

**EXPLORING CULTURAL CONTENT AND EFL TEACHER LOCALIZATION
PRACTICES IN *BAHASA INGGRIS: WORK IN PROGRESS***

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Received:

Reviewed:

Accepted:

Abstract

This study examined cultural content in an EFL textbook, *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress*, and explored an English teacher's localization practices of the textbook. The data were collected through a qualitative document analysis and interview with one high school English teacher. The findings revealed that the textbook heavily emphasizes surface-level cultural elements, while deeper cultures, such as perspectives, appear less frequently. Most of the cultural content focuses on universal and source cultures, with limited representation of target and international cultures. This study also found that the teacher actively localized the textbook by adjusting its content, linguistic features, and pedagogical strategies to bridge gaps between the textbook and students' needs. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this highlights the teacher's role as a cultural mediator who facilitates students' learning within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It is suggested that textbook developers balance cultural dimensions based on students' level. Future researchers are recommended to investigate more varied learning materials and educational settings to better understand cultural content and localization in a broader context.

Keywords: culture, localization, textbook, textbook analysis, sociocultural theory

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, cultural representation in EFL textbooks remains a concern, as the absence of government regulation makes cultural content highly depends on the authors (Ariawan, 2020; Sulistiyo et al., 2021). This situation creates wide variation in how culture is represented across different textbooks. Since language

and culture cannot be separated (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999), the way culture is presented in textbooks plays a crucial role in language learning. Effective language learning requires materials that are culturally relevant to learners. However, many studies have found that textbooks often lack balance between local, target, and international cultures (Parlindungan et al., 2018; Kusumaningrum et al., 2023). To address these limitations, many teachers localize the materials to better align with students' cultural contexts and needs (McGrath, 2016). Investigating both cultural contents in textbooks and teachers' localization practices provides a deeper understanding of how language learning and culture are intertwined in EFL classrooms.

Previous research has explored the topic of cultural content in textbooks, but studies regarding teachers' localization are still limited. Sulistiyo et al. (2021), for example, found that EFL textbooks have a tendency to emphasize target cultures while giving a limited representation of local cultures. Similarly, Parlindungan et al. (2018) found that Indonesian EFL textbooks do not always represent the country's cultural diversity and tend to neglect minority cultures. From a different focus, Hanifa et al. (2024) explored teachers' adaptation of teaching materials to create meaningful learning experiences. In an international context, Sadeghi & Sepahi (2017) analyzed three global textbooks and found that small "c" elements, such as values and beliefs, appear more than big "C" aspects like music, history, and geography. Among these studies, only Toledo-Sandoval (2020) explored both cultural representation and teachers' localization practices and found that incorporating local references helps bridge the gap between students and textbook materials.

Although studies have explored the topic of cultural representation and localization in the EFL context (Sulistiyo et al., 2021; Parlindungan et al., 2018; Hanifa et al., 2024; Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2017; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020), several aspects about the topic need further empirical exploration. In particular, while cultural representation in textbooks has gained attention, there is still limited research on how it is combined with the topic of localization practices. Most prior studies only used content analysis methods (Sulistiyo et al., 2021) or combined with questionnaires (Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2017), with limited attention to how teachers localize the cultural elements. This study is different because it specifically investigates how an Indonesian teacher localizes cultural content in an EFL textbook, a gap that has not yet been addressed in existing research. By combining qualitative content analysis with semi-structured interviews, this study aims to understand how culture is represented in EFL textbooks and how localization occurs in classrooms.

To address these research gaps, this aims to: (1) analyze how cultural elements are represented in the textbook *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress*; and (2) investigate how the teacher localizes the cultural elements in the textbook *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress*. This study uses the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes that learning happens through social interaction and is influenced by cultural context.

From this perspective, textbooks are not only seen as learning resources, but also cultural tools that influence how students engage with the target language. At the same time, teachers play a crucial role in mediating these materials with students' experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Culture

1. *Definition of Culture*

Culture can be understood as a product of civilization, which consists of formal, visible, and tangible culture, such as art, literature, and music, as well as informal and intangible culture, such as beliefs, customs, and values that shape the way people live and interact on daily life (Brody, 2003; Yuen, 2011; Hoa et al., 2024). On the other hand, Pollock (2008) defines culture as a system of everyday human interactions in a real context. From these various definitions, it can be concluded that culture includes tangible formal aspects (Big C) and intangible informal aspects (Small C), all of which shape human interactions and norms in social interactions as a result of human civilization.

2. *Yuen's 4-P Model*

Yuen's (2011) 4-P Model classifies cultural elements into four categories: products, practices, perspectives, and persons. Products refer to tangible and intangible cultural artifacts, such as food, music, paintings, tourist attractions, and oral tales. Practices consist of specific patterns of community behavior, including information about daily life, customs and rituals. Perspectives include the norms and values underlying people's behavior and the worldview of a particular society. Persons refer to both well-known individuals or unknown people from a particular community. However, Yuen (2011) categorizes fictional characters in stories or movies as products, not persons.

3. *The Main Categories of Culture*

Chao (2011) categorizes culture into five types: source/local culture (SC), target culture (TC), international culture (IC), intercultural interaction (ICI), and universality across culture (UC). SC refers to the cultural elements that originate from the country where English is used as a second or foreign language. TC encompasses cultural elements from English-speaking countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Ireland. IC refers to cultural content from various countries across the world, including those in Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia, excluding those classified as SC and TC. ICI focuses on understanding, comparing, and reflecting on cultural similarities and differences between the source and the target/international culture. Lastly, UC involves cultural content that is not tied to any particular country.

B. Textbook

1. Definition of Textbook

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) describes a textbook as "a book that teaches a particular subject and that is used especially in schools and colleges". This definition is further developed by Tomlinson (2011), who describes textbooks as a primary learning resource used by both teachers and students in a language classroom. In the EFL context, textbooks are designed to equip learners with essential knowledge, language skills, and cultural insights about English-speaking countries, preparing them to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Radić-Bojanić & Topalov, 2016). Beyond serving as static sources, textbooks are seen as flexible raw materials for teaching and learning (Garton & Graves, 2014) that teachers can adapt and modify to better meet the needs of their students.

2. The Textbook Classification

Garton & Graves (2014) classify textbooks into 3 categories, namely global textbooks, localized textbooks, and local textbooks. Global textbooks are designed for students from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds, with specific levels of language proficiency and age groups. Localized textbooks are global books that have been localized to align better with students' cultural backgrounds and the curriculum applied in a particular country. Local textbooks are books developed specifically for a particular country or region, which ensures a strong connection between learners' cultural backgrounds and the national curriculum

C. Localization

1. Definition of Localization

Localization refers to modifying textbooks to better reflect local content effectively, compared to only using the original content in the textbook (Richard, 2014). McGrath (2016) adds that localization is an important effort made by teachers to adjust textbooks to match students' cultural and educational contexts. These definitions resonate with Tomlinson (2003), who emphasizes that effective teaching materials must match target learners and their learning environments.

2. Localization Practices

Localized materials, according to Toledo-Sandoval (2020) in an adaptation of the model by Lopez-Barrios & Villanueva de Debat (2014), consist of five main components: contextualization, linguistic contrast, intercultural reflection, facilitation of learning, and others. Contextualization connects the textbook with students' backgrounds and matches with local teaching methods and curriculum; linguistic contrast compares L1 of diverging L2 features at different levels: phonological, morphological, lexical, and textual; intercultural reflection raises awareness of the relation between home and target cultures, focus on learning include features that support students' autonomy, and others include clear or unclear actions teachers performed.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative content analysis design, supported by semi-structured interviews. The data were collected from two sources: (1) cultural elements found in the *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress* textbook for grade X, and (2) interviews with one EFL teacher at a public senior high school in Banyumas, Central Java, who shared her localization practices. The teacher was selected through purposive sampling, which involves intentionally choosing participants who are relevant to the research focus (Andrade, 2021). Cultural elements were first identified directly from the textbook, then interpreted using the 4-P framework and the cultural origins to identify emerging patterns. In addition, the semi-structured interview was guided by an interview protocol designed to focus on localization practices. The data collected were analyzed using Miles et al.'s (2020) interactive model, which consists of four stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

FINDINGS

This section presents two main findings from the research: (1) the cultural elements identified in *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress* through qualitative content analysis, and (2) the teacher's localization practices in using the textbook, explored through semi-structured interview. These findings highlight how cultural content is represented in the material and how it is adapted in real classroom contexts.

1. The Cultural Elements in *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress*

The first research question is asking regarding what cultural elements are represented in the textbook. The detailed result can be seen in table 1 below:

Table 1

Forms cultural element in "Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress"

No	Forms of Cultural Elements	Total Appearances	Proportion (%)
1	Pictures	69	50%
2	Texts	27	19%
3	Activity	43	31%

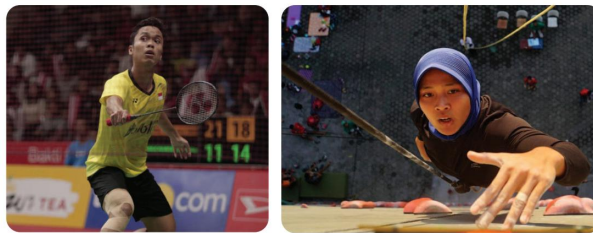
a. Cultural Elements Represented in Pictures

Pictures are the most frequently used cultural elements in the textbook, making up 50% of the overall content. Many images highlight familiar aspects of Indonesian life, such as traditional foods (e.g., es pisang ijo and cendol in Chapter 4), local sports attire like silat uniforms in Chapter 2, and famous Indonesian figures in Chapter 1. Other pictures portray common daily activities, such as exercising, relaxing, and eating junk food as seen in Chapter 3, along with sports like wall climbing and swimming in Chapter 2. Pictures presented activities mostly contain general themes, such

as sleeping, eating healthy foods, and working in front of computers. However, some pictures portray more specific culture. The examples are hockey, which is associated with Canada and considered as target culture, and surfing, which is tied to Hawaii and categorized as international culture, as it does not represent either Indonesian or English-speaking cultures directly.

Figure 1

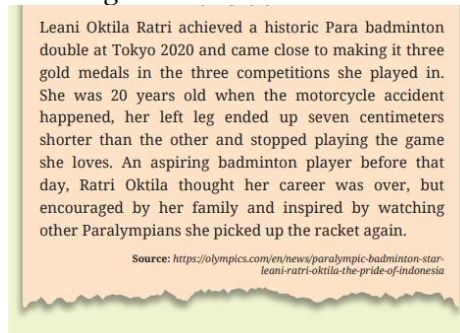
Pictures of famous Indonesian figures



Most pictures highlight surface-level cultural products, such as traditional foods, clothing, and sports. While these images may help students feel connected, without explanation, they only support surface-level understanding. From the view of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), materials should function as cultural tools that support deeper learning. For example, presenting hockey or surfing without context prevents students from internalizing the values behind these activities. This eventually limits the chance for the teacher to facilitate students' learning through their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where culture should be explained and discussed. Without that support, students may understand what people do, but not why they do it. As a result, the pictures remain at the surface-level instead of helping students improve their intercultural understanding.

b. Cultural Elements Represented in Text

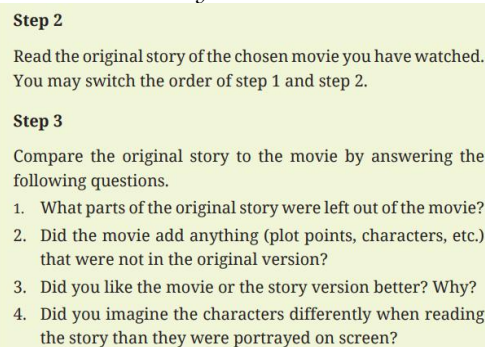
Cultural elements in the text have the fewest occurrences, which is only 19% of the overall elements. The examples are narrative texts "Malin Kundang", "Little Red Riding Hood", and "Hare and Tortoise", which reflect both local and international narratives. In addition, there are also texts in the Enrichment section of each paragraph, such as a biography text "The Paralympic Heroes" which represents general culture (resilience and inspiration), as well as an expository text "My Healthy Meal" which reflects Indonesian culture (Indonesian adolescent nutrition and health). As a whole, the texts come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, with each one highlighting unique perspective.

Figure 2*An example of text containing cultural elements*

Texts in the textbook successfully introduce students to diverse cultural origins, including local, target, and international cultures. The stories also represent perspectives that can support students in understanding how different cultures express values such as obedience or resilience. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), these texts can act as cultural tools that help learners reflect on different worldviews when supported by teacher mediation. However, without background explanations, students may not fully understand the beliefs behind these stories. Since perspectives represent deeper layers of culture, they require interpretation and reflection to be meaningful.

c. Cultural Elements Represented in Activity

The intercultural activities appear the least in the textbook, with only 14 examples: 1 in Chapter 2 and 13 in Chapter 6. These tasks ask students to compare cultures, such as looking at different Paralympic Games or contrasting a modern movie with its original fairy tale. In Chapter 6: Fractured Stories, students are instructed to watch a movie that presents a fractured version of a classic story, then read the original version and reflect on the differences. The questions help them think about what was changed, added, or removed, and how the characters or settings are presented differently. However, this comparative activity is limited in both frequency and distribution, which is mostly found only in Chapter 6. The other chapters contain few references to cross-cultural activity.

Figure 3*An example of intercultural activity*

While these activities represent both international and target cultures and

provide students chances to explore beyond their local backgrounds, the activities are few in number and mainly focus on surface features like storylines or event settings. They rarely guide students to reflect on the deeper cultural values or beliefs behind the differences. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), ICI (intercultural interaction) content should act as a cultural tool that helps students understand and compare cultures more meaningfully. Because the textbook provides limited and shallow ICI content, it misses the opportunity to support critical thinking and deeper learning within students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

2. Teacher's Localization Practices of *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress*

a. Content-Based Localization

One of the key themes that emerged from the interview data is the content-based localization. The teacher modified the cultural elements in the textbook by integrating local stories that are culturally familiar to her students. For example, when encountering international narrative texts, she would replace them with local texts such as Babad Banyumas. She explained that this adjustment helped make learning more relatable, as students were more familiar with local stories than with foreign ones. In her view, starting with local stories helped students understand the content more easily, while global stories could still be used later when necessary.

"If it is about an international fairy tale, like Cinderella or something, we can replace it with a local one. In the case of Banyumas, the example is Babad Banyumas, right."

DS.04-02-25.1

The teacher's decision to replace foreign stories with Babad Banyumas reflects contextualization, one of the key types of localization, which involves adapting materials to align with students' cultural backgrounds and local contexts. Through this, she acted as a mediator who connected students' prior knowledge with new language input. This aligns with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), where teachers help learners internalize new knowledge through meaningful tools and interactions. However, while these efforts helped build students' cultural identity and interest, the limited exposure to broader intercultural content limits the chance for students to have a deeper intercultural learning experience.

b. Linguistic Localization

The second type of localization found in the interview is linguistic localization. This refers to the teacher's effort to make cultural elements in the target language easier to understand for students learning it as a foreign language. To support students in understanding cultural expressions found in social media texts, the teacher added materials that were not covered in the textbook, which is pronunciation. She identified the vocabulary and created

pronunciation materials based on the words in the reading texts. These materials included phonetic symbols and pronunciation models to help students say the words correctly. Her goal was to help students connect the meaning of the words with how they are spoken, especially when the vocabulary came from culturally rich sources like social media posts or public opinions.

"... if we are going to discuss the theme of social media, then we go through the text thoroughly. The target vocabulary must be mastered first before the students read the text. That target vocabulary, in addition to finding the meaning, we also insert the phonetic symbols."

DS.04-02-25.5

By identifying key vocabulary from texts and teaching using phonetic symbols, the teacher applied linguistic contrast, a type of localization that focuses on helping students understand differences between their first language and the target language. This demonstrates her role as a mediator who adjusts learning tools based on students' needs, which aligns with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). In this view, language is not learned in isolation, but through guided interaction, especially when learners are in their Zone of Proximal Development. By preparing vocabulary in advance, the teacher supported students' understanding and gave them a stronger foundation to engage with the text. This practice highlights that linguistic localization is part of making materials more accessible, and it plays an important role in helping students internalize both language and the cultural meaning.

c. Pedagogical Localization

The interview reveals that another type of localization the teacher applied is pedagogical localization. This relates to the adjustments the teacher made in her teaching strategies to improve the learning process based on the students' context. For example, the teacher did not follow the textbook's content in its original format. Instead, she adapted how it was delivered in the classroom by using a genre-based approach. She explained that the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum made it possible for her to adapt the textbook content with this method. For instance, when the learning goal was expressing opinions, she used debate activities supported by discussion texts. This strategy helped the teacher to integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening in a connected and meaningful way. Texts that contain cultural content provide students with a clearer context before engaging in speaking or writing tasks.

"But before they actually do the debate, they first study a text, the type of text that is called a discussion text. So, it is then delivered in the form of a text. That is why we use a genre-based approach."

DS.04-02-25.3

This finding reflects the teacher's effort to apply focus on learning, a type of localization that involves adapting pedagogical strategies to support students' needs and classroom dynamics. Her decision to use a genre-based approach shows a purposeful teaching choice that helps students learn more effectively beyond what is provided in the textbook. From a sociocultural view (Vygotsky, 1978), this localization demonstrates the teacher's role as a mediator who connects students with knowledge through meaningful tools and strategies. The textbook becomes effective only when used in ways that fit the classroom context, and the teacher's method supports this process. Rather than directly asking students to debate, she made the activity more accessible by first prepared them through a discussion text. Overall, it can be understood that localization is not only about changing the content, but also about how the teacher delivers the material to match students' learning needs.

DISCUSSION

1. The Cultural Elements in *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress*

The findings reveal that *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress* emphasizes surface-level cultural elements, particularly products and universal cultural content, while reflective elements such as perspectives, target culture, international culture, and intercultural reflection are limited. This pattern is consistent with previous studies by Kusumaningrum et al. (2023) and Ariawan et al. (2022), which also found that cultural products dominate Indonesian EFL textbooks. Although superficial content, such as foods and places, may help students relate more easily to lessons (Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2017), it may also make cultural learning too shallow. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), textbooks should act as cultural tools that support the internalization of deeper meanings. If cultural content focuses only on visible aspects, students may not explore important values or worldviews. As highlighted by Alfaya et al. (2023) and Ariawan et al. (2022), the lack of perspectives limits students' opportunities to develop critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural awareness.

In terms of cultural origin, the textbook presents an imbalanced distribution. Target culture, international culture, and intercultural interaction are very limited, while universal and source cultures dominate the textbook. This finding differs from earlier studies. Ariawan et al. (2022) and Kusumaningrum et al. (2023) found source culture as the most dominant, Alfaya et al. (2023) reported target culture, and Khoeriah et al. (2024) identified international culture as the most visible. The variation confirms Ariawan's (2020) argument that cultural representation in Indonesian EFL textbooks is inconsistent due to the absence of clear national guidelines. Upper-intermediate students should be exposed more to international and target cultures, with less emphasis on source culture (Alaei et al., 2019). As the textbook does not follow this proportion, it prevents students from fostering their global competence.

2. The Teacher's Localization Practices of *Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress*

The findings show that the teacher implements various localization practices, including content-based, linguistic, and pedagogical, in order to make the textbook more relevant to her students. The most dominant form is contextualization, which aligns with Toledo-Sandoval (2020), where the teacher modified textbook activities based on her classroom realities. This supports Yuen's (2011) view that teachers should take an active role in evaluating and adapting materials instead of using them passively. Even when the teacher does not change the cultural content, she often revises how the material is presented. These findings highlight that localization is not just about changing cultural elements, but also ensuring that materials are relevant to both students' needs and learning objectives. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), this shows the teacher's role as a cultural mediator who helps students as they internalize new cultural knowledge, which shapes how they understand and use the target language.

The teacher seeing the textbook as a "buffet" demonstrates her flexible approach in using the materials, carefully using what suits her students and skipping what does not. This is in line with Hanifa's (2024) findings, where teachers modify materials to improve student comfort and engagement. The teacher's choice to avoid texts that are irrelevant shows the strategies identified by Rathert & Çabaroğlu (2022), where adaptation involves adjusting content to make it more meaningful. The teacher's creative way of using images also shows her active role in adapting the textbook (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). It suggests that localization is not just about changing cultural content, but about understanding what fits the classroom context best (McGrath, 2016). However, the teacher's limited focus on intercultural reflection shows that this part of localization still needs to be improved to support deeper cultural understanding.

CONCLUSION

Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress presents cultural elements through pictures, texts, and activities, with a strong focus on surface-level cultures such as products and universal culture. Even though these materials are engaging for students, they often lack deeper cultural meaning and limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives. According to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), cultural materials should act as tools that support students in internalizing meaningful cultural knowledge. On the other hand, the teacher localized the textbook through content, linguistic, and pedagogical adaptations. She adjusted the cultural elements to better fit her students' needs, showing her role as a mediator in learning. However, these efforts focused mostly on familiar content, students had fewer chances to explore other cultures and build their intercultural skills and global understanding.

The study has limitations as it focuses on one textbook and a single teacher in a specific context. Therefore, future researchers are recommended to investigate the cultural content of textbooks and teachers' localization in various school types, regions, and grade levels. With broader research, researchers can achieve deeper insights into how teachers and materials can better support students' deeper cultural learning.

Furthermore, textbook authors should include cultural elements appropriate for the intended learners. For upper-intermediate students, textbook developers should include a balanced representation of local, target, and international cultures, along with deeper cultural perspectives. On the other hand, to improve cultural learning in EFL classrooms, teachers are encouraged to actively localize textbook materials based on students' cultural backgrounds, language levels, and needs. Teachers are justified in modifying or omitting irrelevant content and supplementing with better content, which can help foster students' critical thinking and cultural awareness.

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