

INTEGRATING LOCAL CULTURE IN PRIMARY ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS: A MULTIMODAL ETHNOPEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Integrating local cultural values into language learning materials is crucial for fostering culturally responsive education, especially in primary schools. English textbooks significantly influence young learners' language skills and socio-cultural awareness. However, previous textbook studies mainly focus on linguistic features and often overlook how cultural values are conveyed through multimodal elements. This study aims to analyze the multimodal representation of local cultural values in an Indonesian Grade 4 English textbook from an ethnopedagogical perspective. Using a qualitative document analysis, the study examines various multimodal elements in the textbook, including written texts, dialogues, images, and activities. An ethnopedagogical coding framework with three categories, such as social-cultural values, cultural knowledge, and environmental values, is used for analysis. The results show that local cultural values are expressed through multiple modes, especially visual illustrations and classroom activities that mirror students' daily social experiences. These portrayals emphasize values like respect for elders, family bonds, and community cooperation, which are vital to Indonesian socio-cultural life. Yet, the cultural elements tend to be implicit and limited in some units. The study recommends that future textbook design include more explicit ethnopedagogical components to enhance culturally responsive language learning for young students.

Keywords: ethnopedagogy; multimodal analysis; textbook evaluation; local culture

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INTRODUCTION

English language learning in primary education has become increasingly important in the context of globalization and international communication. In many countries, including Indonesia, English is introduced to young learners to improve communication skills and prepare students for future academic and professional challenges. Besides linguistic competence, English learning is also expected to develop students' intercultural awareness

and social understanding (Karras, 2021). Therefore, language learning materials should not only teach grammar and vocabulary but also support students' cultural identity and social values.

Textbooks, as one of the learning materials, play a central role in shaping students' learning experiences. In primary schools, textbooks often become the main source of language input, classroom activities, and cultural exposure. Through texts, dialogues, images, and tasks, textbooks communicate certain values, beliefs, and social norms. The notion that language and culture are inseparable has been widely emphasized in language education studies (Byram, 1997; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Prihatiningsih et al., 2021). As a result, the cultural content within textbooks significantly influences how young learners understand both their own culture and other cultures. This highlights the importance of culturally responsive teaching materials that connect learning content with students' local realities and experiences.

In Indonesia, local cultural values are closely tied to everyday social practices, including respect for elders, cooperation, politeness, family relationships, and environmental awareness. These values are deeply rooted in Indonesian society and play an important role in character development within educational contexts. Integrating such values into English language teaching materials may help students learn English in more meaningful and contextualized ways because learners can relate the materials to their daily social experiences. This is supported by Hasnah et al. (2024), whose findings indicate that coursebooks containing extensive representations of local culture can enhance students' learning engagement and intercultural literacy, particularly when localized cultural resources are meaningfully incorporated into learning materials. Students are more likely to engage with learning materials that reflect familiar situations, traditions, and social interactions from their own communities. This is in line with Gumartifa et al. (2025), who believe it leads to English literacy enhancement.

Despite the growing importance of culturally responsive education, many English textbook studies still focus primarily on linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, readability, and language functions. Studies investigating cultural representation often examine national identity or foreign cultural dominance, but rarely explore how local cultural values are conveyed through multimodal resources. In modern textbooks, meaning is not only communicated through written language but also through visual images, symbols, colors, layouts, and classroom activities. Indeed, pictures create rich contexts of second language situations and cultural understanding, allowing textbook developers to communicate meanings that may not be explicitly conveyed through linguistic texts alone (Bezemer & Kress, 2010; Petrie, 2003). Therefore, multimodal analysis becomes important in understanding how textbooks construct and communicate cultural meanings.

Furthermore, previous studies have highlighted that visual representation has become a dominant characteristic of contemporary teaching materials, particularly in multimodal ELT textbooks (Derakhshan, 2024; Kiss & Weninger, 2017). The use of visual elements not only supports language comprehension but also enhances learners' understanding of cultural ideas and social realities in foreign language classrooms (Derakhshan, 2021; Kiss & Weninger, 2017). Through images, layouts, and contextual classroom activities, textbooks may implicitly represent local cultural values and socio-cultural practices experienced by learners in their daily lives. However, limited studies specifically investigate how these multimodal elements represent local cultural values from an ethnopedagogical perspective within Indonesian primary English textbooks.

Multimodality refers to the use of multiple semiotic resources to communicate meaning. According to multimodal theory, communication occurs through the interaction of various modes such as language, images, gestures, typography, and spatial arrangement. In educational materials, visual illustrations and activity designs often carry implicit cultural messages that shape students' understanding of social life. (Bezemer & Kress (2008) argue that visual representation has increasingly replaced writing as a dominant mode of meaning-making in contemporary educational materials. Thus, analyzing textbooks from a multimodal perspective can provide deeper insights into how cultural values are represented and transmitted to learners.

Previous studies on ethnopedagogy have primarily focused on classroom practices, character education, digital learning media, and literacy development (Hasanah et al., 2026; Majid & Warman, 2021; Talita & Saputra, 2025). Meanwhile, multimodal textbook studies mostly investigate visual representation and cultural content without specifically examining ethnopedagogical values in English language learning materials (Prihatiningsih et al., 2021). Although local wisdom integration has been widely discussed in educational contexts, limited studies explore how local cultural values are represented through multimodal elements in Indonesian primary English textbooks from an ethnopedagogical perspective.

Therefore, this study offers a multimodal ethnopedagogical analysis of a Grade 4 English textbook to investigate how textual, visual, and activity-based elements construct local cultural meanings for young learners. Ethnopedagogy has increasingly developed as an interdisciplinary educational field emphasizing the integration of local wisdom and cultural values into learning practices (Supriyadi et al., 2023). Through this approach, language learning not only develops students' linguistic competence but also encourages them to recognize, understand, and appreciate local cultural identities through language as a means of cultural expression. As stated by Talita & Saputra (2025), ethnopedagogical learning supports students in valuing local cultures while promoting cultural sustainability within educational contexts.

Since language learning also involves understanding cultural behaviour and social meaning, educational materials play an important role in shaping students' cultural awareness. Observing, interpreting, and explaining cultural behaviour are considered important aspects of intercultural language learning, particularly in materials containing cultural representation (Corbett, 2022). Therefore, the present study aims to examine how local cultural values are represented through multimodal elements in an Indonesian primary English textbook. Specifically, this study investigates the representation of social-cultural values, cultural knowledge, and environmental values through written texts, dialogues, visual illustrations, and classroom activities. The findings are expected to contribute to textbook evaluation studies and provide recommendations for culturally responsive English language teaching materials.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative document analysis using a multimodal social semiotic approach to investigate the representation of ethnopedagogical values in an Indonesian elementary English textbook. The analysis was grounded in the perspective that language textbooks function not only as linguistic learning resources but also as cultural and social vehicles that shape learners' cultural awareness, identity construction, and intercultural understanding (Keles & Yazan, 2020; Wang & Hemchua, 2022).

The study adopted Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal social semiotic framework, which emphasizes that meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes such as written texts, visual images, symbols, layouts, and learning activities (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). In multimodal ELT materials, images and visual representations are considered meaningful semiotic resources rather than decorative elements because cultural messages are often conveyed implicitly through visual and textual interaction (Wang & Hemchua, 2022). Therefore, both textual and visual elements were analyzed simultaneously to examine how ethnopedagogical meanings were represented throughout the textbook.

The analytical framework was also informed by studies on cultural representation, local wisdom integration, and intercultural language teaching in ELT materials. Mustapidaturrohman et al. (2022) and Riadini & Cahyono (2021) have emphasized that textbooks should integrate source culture, local wisdom, and intercultural perspectives to support contextualized language learning and strengthen students' cultural awareness. In addition, local wisdom-based materials are considered effective in helping students connect learning content with their social realities and lived experiences (Laila et al., 2021; Regita Vian Priswanti et al., 2024).

Rather than relying solely on a single cultural categorization model, this study synthesized concepts from ethnopedagogy, local wisdom education, and cultural content analysis to construct the coding framework. The coding framework was developed through the synthesis

of concepts from ethnopedagogy, local wisdom education, and cultural representation studies to identify how local cultural values were represented multimodally within the textbook.

The framework consisted of three major categories: social-cultural values, cultural knowledge, and environmental values. The first category, social-cultural values, included representations related to family relationships, social interaction, cooperation, politeness, respect, and social harmony. As discussed by Awwalia et al. (2024) and Hasibin & Inayah (2021), these aspects reflected ethnopedagogical principles emphasizing collective values and community-oriented learning within Indonesian cultural contexts.

The second category, cultural knowledge, referred to the representation of local traditions, traditional food, occupations, folklore, local identity, and everyday cultural practices. This category was influenced by Keles & Yazan (2020) and Riadini & Cahyono (2021), emphasizing the importance of integrating source culture and local wisdom into English language teaching materials to strengthen intercultural competence and contextualized learning experiences. This category was particularly related to the representation of source culture within English language learning materials as proposed by Cortazzi & Jin (1999).

The third category, environmental values, included representations associated with environmental awareness, cleanliness, natural surroundings, and harmonious relationships between humans and their environment. These values reflected local wisdom perspectives that emphasize social responsibility and environmental care as part of cultural education (Laila et al., 2021).

The units of analysis included written texts, dialogues, images, and activities presented throughout the textbook. The analysis process involved identifying multimodal representations containing ethnopedagogical elements, classifying them into the predetermined categories, and interpreting how textual and visual modes interacted in constructing cultural meanings. To ensure consistency and interpretive reliability, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the textbook content and conducted cross-checking among the coded multimodal data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sociocultural Values

The findings reveal that sociocultural values are strongly represented throughout the textbook, particularly through visual illustrations and everyday activities that portray family interaction, communication, and social behavior. These representations appear in both textual and visual modes, indicating that the textbook not only teaches language structures but also introduces culturally familiar social practices to young learners.

One of the most dominant representations is the family relationship. In Unit 4 “*Cici Cooks in the Kitchen*,” the visual illustration portrays a child participating in domestic activities within a family environment. The multimodal interaction between the written text and the image constructs meanings related to responsibility, family bonding, and everyday household participation. The kitchen setting, household objects, and domestic activities represent familiar social realities commonly experienced by Indonesian children. From an ethnopedagogical perspective, this representation implicitly suggests local socio-cultural values emphasizing family cooperation and children’s involvement in household responsibilities.

The textbook also represents family-oriented daily routines through illustrations showing children watching television, studying at home, and spending time indoors. For example, the image of Joshua watching television every Saturday and Cici and her mother cooking in the kitchen represents family members’ daily social lives within domestic environments. These visual representations function as contextual learning resources because students can easily relate the activities to their own experiences. According to Bezemer & Kress (2010), images in learning materials may communicate meanings that are not always explicitly conveyed through written language alone. In this context, the domestic settings visually communicate cultural values related to family life, routine, and social familiarity.



Cici and her mother cook in the kitchen.

Figure 1. Sociocultural Values

Social interaction is another important value identified in the textbook. In Unit 8 “*Be on Time!*” the textbook introduces communication practices related to punctuality, classroom interaction, and socially appropriate behavior. The verbal expressions and visual illustrations work together to portray respectful communication and social discipline within school settings. These representations reflect Indonesian educational values emphasizing politeness, discipline, and harmonious interpersonal interaction.

The findings indicate that multimodal representations play an important role in constructing social-cultural meanings in the textbook. Through the integration of images, dialogues, and contextual classroom activities, students are exposed to culturally familiar interaction patterns and social practices. This supports ethnopedagogical perspectives, suggesting that learning materials should connect language learning with learners' socio-cultural backgrounds and daily experiences.

Cultural Knowledge

The findings further demonstrate that the textbook represents cultural knowledge through visual depictions of everyday cultural practices, familiar social environments, and local identity markers. Although explicit explanations about Indonesian culture are limited, the textbook implicitly incorporates cultural knowledge through contextualized illustrations and daily-life situations. Nevertheless, the cultural representation in the textbook still tends to focus primarily on localized everyday experiences, while broader intercultural perspectives and more diverse cultural representations remain limited. By presenting cultures inside the textbook, besides increasing literacy, it is expected that the generation will also have a good attitude towards various cultures (Hasyda et al., 2023).



Figure 2. Cultural Knowledge

One example appears in Chapter 1 “*What Are You Doing?*” where children are portrayed performing everyday activities within familiar home and school environments. The visual and textual elements represent routine social practices such as studying, helping at home, and interacting with family members. These multimodal representations help students connect English learning materials with their lived cultural realities. According to Hasnah et al. (2024), localized cultural representations in ELT materials may enhance students' engagement and intercultural literacy because learners are more familiar with the cultural contexts presented in the materials. On the other hand, Ghaffour (2022) argues that culture in language education should be understood as dynamic, heterogeneous, and socially negotiated rather than fixed or nationally homogeneous.

Representations of local occupations and transportation also contribute to cultural knowledge construction. In Unit 11 *“How Do You Go to School?”* and Unit 12 *“He Goes to School by Bike,”* students are introduced to familiar modes of transportation and daily mobility patterns commonly found in Indonesian communities. The illustrations depicting bicycles, pedicabs, neighborhood roads, and school environments reflect local socio-cultural realities rather than foreign contexts often found in global ELT textbooks. These representations support contextualized language learning because students can easily recognize the environments and activities presented.

The textbook also reflects cultural identity through the use of local names, familiar domestic spaces, and socially recognizable settings. Although the textbook does not explicitly discuss ethnicity or traditional identity, the visual representations implicitly construct Indonesian social realities through ordinary daily-life contexts. This finding aligns with Cortazzi & Jin (1999) perspective, emphasizing the importance of incorporating source culture into language learning materials so learners can connect English learning with their own cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the cultural knowledge represented in the textbook tends to focus on ordinary social experiences rather than formal cultural symbols or traditional ceremonies. Instead of presenting culture as static artifacts, the textbook represents culture through students’ everyday routines, activities, and environments. This representation reflects a contextualized and experience-based understanding of culture within primary English learning.

Environmental Values

Environmental values were also identified through multimodal representations related to cleanliness, environmental awareness, and familiar local surroundings. These values appeared through classroom activities, household settings, and visual depictions of organized living environments throughout several textbook units. The textbook depicts environmental values through multimodal elements such as visual illustrations, contextual dialogues, and classroom activities embedded throughout several units.

In Unit 6 *“The Stove is in the Kitchen,”* the textbook presents household vocabulary through illustrations of clean and well-arranged domestic spaces. The visual organization of furniture, kitchen objects, and room layouts implicitly communicates values related to cleanliness and environmental responsibility. Although the verbal text primarily focuses on vocabulary learning, the visual elements simultaneously construct meanings associated with organized living environments and responsible household behavior.

Representations of local environments also appear in several units portraying morning routines, school environments, and neighborhood surroundings. In Unit 10 *“He Always Gets Up at 5 O’Clock,”* visual illustrations depict students’ daily routines within familiar environmental settings. The houses, roads, classrooms, and surrounding spaces reflect socio-geographical environments commonly experienced by Indonesian elementary students. These representations provide contextual support for language learning because students can associate English expressions with recognizable environmental situations.



Figure 3. Environmental Values

The findings show that environmental values are mostly represented implicitly rather than explicitly. Instead of directly teaching environmental education concepts, the textbook embeds environmental awareness within ordinary daily-life activities and visual settings. From an ethnopedagogical perspective, this reflects local wisdom values emphasizing harmonious relationships between individuals and their surrounding environments. Integrating local cultural content into English learning materials can make lessons more

meaningful, accessible, and motivating for young learners because the materials are closer to their social and cultural experiences (Awwalia et al., 2024).

Moreover, the multimodal representations contribute significantly to students' understanding of environmental meaning. The interaction between visual images and textual content allows learners to interpret environmental values contextually rather than abstractly. Wang & Hemchua (2022) argue that visual representation has become a dominant characteristic of multimodal ELT materials because images can effectively communicate cultural and contextual meanings in language learning.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the textbook integrates environmental values through familiar local surroundings and contextualized visual representations. Although the cultural and environmental elements are often presented implicitly, the multimodal design of the textbook helps students connect English learning with their social and environmental realities.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the multimodal representation of local cultural values in an Indonesian Grade 4 English textbook from an ethnopedagogical perspective. The findings demonstrate that local cultural values are represented through written texts, visual illustrations, dialogues, and classroom activities that reflect students' daily socio-cultural experiences. The textbook portrays socio-cultural values, cultural knowledge, and environmental values through familiar contexts closely connected to Indonesian elementary students' social realities and local environments.

The study also reveals that multimodal elements play an important role in constructing cultural meanings within English language learning materials. Visual representations and contextualized classroom activities help students relate English learning to their everyday experiences, making language learning more meaningful and accessible. However, most cultural representations in the textbook tend to be implicit and limited to ordinary daily-life situations, indicating that opportunities for deeper cultural reflection and intercultural understanding remain relatively underdeveloped.

The findings suggest that integrating local culture and local wisdom into primary English textbooks can support culturally responsive learning while strengthening students' engagement and literacy development. Meaningful visual illustrations, relatable social contexts, and contextual activities may enhance students' motivation to learn English because the materials are closely connected to their lived experiences. This finding supports Gumartifa et al. (2025), who emphasize that culturally relevant learning materials contribute positively to literacy development during children's early educational stages. Therefore, future English textbook development should incorporate more explicit ethnopedagogical elements and diverse multimodal cultural representations to support both language learning and cultural awareness in primary education.

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