CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN EFL TEXTBOOKS BY INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT: A STUDY OF "*WHEN ENGLISH RINGS A BELL*" IN THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRAK

Teachers' attitudes toward English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks significantly influence their effectiveness in the classroom. This study aims to examine Indonesian teachers' attitudes in using government-provided EFL textbooks, particularly When English Rings a Bell (Rahimi et al., 2012; Amiruddin et al., 2021). However, these textbooks serve as essential resources, teachers often perceive them as supplementary rather than primary teaching materials due to concerns regarding content relevance, cultural representation, and student engagement (Latifah et al., 2023; Esa et al., 2021). There are 50 teachers participate in this study that provide and answer open-ended questionnaire that's reflect teacher attitude on the use of EFL textbooks. A qualitative analyzed through axial, open, and preliminary coding to categorize the data into units of meaning. All teachers tend to modify and complement government textbooks with additional materials to better align with students' needs and classroom realities. After the reduction of the data, the researcher came up with major theme regarding to teachers attitudes in cultural elements represented in EFL textbooks namely When English Rings a Bell in 7th and 8th grade (Nurjanah, 2022; Herlina et al., 2020). Moreover, based on the reflection result shows that the teachers' attitudes are shaped by their agreement with textbook content, teaching flexibility, and cultural integration and express teachers concerns about the textbooks' lack of alignment with students' needs, particularly in developing communicative competence and cultural awareness (Sari, 2023; Nguyen, 2017). The study highlights that while government textbooks aim to promote standardized learning; their effectiveness depends on how well they accommodate cultural diversity, foster intercultural competence, and engages students during learning. During learning process teachers referring on EFL textbooks. The findings suggest that a more teacher-inclusive approach in textbook development could enhance their usability and effectiveness in EFL education. Future research is recommended to explore how teacher feedback can be integrated into the textbook revision process to improve instructional quality and student outcomes and should focus on bridging the gap between curriculum policies and classroom realities to ensure that government textbooks adequately support language acquisition (Rashidi & Meihami, 2016).

Kata kunci: *EFL textbooks, government curriculum, cultural content*

ABSTRAK

Sikap guru terhadap buku teks Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) secara signifikan mempengaruhi keefektifannya di kelas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti sikap guru Indonesia dalam menggunakan buku teks EFL yang disediakan pemerintah, khususnya When English Rings a Bell (Rahimi et al., 2012; Amiruddin et al., 2021). Namun, buku teks ini berfungsi sebagai sumber daya yang penting, guru sering menganggapnya sebagai pelengkap daripada bahan ajar utama karena kekhawatiran terkait relevansi konten, representasi budaya, dan keterlibatan siswa (Latifah et al., 2023; Esa et al., 2021). Ada 50 guru yang berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini yang memberikan dan menjawab kuesioner terbuka yang mencerminkan sikap guru tentang penggunaan buku teks EFL. Analisis kualitatif dilakukan melalui pengodean aksial, terbuka, dan awal untuk mengkategorikan data ke dalam unit-unit makna. Semua guru cenderung memodifikasi dan melengkapi buku teks pemerintah dengan materi tambahan agar lebih sesuai dengan kebutuhan siswa dan realitas kelas. Setelah reduksi data, peneliti menemukan tema utama terkait sikap guru dalam elemen budaya yang direpresentasikan dalam buku teks EFL yaitu When English Rings a Bell di kelas 7 dan 8 (Nurjanah, 2022; Herlina et al., 2020). Selain itu, berdasarkan hasil refleksi menunjukkan bahwa sikap guru dibentuk oleh persetujuan mereka terhadap isi buku teks, fleksibilitas pengajaran, dan integrasi budaya, serta mengekspresikan kekhawatiran guru mengenai kurangnya keselarasan buku teks dengan kebutuhan siswa, terutama dalam mengembangkan kompetensi komunikatif dan kesadaran budaya (Sari, 2023; Nguyen, 2017). Studi ini menyoroti bahwa meskipun buku teks yang diterbitkan pemerintah bertujuan untuk mempromosikan pembelajaran yang terstandardisasi, efektivitasnya bergantung pada seberapa baik buku teks tersebut mengakomodasi keragaman budaya, mendorong kompetensi antarbudaya, dan melibatkan siswa selama pembelajaran. Selama proses pembelajaran, para guru mengacu pada buku teks EFL. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan yang lebih inklusif terhadap guru dalam pengembangan buku teks dapat meningkatkan kegunaan dan keefektifan buku teks tersebut dalam pendidikan EFL. Penelitian di masa depan direkomendasikan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana umpan balik guru dapat diintegrasikan ke dalam proses revisi buku teks untuk meningkatkan kualitas instruksional dan hasil belajar siswa dan harus fokus untuk menjembatani kesenjangan antara kebijakan kurikulum dan realitas di kelas untuk memastikan bahwa buku teks pemerintah secara memadai mendukung pemerolehan bahasa (Rashidi & Meihami, 2016).

Kata kunci: *buku teks EFL, kurikulum pemerintah, konten budaya*

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia has long emphasized the importance of textbooks in formal education. As mandated in regulation number 8 of 2016 by the Ministry (Kemendikbud, 2016), textbooks are deemed essential resources that support learning across all subjects. However, the increasing need for inclusive and culturally diverse content has challenged educators to evaluate and adapt these resources to align better with students' cultural contexts and learning needs. This paper investigates the cultural content embedded in the English textbook *When English Rings a Bell*, examining teachers' experiences and strategies in utilizing it effectively.

Textbooks serve as both linguistic and cultural tools in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), textbooks may reflect three cultural perspectives: source culture, target culture, and international culture. An imbalance in these elements could lead to a culturally biased curriculum. Weninger and Kiss (2013) argue that textbooks must present culture not only as factual information but also through authentic contexts that promote intercultural awareness. Rahimi et al. (2012) and Tuna and Razı (2016) emphasized that the pedagogical effectiveness of EFL materials depends on their cultural appropriateness and relevance to students' lives. Furthermore, Al-Mutairi (2020) found that culturally rich materials enhance students' motivation and engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach involving in-depth interviews with English teachers who utilize "*When English Rings a Bell*" in junior high schools across Indonesia especially in Pekanbaru city. The data collection focused on understanding how teachers perceive and integrate cultural content in their teaching practices. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in the participants' responses

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Culutral content in the textbooks

The analysis of the English textbook *When English Rings a Bell* reveals a predominant emphasis on international cultural references—featuring topics such as Western holidays, global food trends, and foreign celebrities—while only minimally integrating Indonesian cultural elements. Although the inclusion of such global content aligns with the broader aims of preparing students for participation in international discourse, this approach risks creating a pedagogical disconnect, particularly for students in rural or culturally homogeneous areas. In these contexts, the absence of familiar cultural markers in learning materials can lead to alienation, reduced engagement, and a diminished sense of self-worth, as learners may perceive their own culture as inferior or irrelevant within the academic space (Canagarajah, 1999; Kramsch, 1993).

This imbalance in cultural representation highlights a critical issue in EFL material design—namely, the tension between global orientation and local relevance. While global exposure is essential for developing intercultural competence, the marginalization of local culture contradicts the principles of inclusive education and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010). Particularly in Indonesia, a country with immense cultural diversity and strong regional identities, the failure to reflect local cultural content in textbooks undermines the national educational goal of nurturing learners who are globally competent yet rooted in their cultural heritage. Furthermore, according to Yuen (2011), a balanced representation of source, target, and international cultures in EFL textbooks fosters learners' ability to negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries while affirming their own identities. The limited integration of Indonesian cultural content in *When English Rings a Bell* may inadvertently prioritize Western-centric perspectives, reinforcing linguistic and cultural hegemony in language education (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). This could result in what Byram (1997) refers to as "cultural impoverishment"—where learners are linguistically equipped but culturally disoriented.

Therefore, a reevaluation of textbook content is necessary to ensure that it supports both global literacy and cultural rootedness. The inclusion of culturally relevant narratives, local traditions, and community-centered themes would not only affirm students' identities but also enhance comprehension and critical engagement. A more balanced cultural approach would empower learners to appreciate diversity while valuing their own cultural contributions to global conversations.

Teachers' adaptation strategies

To address the cultural limitations identified in the *When English Rings a Bell* textbook, teachers reported adopting supplementary materials as a strategic response to enhance relevance and learner engagement. These materials included local folklore, traditional customs, regional festivals, proverbs, and everyday cultural practices familiar to students. By contextualizing the textbook's general or foreign content with culturally proximate references, educators aimed to bridge the gap between standardized learning materials and students' lived realities. This practice not only enriched the learning experience but also reinforced the sociocultural identity of students, particularly those in rural and ethnically distinct regions of Indonesia.

This adaptive approach aligns closely with the findings of Amiruddin et al. (2021) and Latifah et al. (2023), who highlighted the necessity of integrating contextual and localized cultural elements into English language instruction. Their studies reveal that when learners recognize their own cultural frameworks within classroom content, their affective engagement, motivation, and willingness to communicate in English significantly improve. In this context, the act of supplementing textbook content is not merely a pedagogical workaround, but a form of culturally responsive teaching that validates students' backgrounds while fostering more inclusive classroom discourse.

From a theoretical standpoint, this practice resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which underscores the importance of social and cultural contexts in cognitive development. Learning, in this view, is not an abstract, decontextualized activity but one deeply situated in social interaction and cultural experience. Teachers who integrate local narratives are not only facilitating language acquisition but also enabling students to negotiate meaning through culturally familiar frames, thereby making the learning process more meaningful and authentic (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Moreover, this teacher-led adaptation highlights the significance of instructional flexibility in curriculum implementation. As Rahimi et al. (2012) note, effective language instruction often depends on the extent to which educators can modify or enrich curriculum content to meet specific learner needs. In multicultural contexts like Indonesia, where linguistic and cultural diversity is profound, a one-size-fits-all textbook model is insufficient. Thus, the incorporation of supplementary materials reflects not only pedagogical creativity but also a form of professional agency and cultural advocacy.

Impact on students engagement

Participants observed that students were more engaged when the material reflected familiar cultural references. They noted improvements in participation, curiosity, and willingness to communicate in English when lessons included local cultural content. Participants consistently observed a marked increase in student engagement when instructional materials incorporated familiar cultural references. This heightened engagement was evidenced by improved levels of participation, enhanced curiosity, and greater willingness to communicate in English during classroom activities. Teachers noted that students responded more enthusiastically when content reflected aspects of their everyday lives, local traditions, or national identity, as these elements fostered a sense of relevance and personal connection to the learning process. These findings are supported by previous research indicating that the inclusion of local culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction not only bridges the gap between learners' sociocultural realities and the target language, but also promotes intrinsic motivation (McKay, 2003; Sari, 2023).

Moreover, such cultural alignment allows learners to process linguistic input more meaningfully, as language learning is deeply intertwined with identity formation and social context (Byram, 1997). When students see their own culture valued in educational materials, it cultivates a more inclusive and empowering classroom environment, leading to increased learner confidence and communicative competence (Kirkpatrick, 2007). This observation aligns with the concept of "cultural proximity," wherein familiarity with content enhances cognitive processing and emotional resonance (Kramsch, 1993).

Teacher attitude toward textbooks

Teachers generally perceived the government-issued textbook *When English Rings a Bell* as a functional yet insufficient instructional tool. While it provides foundational linguistic input and structure aligned with national curriculum standards, it often lacks the depth and flexibility required to address the diverse cultural and pedagogical needs found in Indonesian classrooms. This perception resonates with findings by Herlina et al. (2020) and Nurjanah (2022), both of whom highlight a widespread sentiment among educators that standardized textbooks, though useful, cannot fully accommodate the contextual realities of varied school environments, particularly in terms of cultural representation and learner diversity. Many

teachers advocated for increased professional autonomy in selecting and modifying learning materials to suit their students' sociocultural contexts and proficiency levels. This demand aligns with the broader pedagogical discourse that emphasizes the role of teachers as curriculum designers rather than mere implementers (Graves, 2000). Autonomy in material adaptation is seen as essential not only for tailoring content to local values and experiences, but also for fostering pedagogical innovation and responsiveness (Littlejohn, 2011). In contexts like Indonesia, where classrooms often encompass a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, a one-size-fits-all textbook is insufficient to meet learners' holistic development. Moreover, the lack of culturally responsive content in many national textbooks may inadvertently marginalize students whose lived experiences are not reflected in the learning materials. This can lead to disengagement, reduced self-efficacy, and the perception that English learning is disconnected from local identity and relevance (Canagarajah, 2005). Therefore, the call for more culturally nuanced content and greater teacher agency is not merely a matter of instructional preference but a crucial step toward educational equity and effectiveness in multicultural EFL settings.

DISCUSSION

The role of culture in language learning

Language learning is not only a linguistic process but inherently a cultural one, as language both shapes and is shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which it operates. Scholars such as Nguyen (2017) and Nieto (2001) have emphasized that integrating cultural dimensions into language education fosters not only communicative competence but also critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural awareness—skills that are increasingly essential in a globalized and multicultural world. Language becomes meaningful when learners are able to navigate it within real-world, contextually rich frameworks that reflect cultural nuances, values, and perspectives. The findings of the current study affirm this theoretical foundation. Teachers who intentionally infused their English lessons with culture-rich content—drawing from students' own traditions, community practices, and social realities—reported significant improvements in classroom dynamics. These improvements included greater student engagement, more inclusive classroom discussions, and enhanced learner confidence in using English as a tool for self-expression. This observation aligns with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, which posits that effective language instruction must equip learners with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to interpret and interact with both familiar and unfamiliar cultural contexts.

Moreover, cultural content in EFL education provides a platform for learners to question stereotypes, understand multiple viewpoints, and build tolerance—contributing to their development as global citizens (Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). In classrooms where such content was present, teachers observed not only improved academic outcomes but also deeper interpersonal respect and cooperation among students, especially those from diverse backgrounds. In this regard, culture is not simply an added layer to language learning; it is a fundamental dimension that shapes the way learners interpret and engage with the world. These clarify reinforce the argument that an effective EFL curriculum must move beyond teaching grammar and vocabulary in isolation. Instead, it should integrate cultural literacy and intercultural communication skills as core competencies. Doing so not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also cultivates learners who are empathetic, reflective, and capable of engaging

The balance of cultural representation

The textbook's emphasis on international culture may reflect globalization trends, yet it risks marginalizing local cultures. In language learning is not only a linguistic process but inherently a cultural one, as language both shapes and is shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which it operates. Scholars such as Nguyen (2017) and Nieto (2001) have emphasized that integrating cultural dimensions into language education fosters not only communicative competence but also critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural awareness—skills that are increasingly essential in a globalized and multicultural world. Language becomes meaningful when learners are able to navigate it within real-world, contextually rich frameworks that reflect cultural nuances, values, and perspectives. Teachers who intentionally infused their English lessons with culture-rich content—drawing from students' own traditions, community practices, and social realities—reported significant improvements in classroom dynamics. These improvements included greater student engagement, more inclusive classroom discussions, and enhanced learner confidence in using English as a tool for self-expression. This observation aligns with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, which posits that effective language instruction

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Teacher autonomy and professional development

Given the inherent limitations of government-issued textbooks—particularly in terms of cultural inclusivity, contextual flexibility, and pedagogical adaptability—teachers require not only autonomy but also structured institutional support and ongoing professional development. While standardized materials may offer consistency and curriculum alignment, they often fall short in addressing the nuanced needs of heterogeneous classroom settings. As Monera (2020) underscores, teacher agency plays a pivotal role in curriculum implementation, where educators act not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as active interpreters and co-constructors of meaning. This perspective is echoed in the current study, which reveals that teachers who were empowered—through training, reflective practice, or collaborative professional communities—demonstrated a greater capacity to modify and enrich textbook content, particularly in ways that enhanced cultural relevance and student engagement.

Empowering teachers to adapt materials requires more than informal encouragement; it necessitates a systemic shift in how curriculum development and instructional delivery are conceptualized within education policy. Borg (2006) argues that teacher cognition—what teachers know, believe, and think—profoundly influences their classroom decisions. Without adequate training and institutional recognition of their professional judgment, teachers may lack the confidence or tools to critically evaluate and adapt curricular materials. Hence, support mechanisms such as workshops on culturally responsive pedagogy, resource-sharing platforms, and participatory textbook evaluation processes are essential. Furthermore, this study found that teachers who exercised agency in adapting content often went beyond mere supplementation. They recontextualized topics, introduced local narratives, and created dialogic spaces where students could critically reflect on cultural similarities and differences. Such practices align with the notion of "critical language pedagogy" (Norton & Toohey, 2004), which emphasizes the role of language education in empowering learners to challenge dominant discourses and assert their own cultural identities.

Ultimately, the ability of teachers to bridge the gap between standardized resources and localized learning needs hinges on how well the education system cultivates teacher agency. When educators are trusted, supported, and professionally equipped to make pedagogical decisions, they are better positioned to create inclusive and culturally relevant classrooms that resonate with learners' lived experiences.

CONCLUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

CONCLUSSION

The study concludes that while *When English Rings a Bell* serves as a foundational tool for EFL instruction in Indonesia, its effectiveness is contingent on its cultural relevance and the teacher's role in contextualizing its content. Incorporating cultural elements fosters not only language acquisition but also intercultural competence and critical thinking. Future curriculum development should involve teachers in the textbook design process to ensure that learning materials are both culturally and pedagogically aligned with students' needs.

RECOMMENDATION

Conduct further research on the cultural needs of students from diverse regions in Indonesia. To involve educators in the textbook development and review process. Then it is also need to provide professional development programs focused on cultural adaptation of teaching materials. In addition, it is also

important to ensure that textbooks include a balanced representation of local, national, and international cultures.

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