

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Learning a language cannot be separated from learning about its culture. Language is not only used to communicate, but it also shows the values, way of thinking, and identity of the society. Kramsch (1993) explains that language is always connected to culture, and culture helps give meaning to the language. Similarly, Byram (2021) states that the main goal of language education is to develop intercultural communicative competence, which requires understanding and thinking critically about cultural knowledge.

From this perspective, language is not merely a neutral means of communication but reflects the culture of its speakers. According to Risager (2018), language always carries cultural meanings that are shaped by social history and shared values. Words, expressions, and even gestures often reflect the history and social values of the people who use them, and these factors influence how messages are understood. When learners do not understand these cultural aspects, they may misinterpret the real meaning of a conversation, even if their grammar is correct. Therefore, learning English in the classroom should not focus only on grammar and drills, but should also help students understand the cultural meanings and values that are part of the language, as emphasized by Byram and Wagner (2018), who highlight the importance of intercultural awareness in language learning.

To translate this cultural understanding into classroom practice, the role of instructional materials, particularly textbooks, becomes indispensable. Richards

(2015) suggests that textbooks provide a structured framework for language learning, ensuring that students receive consistent linguistic and cultural input. Reinforcing this view, McGrath (2013) emphasizes that textbooks serve as the main medium that helps students understand how language is used in real social and cultural contexts. These materials act as a bridge between the classroom and the real world, presenting various cultural elements, ranging from daily habits to social values that enable students to visualize language within its appropriate environment. Therefore, the way culture is portrayed in these materials is vital, as it determines the extent to which students can successfully navigate cross-cultural interactions in a globalized society.

The urgency of integrating culture into language learning and materials is further amplified by current global and national educational standards. On a global scale, this focus aligns with the OECD (2018) PISA Global Competence framework, which underscores the necessity for students to examine local and global issues through multiple cultural perspectives. Similarly, within the Indonesian context, the Merdeka curriculum underscores the development of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, which includes the dimension of Global Diversity (*Berkebinekaan Global*). This dimension aims to foster students who can engage in intercultural dialogue and respect cultural differences (Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan, 2021). Consequently, English textbooks used in Indonesian schools are now expected to serve as a primary tool in achieving these national goals by providing rich, diverse, and inclusive cultural representations.

However, despite the important role of textbooks in developing cross-cultural understanding, various studies show that not all textbooks are able to present a balanced and in-depth representation of cultural elements (Noorfauzi, 2023; Jismulatif and Putri, 2023). In general, concrete cultural elements such as products (objects, places, cultural artifacts) and persons (famous figures) are more frequently presented than conceptual elements such as practices and perspectives that reflect cultural values and norms. Noorfauzi (2023) found that in the “English for Change” textbook for Grade XI, the elements of persons and products dominated the content, while practices and perspectives appeared only in a small portion. Similarly, Jismulatif and Putri (2023) reported a dominance of products in junior high school English textbooks, with a much greater representation of Indonesian culture.

This issue is also evident in the local teaching context. Based on preliminary observations at SMAN 14 Medan, a similar pattern to previous research findings was identified. An initial analysis of the reading materials in the main textbook used in the teaching and learning process, “Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress” for Senior High School Grade X, shows that cultural content is mainly presented through products and persons, such as famous places, traditional foods, and well-known figures from Indonesia. Meanwhile, deeper cultural elements, such as practices and perspectives that reflect values, beliefs, and social norms, are rarely found. These observations indicate that the cultural representation in the reading materials is still limited and tends to focus on surface-level elements.



Figure 1. 1 Cultural elements representation in reading materials

To analyze these findings systematically, this study applies the cultural elements framework proposed by Yuen (2011). This framework classifies cultural content into four elements: products, persons, practices, and perspectives. By using this framework, the researcher is able to examine how culture is represented in the textbook and identify which elements are dominant and which are underrepresented. Therefore, Yuen's framework serves as the main theoretical foundation for analyzing cultural representation in this study. Through this analysis, the researcher is able to generate meaningful findings related to cultural elements representation in the textbook.

Through this focus, the findings of this study are expected to provide a clearer description of cultural elements representation in the textbook and to contribute to a more informed understanding of how cultural elements are currently presented in English learning materials. The results of this research are also expected to serve as a reference for educators, curriculum developers, and textbook

writers in evaluating and selecting English textbooks that appropriately represent cultural elements in line with curriculum objectives.

1.2 Problem of the Study

Based on the background outlined above, this study aims to address the following research problem: How are cultural elements represented in the “Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress” textbook for tenth-grade students?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the research problem, the objective of this study is: To analyze how cultural elements are represented in the “Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress” textbook for tenth-grade students.

1.4 The Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the reading materials and visual contents in all units of the "Bahasa Inggris Work in Progress" textbook for Grade X, published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The analysis examines how cultural elements are represented in the written and visual content of the textbook using Yuen's (2011) framework, which classifies cultural elements into four elements: Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons. A qualitative descriptive approach with content analysis method is employed to identify and interpret these cultural elements.

1.5 The Significances of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights and significant contributions to the following parties:

1.5.1 Theoretically

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) by providing a deeper understanding of cultural representation in EFL textbooks. Through Yuen's (2011) framework, the findings highlight the importance of balancing both tangible and intangible cultural aspects in textbook design, enriching the theoretical discussion on the relationship between language and culture.

1.5.2 Practically:

- a) For teachers, this paper Provide a deeper and more critical understanding of cultural representation in the Work in Progress textbook. These results can assist teachers in selecting, sorting, and supplementing teaching materials, particularly to promote the Perspectives and Practices dimensions that may be underrepresented, thereby more effectively developing students' Intercultural Communicative Competence.
- b) For textbook writers and curriculum developers, this paper provides concrete empirical data and input on which areas of textbooks require cultural content balancing. This is crucial to ensure that textbooks produced in the future are truly in line with the mandate of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Global Diversity dimension in the Pancasila Student Profile.
- c) For future researchers, the findings may serve as a reference or comparative basis for further studies on cultural representation or intercultural competence in other English textbooks or educational contexts.