English language learning. A study conducted by Seftika, Janah, and Syaputri (2017) emphasized the study on local culture for Teaching English, especially inserting culture of Lampungnese, Javanese, Sundanese, Padangnese, and Palembangnese. Another study by Rizal (2012) emphasized potential of culture to enhance writing skill, especially creative writing. Moreover, incorporating local culture, such as Sentani culture, can strengthen students' knowledge on English and Papua's cultural heritage (Yektiningtyas & Modouw, 2017). Furthermore, Anggraini and Rohmah (2024)

examined cultural representation within two points namely source culture (Indonesian culture) and target culture (English culture).

These previous research are different from the current study in terms of theories as the main focus. This study employs theory of origin of culture (cultural types), and theory of the form of culture (cultural elements). However, there are similarities in the focus of source culture and target culture. The selection of the English textbooks *When English Rings a Bell* (for Grades VII and VIII) and *Think Globally, Act Locally* (for Grade IX) is considered based on key pedagogical and contextual points. These textbooks exhibit a strong integration of cultural content, with a particular emphasis on Indonesian source culture complemented by elements of target and international cultures, thereby fostering users' intercultural competence and contextualized language use. The textbooks are systematically structured, learner-centered, and aligned with national curriculum standards, enhancing their pedagogical relevance and support for autonomous learning. The materials are also presented in a clear and accessible format, facilitating users' comprehension and engagement with both linguistic and cultural content embedded in texts, visuals, and activities. Moreover, as government-endorsed publications, these textbooks are extensively utilized across Indonesian schools, ensuring their representativeness, relevance, and wide applicability within the national educational landscape. Therefore, this study focused on two points: (1) the cultural contents represented in three English educational textbooks, (2) the perceptions of respondents about the cultural content in the English educational textbooks.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research approach with a mixed-method analysis. Qualitative approach employs words to describe a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Similarly, Emzir (2015) explains that descriptive qualitative research provide a comprehensive and narrative representation of the object being studied. This approach was chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration and description of cultural representations found within written texts and images in the English textbooks.

For this study, the descriptive qualitative method was applied to analyze the cultural content in the English textbooks consisting of cultural types (the origin of culture) and cultural elements (the forms of culture) present in three English educational textbooks used in Indonesian educational institutions: first, *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VII (Wachidah, Gunawan, & Khatimah, 2014), second, *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VIII (Wachidah & Gunawan, 2014), and third, *Think Globally, Act Locally* for Grade IX (Wachidah & Gunawan, 2015). The analysis was guided by two theoretical frameworks: (1) cultural types (the origin of culture) based on Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and Silvia (2014), which include source culture, target culture, international target culture, and culture-free; and (2) cultural elements (the form of culture) based on Yuen (2011), encompassing product, practice, perspective, and person.

Furthermore, this study sought to investigate the perceptions of respondents who are actively involved in academic environments regarding the role of cultural content in English textbooks. To collect qualitative data, the

researcher conducted semi-structured interviews focusing on how culture influences English language learning. Prior to their use, the interview questions were carefully reviewed, validated, and revised with the help of experts to ensure clarity and relevance, which included making several adjustments such as adding, modifying, or removing certain items.

The respondent selection was conducted by applying *quota sampling*. From 6 academic settings, there were 3 respondents selected for representing each academic site, and they are considered as users of English educational textbooks. Total 18 respondents involved in this study. Respondent were selected after having met characteristics as follows: 1) having engaged with a minimum of 2 years in English academic setting, 2) possessed experience of using and reading the English textbook of *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VII, *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VIII, and *Think Globally, Act Locally* for Grade IX.

After conducting the interviews, the obtained data were systematically analyzed by using Braun and Clarke thematic analysis consisting of six-phase procedure: data familiarization, generating initial code, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes, and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Trustworthiness in thematic analysis was applied through four key criteria based on Lincoln and Guba's framework: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The analysis process followed the stages outlined in the research design, with the data categorized into specific themes that aligned with the study's objectives. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how respondents perceived the cultural aspects presented in English textbooks and their significance in the learning process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion of the data analysis were organized around the two points of research. First section focuses on cultural contents consisting of cultural types and cultural elements, and the second section deliberates respondents' perspectives on cultural contents in the English educational textbooks they used.

1. Cultural Contents in English Educational Textbooks Cultural Types (The Origin of Culture)

One of the findings identified as source culture in the textbooks was an image of restaurant Padang or *Rumah Makan Padang*. It is a well-known restaurant in Indonesia since it published in an advertisement in newspaper *Pemandangan*, Batavia in 1937. B. Ismail Naim, an immigrant from Minang, West Sumatera province who founded the restaurant offers Padangnese menu in Cirebon, West Java. He named his restaurant in Cirebon: *Padangsch-Restaurant "Gontjang-Lidah"*. Recently, *Rumah Makan Padang* has successfully taken over a large share of market of traditional restaurant and has branches in various regions in Indonesia. This introduced sample will be beneficial to raise community's respect to their own culture and stimulate nationalism. Moreover, culture free was mentioned in

the textbooks such as daily foods: rice, salty fish, and dishes that are regularly served for meal. The menu is not only referring to Indonesian's food, but it is also served as staple food in Malaysia, India, Brunei, China and other countries in Asia. These foods reflect culture of which do not belong to a specific country, but some Asian countries consume them as main foods. This kind of culture will enrich information about the familiarity of main food in their country with other countries.

Target culture in the textbooks was found in several times, one of them is displayed by a song entitled '*I have a dream*' in *When English Rings A Bell Grade VII*, a popular song by Westlife, an all-boy Irish band formed in July 1998 and disbanded in June 2012. The song was created by Benny Andersson/Björn Ulvaeus entitled: '*I Have a Dream*' (displayed in picture in the textbook) which was recorded by PWL Studios, London January 1999 and released on 25 December 1999. Westlife is very popular not only in Ireland and in the UK, but worldwide. The writer includes it into target culture (UK and English speaking countries). That song is appropriate with Cortazzi and Jin (1999)'s theory related to target culture which means culture of the countries where the English is spoken as a first language. The English textbooks also contain international target culture where one of which is a folktale entitled *The Golden Star Fruit Tree* which represented story from Vietnam. This story is not commonly found outside of Vietnamese society. Vietnamese assume that story as a myth, while others assume it as a legend. This culture is useful to be introduced to help an individual who struggles in English acquisition to know other culture outside their country and automatically will raise their respect to people from different culture.

Overall distribution of the findings on cultural types in three English textbooks: *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VII and VIII and *Think Globally, Act Locally* for Grade IX, identified 156 cultural representations. Culture-free (CF) content predominated with 83 occurrences (53.2%), followed by source culture (SC) with 60 appearances (38.5%), while target culture (TC) and international target culture (ITC) appeared minimally, accounting for 6 (3.8%) and 7 occurrences (4.5%), respectively.

Table 1. Findings of Cultural Types in English textbooks

Grade	<i>When English Rings a Bell and Think Globally, Act Locally</i>				total
	Cultural Types				
	SC	TC	ITC	CF	
VII	14	1	1	44	60
VIII	9	1	2	17	29
IX	37	4	4	22	67
total	60	6	7	83	156
%	38,5%	3,8%	4,5%	53,2%	100%

The results of this study regarding cultural types (the origin of culture) show noticeable differences from previous research conducted by Yekhtiningtyas and Modouw (2017), Seftika, Janah, and Syaputri (2017), and Rizal (2012). The

main distinction lies in this study's focus on a wider range of cultural representations, particularly the target culture referring to English native speakers (from the UK and US), the international target culture representing cultures beyond Indonesia, the UK, and the US, as well as culture-free content. This broader categorization allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how diverse cultural dimensions are portrayed in English educational textbooks.

Despite these differences, there is also a point of similarity with earlier studies, especially in the attention given to local or source culture originating from Indonesia. However, while this study examined all aspects of Indonesian cultural representation found in the textbooks, previous research concentrated more on specific regional cultures, such as cultural aspect of Lampungnese, Javanese, Sundanese, Padangnese, Palembangnese (Seftika, Janah, & Syaputri (2017), and Sentani communities from Papua (Yektingtyas & Modouw, 2017). Although earlier research addressed the source culture (Anggraini & Rohmah, 2024), its representation was considerably smaller compared to the target culture, creating a challenge for readers to develop a broader understanding of global cultural awareness in learning English.

Moreover, previous studies have also similarities in terms of cultural imbalance representation in textbooks which emphasize textbooks function as cultural artifacts carrying ideological values and therefore play an important role in shaping learners' intercultural communicative competence (Cheng & Sun, 2026) unequal cultural representation in both locally developed and internationally distributed textbooks (Mahbub, Basthomi, Suryati, & ElKhoiri, 2024). In contrast, the findings differ from Promwatcharanon (2025), whose study revealed stronger representation of non-native English-speaking contexts and greater exposure to global cultures in ELT materials. This finding is also in alignment with previous studies by Tajeddin, Saeedi, and Khanlarzadeh (2024), who emphasized that English teachers' intercultural instructional practices require collaborative reflection to enhance learners' intercultural competence.

The implication of the dominance of culture-free and source culture content in the analyzed textbooks may stem from pedagogical, sociocultural, and institutional considerations within English language education in Indonesia. First, textbook developers may prioritize culturally neutral materials to ensure accessibility, inclusiveness, and ease of comprehension for learners from diverse educational backgrounds. By minimizing culturally specific references, the materials become more adaptable to local classroom contexts and reduce the possibility of cultural misunderstanding or bias.

Second, the substantial inclusion of source culture appears to reflect an educational intention to preserve learners' national identity and promote local cultural values within the process of learning English. This orientation aligns with the broader objective of integrating character education and cultural preservation into the national curriculum. However, the limited representation of target and international cultures may also indicate a cautious approach toward foreign cultural influence, as well as a greater emphasis on linguistic competence rather than intercultural competence. Consequently, the textbooks tend to present English primarily as an academic subject rather than as a global means of intercultural communication. This imbalance potentially restricts learners'

opportunities to develop cultural awareness, pragmatic understanding, and adaptability in authentic cross-cultural interactions, which are increasingly important in the context of English as an international language.

However, from the perspective of English as an International Language (EIL), this dominant focus namely culture free may limit learners' opportunities to interact with the broader sociocultural diversity in which English functions globally. Zeng and Yang (2024) argue that the hegemony of English in cultural, educational, and technological domains has transformed English into a global communicative resource that transcends native-speaker boundaries (Zeng & Yang, 2024). In this context, English pedagogy should not merely emphasize grammatical competence or culturally neutral content, but also develop learners' intercultural communicative competence through exposure to diverse global perspectives. Similarly, Galloway (2024) highlights that English is increasingly used within multilingual and globalized environments where communication commonly occurs among non-native speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Galloway, 2024). Therefore, the limited representation of international target cultures in the textbooks potentially restricts learners' awareness of English as a pluralistic and intercultural language used beyond inner-circle English-speaking countries.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that English language education in Indonesia continues to negotiate between preserving local cultural identity and responding to global educational demands. The dominance of culture-free content may reflect institutional attempts to provide universally accessible and culturally safe materials for learners from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, Loor, Aguayo, Loor, Cevallos, Medranda, and Moreira (2024) strengthened that the spread of English has created diverse sociolinguistic contexts in which English functions as a first, second, or foreign language. Consequently, English textbooks should represent this diversity by incorporating wider intercultural content and multiple English-speaking contexts to prepare learners for authentic global communication. In addition, Alam (2023) emphasizes that divergent national policies regarding English significantly influence public acceptance of English and access to educational opportunities in non-English-speaking countries. The limited inclusion of target and international cultures in the textbooks may therefore reflect cautious educational policies that seek to minimize foreign cultural influence while preserving local values. However, such an orientation may inadvertently reduce learners' readiness to participate in international academic, technological, and professional environments where intercultural flexibility and global awareness are increasingly essential. Thus, English as international language-oriented pedagogy requires a more balanced integration of source, target, and international cultures to foster learners' intercultural sensitivity, global communicative competence, and ability to navigate multilingual realities in contemporary society.

From the perspective of Byram (1997), intercultural communicative competence refers to learners' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which requires exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, the limited presence of target culture and international target culture in the textbooks suggests that readers may have insufficient opportunities to develop broader intercultural

awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and communication skills needed for intercultural communicative competence development.

Cultural Elements (The Forms of Culture)

The textbooks clearly displayed person as cultural elements, for instance by displaying a picture of Sukarno and Hatta in English textbook *When English Rings A Bell Grade VII*. Both are national figures of Indonesia who proclaimed the independence of Indonesia on August 17th, 1945 in Jakarta. Their roles, struggles, and contributions for Indonesia are admitted and written in the national history of Indonesia. In addition, *When English Rings A Bell Grade VII* also mentioned R.A Kartini (Raden Ajeng Kartini) as person based-culture. She is a public figure and national heroin of Indonesia. She was born in 1879 in Jepara and died in 1904 in Rembang. She fought for girls' and woman's right of Indonesia for education, aspiration and emansipation. She is wellknown by her legendary letters which declared for education and equality for girls and woman in many sectors. The minister of Culture and Religion of Colonial Goverment of Dutch J.H Abendanon collected those letters and published in a single book in 1911 entitled: *Door Duisternis Tot Licht* and translated by Armijn Pane in 1922 into Bahasa Indonesia version: '*Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang*'. This cultural element is appropriate with Yuen's theory (2011) about person who inspiring and famous individual.

The textbooks also contain cultural element-product. One finding was a picture of marriage invitation in *When English Rings A Bell Grade VIII*. It is classified as product because it is used to inform the couples of bride will celebrate their marriage. In Indonesia and also in other countries such invitation is commonly used by the society. This sample is appropriate with Yuen's theory (2011) related to product which means human creation. This cultural element is also useful to help readers to be aware of their product, not only marriage invitation, but also maybe historical sites like *Borobudur temple, museum*, or even simple daily stuff such as bag, teapot, etc. Moreover, English textbook also provides perspective-cultural elements. The findings show local perspective on the folklore of Mount Tangkuban Perahu in West Java. This sample is appropriate with Yuen's theory (2011) related to perspective which relates to myth, superstition, inspiration, way of thinking, etc. Way of thinking people who live in West Java and specifically in Bandung is different from other provinces. For instance, *Dayang Sumbi* is common in West Java and Bandung, others believe in *Malin Kundang* in West Sumatera, meanwhile in North Sumatera people believe in Toba and his son Samosir.

The English textbooks also contain practice as cultural elements. Finding shows the expression to congratulate someone's achievement, it is displayed in English textbook *Think Globally, Act Locally Grade IX*. It always naturally happens when someone wins a match, or got high score in a certain test like national test, final exam, or TOEFL, ILETS tests etc, his or her friend or people around him/her will congratulate on his/her achievement. Even in daily life when someone gets married, wins a lottery, contest or competition, people around him/her will congratulate him/her. This cultural element specifically practice is also important to teach to readers. There are many other local practices need to teach to readers such as greeting elder people politely, traditional play, traditional ritual like

selamatan, suroan, yasinan, etc. For English native speakers, one will say ‘*have a nice dream*’ to son or daughter who is going to bed. In different occasion, one will say ‘*good night*’ indicating to take leave meanwhile to meet, one will say ‘*good evening*’. The situation of taking leave after seeing someone is also slightly similar with Indonesian culture where people will say ‘*see you*’ replied ‘*see you later, take care*’. Expression ‘*take care*’ is quite commonly used among both English native speakers and Indonesian. Indonesians express ‘*hati-hati ya*’ or ‘*hati-hati di jalan*’ in Bahasa Indonesia. This sample appropriate with Yuen (2011)’s theory about practice which is related to daily habits. This kind of culture is important to introduce to readers in order they can behave properly and appropriately when they interact to their friends, elder people, family and people around them.

The overall results of the analysis of cultural elements in the English educational textbooks *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VII and VIII and *Think Globally, Act Locally* for Grade IX reveal a total of 156 cultural elements, comprising 107 (68.5%) instances of product, 43 (27.5%) of practice, 2 (1.3%) of perspective, and 4 (2.5%) of person.

Table 2. Findings of Cultural Elements in English textbooks

Grade	<i>When English Rings a Bell and Think Globally, Act Locally</i>				total
	Cultural Elements				
	Prod	Pract	Persp	Persn	
VII	37	20	-	3	60
VIII	21	8	-	-	29
IX	49	15	2	1	67
total	107	43	2	4	156
%	68,5%	27,5%	1,3%	2,5%	99,8%

In terms of distribution findings of cultural element, the predominance of product-oriented cultural elements in the analyzed English textbooks may be attributed to the pedagogical tendency of curriculum developers and textbook authors to prioritize tangible, observable, and easily contextualized representations of culture, such as food, clothing, landmarks, traditional objects, and other material artifacts, which are considered more accessible for language learners at the secondary education level. In contrast, cultural dimensions such as perspectives and persons are significantly underrepresented because these aspects require deeper critical engagement with values, beliefs, ideologies, and individual sociocultural identities, which are often perceived as more abstract, sensitive, and cognitively demanding for learners. Furthermore, the emphasis on products and practices reflects a conventional approach to cultural instruction in English language teaching, where culture is frequently introduced through visible and descriptive content rather than through interpretative and reflective exploration of underlying cultural meanings. Consequently, the distribution of cultural elements indicates that the textbooks primarily promote surface-level cultural awareness instead of fostering comprehensive intercultural competence and critical cultural understanding.

The dominance of product-oriented cultural elements in the analyzed English textbooks carries significant pedagogical implications for the implementation of English as an International Language (EIL), particularly in fostering learners' intercultural communicative competence within an increasingly globalized and multilingual context. The overwhelming emphasis on cultural products and practices, alongside the minimal representation of perspectives and persons, indicates that cultural learning is primarily confined to observable and descriptive aspects of culture rather than encouraging critical reflection on cultural values, identities, and intercultural understanding. From an EIL perspective, such a tendency may limit students' ability to engage meaningfully with diverse global English users, despite the contemporary role of English as a transnational medium of communication.

In terms of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), the limited representation of perspectives and persons may restrict learners' opportunities to engage with deeper cultural meanings, values, identities, and intercultural interaction. Although cultural products and practices can introduce learners to visible aspects of culture, the imbalance in cultural representation suggests that the textbooks primarily facilitate surface-level cultural exposure rather than comprehensive intercultural understanding. Furthermore, intercultural communicative competence is supposed to have interconnected dimensions such as knowledge, awareness, attitude, and skills (Ertay & Gilanlioglu, 2024; Feng, Abdul Aziz, & Dalib, 2025) all of which can be strengthened through more internationally representative cultural content (Nushi, Aghaei, & Beheshti, 2024).

From the lens of Michael Byram (1997)'s theory on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to findings of cultural elements, the predominance of tangible cultural products and observable practices may provide learners with introductory cultural knowledge; however, the limited inclusion of cultural perspectives and personal representations may constrain students' opportunities to develop deeper intercultural understanding, empathy, and critical cultural awareness. Since ICC requires learners not only to recognize visible cultural artifacts but also to understand the underlying beliefs, values, attitudes, and identities that shape intercultural interaction, the insufficient representation of these dimensions in the textbooks may hinder the cultivation of meaningful intercultural communication skills. Consequently, the findings suggest that the textbooks tend to emphasize surface-level cultural familiarity rather than fostering the interpretative, relational, and reflective competencies necessary for effective communication in culturally diverse English-speaking contexts.

The relationship between findings of cultural types and findings of cultural elements in the English textbooks *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VII and VIII and *Think Globally, Act Locally* for Grade IX demonstrates a strong tendency toward culturally neutral and surface-level cultural representation. The predominance of Culture-Free content, indicates that the textbooks largely present English language materials in contexts that minimize explicit cultural affiliation, thereby emphasizing general communicative functions and universal themes rather than culturally situated interaction. This tendency corresponds closely with the dominance of product-oriented cultural elements such as food, clothing, places, objects, and other observable artifacts are more easily adapted into culturally

neutral instructional contexts without requiring extensive engagement with specific cultural ideologies or social identities. Similarly, the substantial presence of source culture suggests that the textbooks attempt to maintain learners' familiarity with local Indonesian cultural contexts; however, this representation remains primarily descriptive because it is largely manifested through products and practices rather than through deeper cultural perspectives or personal experiences. In contrast, the minimal occurrence of target culture (TC) and international target culture (ITC) reflects the limited exposure provided to learners regarding intercultural diversity and global English-speaking communities. This imbalance is further reinforced by the extremely low representation of perspective and person elements, indicating that the textbooks provide insufficient opportunities for students to critically understand cultural values, beliefs, identities, and interpersonal dimensions of intercultural communication. Consequently, the interaction between cultural types and elements reveals that the textbooks primarily promote surface-level cultural knowledge and functional language learning, while offering limited support for the development of deeper intercultural awareness and communicative competence within diverse global contexts.

2. The Respondents' Perspectives on the Cultural Content in English Educational Textbooks

The semi-structured interviews conducted by involving 18 respondents from six different academic institutions revealed that cultural content holds a vital role in the process of English language acquisition. The respondents, who are actively engaged in educational settings, emphasized that understanding cultural aspects in English textbooks enhances readers and users' ability to grasp linguistic meaning more effectively. This finding underscores the importance of integrating culture into English educational textbooks to make the learning experience more relevant and meaningful.

The results of the interviews highlighted three key insights regarding the cultural contents in English educational textbooks. They are; 1) language used by a certain community is closely inseparable with their cultures; 2) culture provides authentic learning context by giving real-life meaning and situations during acquiring a language; 3) culture helps an individual become more engaged with English vocabulary and expressions by connecting new language concepts to familiar cultural experiences. Together, these points affirm that incorporating cultural content is essential for promoting effective and culturally aware English language learning.

First, language used by a certain community is closely inseparable with their cultures. Culture has a great share in shaping the evolution of language, and language also constructs culture as well. For instance vocabulary development or vocabulary evolution is unavoidably influenced by cultural experiences, indicating that language reflects societal norms and values (Niwanda, Harahap, & Rahmadani, 2024). In addition, the relationship between language and culture works in both directions-cultural shifts shape on an individual' language behavior and communication (Song, 2016), idiomatic expression and communication style (Al-Shawi, 2024), and influence how language is used, while language also affects

cultural expression. This dynamic interplay can be seen in how cultural meanings are embedded and interpreted through language, revealing the mindset and worldview of different cultural groups (Bayramova, 2016). One of the respondents expressed about culture is inseparably with language, and vice versa, voicing:

“Culture is reflected in language. Perhaps, as Indonesian, we use same English. But cultural background will drive us into different use of English itself, just like using vocabulary, pronunciation, accent, tense, or grammar.”

Second, culture provides authentic learning context by giving real-life meaning and situations during acquiring a language. When the topic of language learning comes to a certain traditions, foods, festivals, norms, social interaction, communication style, and even mindset, they do not only memorize the vocabularies or grammar. Instead they practice and enjoy the real-context of how a language concretely used in real life situation. A respondent amplified this during interview, stating:

“When culture is very familiar in our daily conversation, let’s say talk about *Borobudur* or *dodol*, where it is a temple and food all Indonesians know it, then mastering English far much easier”

Following this, cultural materials are far more relevant where strongly advocating the learners’ involvement in language learning (Loewen, Kinshuk, Suhonen, & Chen, 2017), stimulating an individual of engaging meaningful learning that mirror real-life situation (Billett, 2012), and contributing to shape language learning outcomes and intercultural communication (Dong, 2024).

Third, culture helps an individual become more engaged with English vocabulary and expressions by connecting new language concepts to familiar cultural experiences. When English terms are taught using examples, stories, or contexts that relate to readers’ own culture, they can understand and remember them more easily. This connection makes learning more meaningful because readers can relate foreign words to things they already know or experience in their daily lives. This was articulated by a participant as follows.

“By integrating cultural content, the meaning English language is easily predicted because the main topic is familiar, it is culture around us.”

As a result, cultural familiarity not only supports comprehension but also increases readers’ interest, motivation, and confidence in learning English. Subsequently, students are culturally familiar with English vocabularies and able to guess the meaning (Chouaf, 2017), English language learning more relatable and engaging (Prayuda, 2023), improving linguistics fluency in second language learning (Luo, Ren, & Zhang, 2022), maintaining students’ motivation and interest in language learning (Sheridan & Condon, 2020), and constructing their cultural identity (Prasatyo & Amaliah, 2024).

The integration of content analysis and interview findings in the present study demonstrates that culture occupies a fundamental role in English language

learning, both as a linguistic context and as a pedagogical medium for meaningful communication. The content analysis align closely with the interview results, which emphasized that language is inherently inseparable from the culture of the community that uses it, highlighting the interdependent relationship between linguistic competence and cultural understanding. Furthermore, the interview participants asserted that culture provides authentic learning contexts by presenting real-life meanings and communicative situations that facilitate language acquisition, suggesting that the predominance of culture-free and product-oriented content may support basic contextual understanding but may not sufficiently expose learners to deeper intercultural dimensions. In addition, the participants explained that cultural familiarity enhances learners' engagement with English vocabulary and expressions because new linguistic concepts become more meaningful when connected to recognizable cultural experiences.

Consequently, the relationship between the content analysis on English textbooks and the interview findings indicates that although the textbooks attempt to contextualize English learning through accessible cultural representations, the limited inclusion of perspectives, persons, and international cultural dimensions may restrict learners' opportunities to develop comprehensive intercultural communicative competence and critical cultural awareness within increasingly globalized English language use.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses two main points, firstly, it focuses on identifying the total occurrences of cultural contents across three English educational textbooks: *When English Rings a Bell* for Grades VII and VIII, and *Think Globally, Act Locally* for Grade IX. Based on the findings of cultural types (the origin of culture), the results of analysis revealed 156 appearances in total, comprising 60 appearances of source culture (38.5%), 6 of target culture (3.8%), 7 of international target culture (4.5%), and 83 of culture-free content (53.2%). Moreover, the analysis of cultural elements (the forms of culture) in the English textbooks *When English Rings a Bell* (Grades VII and VIII) and *Think Globally, Act Locally* (Grade IX) identified a total of 156 cultural elements. Of these, 107 were categorized as product (68.5%), 43 as practice (27.5%), 2 as perspective (1.3%), and 4 as person (2.5%). These results indicate that the textbooks place a stronger emphasis on culture-free and source culture materials, suggesting the need for a greater inclusion of target culture and international target culture to achieve better cultural balance.

Based on the findings, more specific recommendations can be proposed to achieve a more balanced cultural representation in English textbooks. In terms of cultural types, a more proportionate distribution could ideally allocate approximately 25-30% to target culture and 20-25% to international target culture, while reducing culture-free content to around 30-35% to ensure learners are sufficiently exposed to authentic and diverse cultural contexts. Source culture may be maintained at a similar level (around 30-35%) to preserve local identity without dominating the overall representation.

In regard to cultural elements, the data suggest a need to significantly increase the representation of underrepresented categories, particularly perspectives (currently 1.3%) and persons (currently 2.5%), which are essential for developing deeper intercultural understanding and human-centered cultural

awareness. These could be strengthened to at least 10-15% each by incorporating more values, beliefs, worldviews, and real-life cultural figures from both target and international contexts. Additionally, product-dominated content (68.5%) could be moderately reduced in favor of more practice-and perspective-oriented materials to promote not only recognition of cultural artifacts but also critical engagement with cultural meanings and behaviors.

Secondly, the result of semi-structure interview unmasked that respondents perceived that cultural content in English educational textbooks has crucial role for readers in English language acquisition process. Their perception of the role of culture in language learning summarized into three main points, 1) language used by a certain community is closely inseparable with their cultures; 2) culture provides authentic learning context by giving real-life meaning and situations during acquiring a language, 3) culture helps an individual become more engaged with English vocabulary and expressions by connecting new language concepts to familiar cultural experiences.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that language and culture are inseparable in English language teaching, as reflected in sociocultural and intercultural language learning theories. The findings support the notion that cultural content in textbooks functions not only as contextual support for language input but also as a medium for developing intercultural awareness and communicative competence.

The limitation of this study lies in its relatively narrow sample scope, as the analysis is restricted to only three English textbooks and it may not fully represent the diversity of cultural content found across other English textbooks or learning resources used in different regions or educational contexts. In addition, the study focuses primarily on textbook content and selected respondent perceptions, which may not capture the broader range of users, interpretations in real instructional settings. Therefore, future research with a larger and more varied sample of textbooks, respondents, and learning environments is needed to provide a more comprehensive and representative understanding of cultural representation in English language education.

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