

CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN COMMERCIAL AND GOVERNMENT- ISSUED EFL TEXTBOOKS

Komariyah¹, Dzulfikri², Hamiddin³

^{1,2,3}English Education Department, Universitas Islam Malang, Indonesia

Email:¹22201073018@unisma.ac.id

Abstract: *This study investigated cultural representations in two English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks used under the Merdeka Curriculum, namely Bahasa Inggris Life Today (BILT) and Pathway to English 3 (PTE). The study aimed to identify the cultural elements represented in both textbooks and to examine the similarities and differences in their cultural representations. This study employed a qualitative content analysis design. The data were collected from reading texts, listening activities, speaking activities, and language exercises in the two textbooks. The analysis was conducted using Yuen's (2011) cultural framework, consisting of Product, Person, Practice, and Perspective, and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) cultural categories, namely source culture, target culture, and international culture. The findings revealed that both textbooks contained all four cultural elements and three cultural categories. However, different patterns of representation were identified. The PTE textbook was dominated by Product representations, particularly literary works, technological innovations, and tourist attractions. In contrast, the BILT textbook contained more Practice and Perspective representations related to community activities, sustainable development, cooperation, and cultural values. The findings also showed that source culture was dominant in BILT, while target culture was the most frequently represented category in PTE. Although both textbooks included international culture, its representation was relatively limited. Overall, the study concludes that the government-issued and commercial textbooks represent culture in different ways. BILT emphasizes local culture, social practices, and cultural values, whereas PTE provides greater exposure to cultural products and cultural content from English-speaking countries.*

Keywords: *cultural representation, EFL textbooks, government-issued textbook, commercial textbook, Yuen's framework*

INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are closely connected because language reflects people's beliefs, values, and ways of life (Baleghizadeh & Shayesteh, 2020; Gurney & Demuro, 2024; Howell & Vetter, 1976; Jiang, 2000). Therefore, culture has become an essential component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it helps learners develop language skills while understanding different cultural perspectives (Ji &

Shapii, 2024). Integrating culture into language teaching enables learners to interpret language more accurately, recognize cultural differences, and communicate appropriately in different situations (Purba, 2011). As one of the main learning resources in EFL classrooms, textbooks play an important role in providing language input as well as cultural exposure. They introduce learners to people, places, and social practices that help develop intercultural awareness (Risager, 2021, 2023).

In Indonesia, both government-issued and commercial English textbooks are widely used under the Merdeka Curriculum. These textbooks are expected to help students understand themselves, their communities, and cultural diversity while introducing global perspectives and developing intercultural competence (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022). They are also expected to represent diverse identities and cultural perspectives that support inclusive education (Kuraedah et al., 2023). Since textbooks strongly influence students' understanding of language and culture, examining how culture is represented in English textbooks is important to determine whether they reflect the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Previous studies have examined cultural representation in English textbooks in different contexts. Lu et al. (2022) found that English textbooks in China emphasized cultures from English-speaking countries more than local culture, while Saemee and Nomnia (2021) reported that cultural representation in English textbooks used in Thailand was limited and unevenly distributed. In Indonesia, Kuraedah et al. (2022) found that local culture appeared more frequently than foreign culture in government-endorsed English and Arabic textbooks, whereas Agustina and Kencana (2023) reported that locally produced textbooks emphasized source culture while global textbooks contained more target-culture content. Similarly, Alfaya et al. (2023) found that the *Work in Progress* textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum was dominated by target culture, with limited representation of source and international cultures. Other studies have explored Indonesian EFL textbooks from different perspectives. Syairofi et al. (2022), using Ellis' (2016) Second Language Acquisition framework and Mayring's (2000) qualitative content analysis, reported that *When English Rings a Bell* mainly emphasized language-related aspects while providing limited opportunities for meaningful interaction. Putra et al. (2025), using Nunan's (1999) framework, found that cognitive tasks in *English for Nusantara* were not evenly distributed across different thinking skills. Ariawan et al. (2022), applying Yuen's (2011) cultural framework and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) cultural categories, found that Product and Person were the most dominant cultural elements, whereas source culture appeared more frequently than target and international cultures. Overall, these studies indicate that cultural representation in English textbooks is often unbalanced and varies across educational contexts.

To address this gap, this study compares two Grade XII English textbooks used under the Merdeka Curriculum, namely *Bahasa Inggris Life Today* published by the Ministry of Education and *Pathway to English 3* published by Erlangga (Hardini et al., 2022; Sudarwati et al., 2022). The study applies Yuen's (2011) framework to identify cultural elements and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework to classify cultural

categories. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on a single textbook, this study compares government-issued and commercial textbooks to examine their similarities and differences in cultural representation.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What cultural elements are represented in the *Bahasa Inggris Life Today* and *Pathway to English 3* textbooks?
2. What are the similarities and differences in cultural representation between the government-issued and commercial textbooks?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture

Culture is an essential concept in English language learning because it shapes how people think, communicate, and interact. Rashid et al. (2021) describe culture as the characteristics that distinguish one group from another, including language, religion, customs, food, music, and arts, as well as beliefs and values. Similarly, Moran (2001) views culture as a dynamic way of life reflected in what people create, do, and believe, while Kramsch (1998) explains that culture is expressed through language, behavior, and social interaction. These views show that culture includes both visible and invisible aspects that influence communication and social identity.

The Merdeka Curriculum highlights intercultural competence by encouraging students to appreciate Indonesian and global cultures through English learning (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022). This goal is supported by the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, particularly the *Berkebinekaan Global* dimension, which promotes respect for cultural diversity (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2021). Brown (1987), Jiang (2000), and Kramsch (1998) emphasize that language and culture are inseparable because language carries cultural meanings and identities. Likewise, Kramsch (2013) and Buttjes (1990) argue that language teaching always involves cultural values, making culture an important part of English language learning.

Textbook

Textbooks are one of the main learning resources in language classrooms. UNESCO (2005) describes textbooks as important references for teachers and students, while McKay (2006) explains that they provide language input, examples, activities, and cultural information. Risager (2021, 2023) also notes that textbooks introduce learners to people, places, and social practices from different cultures. Therefore, textbooks function not only as language resources but also as a medium for developing intercultural awareness.

In language teaching, textbooks help teachers organize instruction and provide systematic learning materials. Mufidah et al. (2022) state that textbooks are often the main source of language exposure in EFL classrooms. Richards (2017) and Widodo

(2018) explain that textbooks support curriculum implementation by providing structured lessons and learning activities. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) also consider textbooks practical tools for classroom instruction. Furthermore, Richards (2001), drawing on Cunningsworth (1995), explains that textbooks present language, provide practice activities, and serve as references for grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Since language and culture are closely connected, textbooks also present cultural meanings through texts and learning activities (Kramsch, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

Cultural Content in English Textbooks

Culture in English textbooks can be examined through different analytical frameworks. Yuen (2011) classifies cultural representation into four elements: Product, Practice, Perspective, and Person. These elements were adapted from the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1996), while Moran (2001) expanded the framework by adding the Person element. Product refers to cultural objects and achievements, Practice to daily activities and traditions, Perspective to beliefs and values, and Person to individuals who represent a particular culture.

Besides identifying cultural elements, cultural content can also be classified according to its origin. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) categorize culture into source culture, target culture, and international culture. Source culture represents learners' own culture, target culture refers to English-speaking countries, and international culture includes cultures from other parts of the world. They argue that balanced representation of these cultural categories helps learners develop intercultural understanding. Therefore, combining Yuen's (2011) and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) frameworks provides a comprehensive way to analyze both the forms and the orientations of culture presented in English textbooks.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a systematic method for examining written materials and interpreting their meanings. Krippendorff (2004) explains that content analysis enables researchers to identify patterns and meanings in texts and other forms of communication. Similarly, Mayring (2000) describes qualitative content analysis as a rule-guided approach that organizes textual data into categories while considering the context in which the texts are produced.

Wallen and Fraenkel (2001) also explain that content analysis is useful for analyzing written and visual materials, including textbooks, because it helps identify recurring themes and messages. In this study, qualitative content analysis is used to examine cultural representation in *Bahasa Inggris Life Today* and *Pathway to English* 3. The analysis applies Yuen's (2011) framework to identify cultural elements and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework to classify cultural categories, allowing a systematic comparison between government-issued and commercial EFL textbooks.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using qualitative content analysis to examine cultural representation in two senior high school EFL textbooks used under the Merdeka Curriculum. Qualitative content analysis provides a systematic and rule-guided way of interpreting written materials (Mayring, 2000). This approach was considered appropriate because it enables the identification and interpretation of cultural elements presented in textbook texts. The study focused on comparing cultural representations in the government-issued *Bahasa Inggris Life Today* textbook and the commercially published *Pathway to English 3*.

The data were collected from two Grade XII English textbooks, namely *Bahasa Inggris Life Today*, published by the Ministry of Education, and *Pathway to English 3*, published by Erlangga. These textbooks were selected because they represent government-issued and commercial teaching materials developed under the same curriculum framework. *Pathway to English 3* has also been evaluated for its suitability for the Merdeka Curriculum (Yumna, 2025). The analysis focused on verbal materials, including reading texts and language exercises, because these components most clearly represent cultural content.

The data collection procedures followed Mayring (2000). First, the researcher identified the units of analysis, consisting of reading passages and language exercises containing potential cultural representations. The textbooks were then read repeatedly to identify relevant cultural references. Text segments related to people, places, traditions, daily activities, beliefs, and other cultural aspects were recorded in a data sheet together with their unit, page number, and brief notes. This procedure ensured that all relevant data were systematically documented before the coding process.

The data were analyzed using deductive coding based on Yuen's (2011) framework of cultural elements (Product, Person, Practice, and Perspective) and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) cultural categories (source, target, and international culture). The coded data were then analyzed following the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), including data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions. To enhance the credibility of the findings, peer debriefing was conducted by asking a peer familiar with textbook analysis to review selected coded data and discuss differences in interpretation, following the recommendation of Lincoln and Guba (1985).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Representation of Cultural Elements in *Bahasa Inggris Life Today* and *Pathway to English 3*

This section presents the cultural elements identified in the *Bahasa Inggris Life Today* (BILT) and *Pathway to English 3* (PTE) textbooks based on Yuen's (2011)

framework, which consists of Product, Person, Practice, and Perspective. The frequency of each cultural element is presented in Table 1

Table 1		
Category	BILT	PTE
Product	8	40
Person	6	15
Practice	16	3
Perspective	14	5
Total	44	63

Note: BILT= Bahasa Inggris Life Today, PTE= Pathway To English

Table 1 shows that both textbooks represent the four cultural elements proposed by Yuen (2011). However, the emphasis differs between the two textbooks. The PTE textbook is dominated by Product representations, whereas Practice and Perspective are more frequently represented in the BILT textbook.

Product

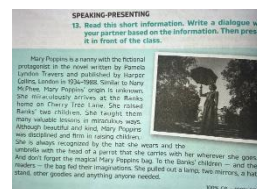
The representation of Product was represented 8 times in the BILT textbook and 40 times in the PTE textbook. The BILT textbook mainly presents products related to renewable energy, technology, and Indonesia's natural heritage, while the PTE textbook emphasizes literary works, technological innovations, and tourist attractions. This finding indicates that the commercial textbook places greater emphasis on tangible cultural products than the government-issued textbook.

Figure 1. Examples of Product representations in the BILT and PTE textbooks

Ricky Elson

One of the Selo electric car designers, is considered as a pioneer of the national electric car. He discovered dozens of electric propulsion motor technologies that have been patented in Japan. In 2011, he initiated a research center which he named Lentera Bumi Nusantara, located in Tasikmalaya Regency, West Java. It moves in various essential industrial sectors based around technology and community development focusing on the enhancing and fulfilling the needs of energy, food, and water.

Source: Santosa / <https://www.studocu.com/indonesia>



(a) BILT: Lentera Bumi Nusantara | (b) PTE: Mary Poppins

Figure 1 illustrates the product representations identified in both textbooks. The BILT textbook presents Indonesian technological innovation through *Lentera Bumi Nusantara*, whereas the PTE textbook introduces *Mary Poppins* as a literary work used in a speaking activity.

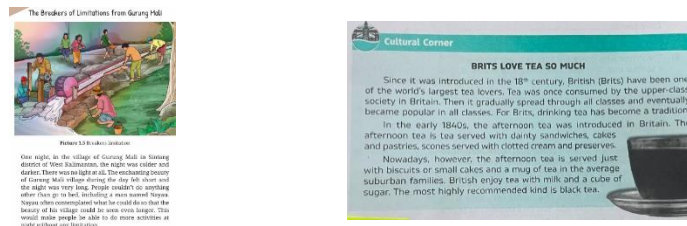
Person

Person was represented 6 times in the BILT textbook and 15 times in the PTE textbook. The BILT textbook mainly introduces local figures whose experiences and contributions benefit their communities, whereas the PTE textbook presents a wider range of nationally and internationally recognized figures from different professional backgrounds. These include Kilion Mangara and Ricky Elson in the BILT textbook, as well as Ed Sheeran, Michelle Yeoh, Jokki Hendra Atmadja, and Justin Bieber in the PTE textbook.

Practice

Practice was represented 16 times in the BILT textbook but only 3 times in the PTE textbook. The BILT textbook mainly presents community cooperation, environmental conservation, and sustainable development, whereas the PTE textbook focuses on everyday cultural traditions. This suggests that the government-issued textbook gives greater attention to social practices than the commercial textbook.

Figure 2. Examples of Practice representations in the BILT and PTE textbooks



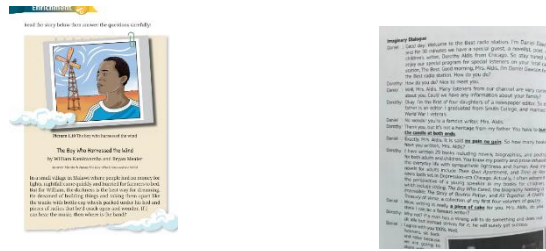
(a) BILT: Gurung Mali Village | (b) PTE: Afternoon tea

Figure 2 shows examples of Practice representations identified in the two textbooks. The BILT textbook highlights community cooperation in developing a micro-hydropower system, whereas the PTE textbook presents the British tradition of afternoon tea as part of everyday life.

Perspective

Perspective was represented 14 times in the BILT textbook and 5 times in the PTE textbook. The BILT textbook emphasizes values related to education, perseverance, creativity, and problem-solving, while the PTE textbook focuses on beliefs about success, determination, and hard work. These findings suggest that the BILT textbook provides broader exposure to cultural values and beliefs than the PTE textbook.

Figure 3. Examples of Perspective representations in the BILT and PTE textbooks



(a) BILT: William Kamkwamba | (b) PTE: No pain, no gain

Figure 3 presents examples of Perspective representations in both textbooks. The BILT textbook emphasizes the value of education and perseverance through the story of William Kamkwamba, whereas the PTE textbook highlights beliefs about success through expressions such as *no pain, no gain*.

Overall, the findings reveal different patterns of cultural representation between the two textbooks. The PTE textbook places greater emphasis on Product, whereas the BILT textbook gives more attention to Practice and Perspective. These differences indicate that the two textbooks present culture in different ways despite being developed under the same curriculum framework.

The dominance of Product in the PTE textbook indicates that culture is mainly introduced through visible cultural products, such as literary works, technological innovations, and tourist attractions. Yuen (2011) classifies these cultural items as Product representations. Similar findings were reported by Saemee and Nomnian (2021), who found that Product was the most frequently represented cultural element in the textbooks they examined. Likewise, Zhang et al. (2024) reported that cultural products received greater attention than other cultural categories. These findings suggest that cultural products remain one of the most common ways of presenting culture in EFL textbooks.

One possible explanation is that commercial textbooks tend to present culture through concrete and observable examples, such as literary works, technology, and tourist attractions, because these are easier to integrate into language learning activities. However, a greater number of Product representations does not necessarily indicate richer cultural learning. While Product representations help students recognize cultural objects, they provide fewer opportunities to understand the beliefs, values, and social practices behind them.

In contrast, the BILT textbook contains more Practice and Perspective representations. Many of these representations are related to community activities, sustainable development, cooperation, problem-solving, and values such as perseverance and creativity. This indicates that culture in the BILT textbook is presented not only through cultural products but also through the way people live and the values they hold. Yuen (2011) argues that culture can be represented through practices and perspectives as well as products. Similarly, Moran (2001) argues that culture includes not only visible products but also the practices and underlying perspectives that shape people's daily lives. A similar finding was reported by Sadeghi and Sepahi (2018), who found that Practice was the most frequently represented cultural element in the EFL textbooks they analyzed.

The stronger representation of Practice and Perspective in the BILT textbook may reflect the educational goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. Rather than presenting culture only as factual information, the textbook presents culture through community activities, real-life issues, and shared values. This suggests that the government-issued textbook reflects the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum by emphasizing cultural values and social practices rather than cultural products alone. This is because the Merdeka Curriculum encourages students not only to learn about culture but also to understand cultural values and apply them in real-life situations. Therefore, although the BILT textbook contains fewer cultural representations than the PTE textbook, its emphasis on Practice and Perspective may better support the development of intercultural competence.

Similarities and Differences in Cultural Representation

Table 2

Category	BILT	PTE
Source Culture	27	17
Target Culture	4	36
International Culture	13	10
Total	44	63

Table 2 presents the distribution of cultural categories in the BILT and PTE textbooks based on Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework. Both textbooks include source, target, and international cultures. However, the dominant cultural category differs between them.

The BILT textbook is dominated by source culture, with 27 representations, followed by international culture (13) and target culture (4). Most source-culture representations relate to Indonesian people, local communities, renewable energy

initiatives, and social issues. International culture is mainly represented through figures and events from countries outside Indonesia and English-speaking countries, whereas target culture appears only occasionally.

In contrast, the PTE textbook is dominated by target culture, with 36 representations. These include famous people, literary works, traditions, and everyday life in English-speaking countries. Source culture appears 17 times and mainly represents Indonesian people and cultural content, while international culture is represented 10 times through figures and cultures from various countries.

Although the two textbooks emphasize different cultural orientations, both include the three cultural categories proposed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). In addition, both textbooks integrate cultural content into various learning activities, including reading, listening, speaking, and writing tasks. The main difference lies in their emphasis. The BILT textbook gives greater attention to Indonesian culture, whereas the PTE textbook provides broader exposure to the target culture.

Overall, the findings reveal different patterns in the cultural categories represented in the two textbooks. The BILT textbook is dominated by source culture, whereas the PTE textbook places greater emphasis on target culture. Although both textbooks also include international culture, this category is represented less frequently than the dominant cultural orientation in each textbook.

The dominance of source culture in the BILT textbook indicates that the textbook places considerable emphasis on cultural content closely related to the Indonesian context, including Indonesian people, local communities, renewable energy initiatives, and social issues. This finding supports Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) argument that source culture helps learners express their own culture through English. Similar findings were reported by Diana (2021), Kuraedah et al. (2022), and Sihombing and Nguyen (2022), all of whom found that local cultural content appeared more frequently than other cultural categories in the textbooks they examined. Taken together, these findings indicate that local culture continues to play an important role in Indonesian English language textbooks. The strong presence of source culture may help learners connect English learning with their own cultural background and strengthen their sense of cultural identity. This also reflects the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages students to value their own cultural identity while developing intercultural competence through English learning.

In contrast, the PTE textbook is dominated by target culture. The textbook frequently presents famous people, literary works, traditions, and aspects of everyday life from English-speaking countries. This indicates that the textbook places greater emphasis on cultural content associated with English-speaking communities. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) explain that target culture provides information about the social and

cultural contexts in which English is traditionally used. Similarly, Risager (2021, 2023) notes that language textbooks often introduce learners to people, places, and social practices from English-speaking contexts. Similar findings were reported by Agustina and Kencana (2023), Alfaya et al. (2023), and Lu et al. (2022), who also found a strong presence of target culture in the textbooks they analyzed. However, most of these studies examined international or globally oriented textbooks, whereas the present study found a similar pattern in a commercial textbook used in the Indonesian context. This suggests that target culture continues to play a prominent role in many English language textbooks. Exposure to target culture may help learners understand the social and cultural contexts in which English is commonly used. However, it may also limit exposure to a wider range of global cultural perspectives if presented too dominantly. Therefore, target culture should be balanced with source and international cultures to support the development of broader intercultural perspectives, as encouraged by the Merdeka Curriculum.

Although both textbooks include source, target, and international culture, one cultural category remains dominant in each textbook. Source culture dominates the BILT textbook, whereas target culture dominates the PTE textbook. In addition, international culture receives less attention in both textbooks. This finding is noteworthy because English is increasingly used as an international language in multicultural settings. Risager (2021, 2023) argues that textbooks can help learners develop intercultural understanding by introducing cultural perspectives from different parts of the world. Therefore, the limited representation of international culture suggests that opportunities for exposing students to a wider range of cultural experiences remain relatively limited in both textbooks. Greater inclusion of international culture could better prepare learners to communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, reflecting the global use of English today.

Overall, the findings suggest that cultural representation is shaped not only by the curriculum but also by how textbook developers interpret the curriculum. Although both textbooks were developed under the Merdeka Curriculum, they reflect different approaches to presenting culture. The government-issued textbook emphasizes cultural practices, perspectives, and local identity, whereas the commercial textbook focuses more on cultural products and target-culture exposure. These findings indicate that the quality of cultural representation may be more important than its quantity. A larger number of cultural representations does not necessarily provide richer cultural learning. Instead, cultural representation appears to be more meaningful when it helps students understand cultural values, social practices, and intercultural awareness, which are key goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study found that both the government-issued *Bahasa Inggris Life Today* (BILT) and the commercial *Pathway to English 3* (PTE) textbooks integrate cultural representation as an important component of English language learning. Both textbooks represent the four cultural elements proposed by Yuen (2011) and the three cultural categories proposed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). However, they differ in their emphasis. The PTE textbook is dominated by Product and target culture, whereas the BILT textbook places greater emphasis on Practice, Perspective, and source culture.

These findings suggest that cultural representation is influenced not only by the curriculum but also by how textbook developers interpret the curriculum. Although both textbooks were developed under the Merdeka Curriculum, they present different cultural orientations that can complement each other in supporting English language learning. Rather than focusing on the quantity of cultural representations, textbook evaluation should pay greater attention to the quality and balance of cultural content. A balanced representation of source, target, and international cultures, together with cultural products, practices, perspectives, and persons, can better support students in developing intercultural competence.

Based on the findings, textbook writers should provide a more balanced representation of source, target, and international cultures while incorporating various cultural elements, particularly practices and perspectives, alongside cultural products. Such a balance can help students develop broader cultural knowledge and intercultural competence.

Teachers are encouraged to complement textbook materials with additional cultural resources and classroom activities to provide students with wider cultural exposure. Future researchers may examine cultural representation in textbooks from different educational levels or curricula and explore how teachers and students respond to cultural content in English language textbooks.

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