



# A Semiotic Analysis of Multicultural Values in an English Textbook for a Primary School

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Received: 2023-10-27 Accepted: 2023-12-28

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v11i2.4119

## Abstract

This research aims to discover multicultural values using semiotic analysis in an English textbook. This research is qualitative methodology. The sample of this research is an English textbook under the title "Big English 5" used in a private primary school in Indonesia. The data were gathered by documentation of the signs in texts and pictures in that English textbook and were analyzed by using semiotic analysis used Barthes's theory (1977) by integrating various theories to get the multicultural values represented in the English textbook. The findings showed that the texts and pictures represent each multicultural value covered in Big English 5. In addition, the most frequent multicultural value was found about Appreciate Other People's Cultural Products (**AOPCP**) with eleven items. The other most frequent multicultural value was found about International Cultural (**IC**) with eleven items. The multicultural values represent in the English textbook in pictures and texts consist of the things, places, foods, and traditions. Unfortunately, the Source Culture (**SC**) related to Indonesian culture was found merely two items, even though young learners use that English book at a primary school in Indonesia. In conclusion, the English textbook of Big English 5 contained multicultural values which could support young learners' English language process. However, this English textbook needs to add the content of Indonesian culture as the user of that English textbook. Hence, it could acquaint the Indonesian culture through English learning for young learners earlier. Besides, the

role of English teachers and students becomes necessary to utilize the English textbook appropriately by designing activities that entangle multicultural values and the use of the English language during the learning process.

**Keywords:** *English textbooks; Multicultural values; Semiotic analysis*

## **Introduction**

Living in the pluralism of Indonesia needs to balance understanding to respect each other. According to Sultan et al. (2020), Indonesian people need to respect differences, but in reality, people have problems related to intolerance of different backgrounds, ethnic, and cultures. Besides, there was a conflict between the communities in Indonesia to defend their identity without appreciating others (Pratama et al., 2021). Those problems could solve by embedding multicultural values. People need to learn the values of multicultural to face the diversity in society by appreciating and respecting each other (Yusup & Suryaman, 2021). Teaching multicultural values becomes fundamental for students to enhance their intercultural awareness by understanding their culture and identity (Derakhshan, 2021). There are many ways to learn multicultural values. One way is providing textbooks with multicultural values in striving to share multicultural values in education, particularly in English language teaching and learning.

Students need an English textbook containing multicultural values in the English language learning process. Setyono and Widodo (2019) mentioned that an English textbook with multicultural values could direct students to acquire the language based on cross-cultural understanding. It becomes the reference for teachers and students to discover and understand the language context based on morals, religions, or customs. Lestariyana and Nurkamto (2022) mentioned that utilizing the English textbook with multicultural values could build students' multicultural awareness since language and culture have significant correlations. The cultural materials in English textbooks illuminate students with intercultural understanding since English is an international language (Riadini & Cahyono, 2021). Utilizing English textbooks in a multicultural context could enhance learners' knowledge of language practices (Efron, 2020). Besides, Alsaawi (2021) mentioned that teaching multicultural values through English textbooks provides students with diverse cultural aspects of behaving in a pluralist environment. Hence, the multicultural values in English textbooks for language learners are necessary.

Young learners need to provide tons of multicultural knowledge through a textbook to support them in learning English. Setyono and Widodo (2019) highlight that multicultural values mean respecting the variety of geography and sociocultural; the multicultural values in English textbooks promote students to have cultural awareness. English textbooks containing cultural information could assist students in exploring local and international multicultural values which embed the cultural concept (Dabbagh & Atai, 2022). In addition, Efron (2020) emphasizes that young learners need to facilitate multicultural understanding through an English textbook because they can identify their culture and language and appreciate other cultures. Also, the content of the English textbook is required to present cultural aspects since the English language can learn through cross-cultural concepts through knowledge and values (Xiong et al., 2022). Also,

Fletcher (2022) writes that English textbooks with cultural and multicultural information could establish global citizenship since today's communication connects with intercultural understanding. Hence, English textbooks could prepare young learners through sufficient multicultural comprehension.

In addition, the role of multicultural values in English textbooks benefits young learners. Davidson and Liu (2018) mentioned that utilizing English textbooks with substantial cultural knowledge could construct students' responsibility and open-mindedness in diversity. English textbooks containing cultural context could give students opportunities to increase the English language through collaboration and reflection on cultural representation (Sinaga et al., 2020). In addition, Xiong et al. (2022) write that the relationship between language and culture demands cultural values in English textbooks which could strengthen intercultural competencies based on local and global values. The multicultural English textbook could help students negotiate the language's meaning by participating in communicating with various cultural contexts (Sharifian, 2017). English textbooks with multicultural values become the instruction for English teachers and students in developing language beyond and within cultural values (Pratama et al., 2021). Therefore, it becomes necessary to use English textbooks with deep multicultural values for young learners in English language learning.

At primary school, young learners could learn English by providing English textbooks with multicultural values. Efron (2020) mentioned that young learners furnish English textbooks with multicultural values that could promote their broader understanding of the culture and language. Young learners could learn multicultural values such as customs, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and religion through English textbooks (Herbyanti, 2020). The multicultural values in English textbooks give young learners opportunities to learn cultural cognition as global citizenship that could direct them to exchange cultural knowledge (Davidson & Liu, 2018). Also, using an English textbook containing cultural values could drive students to have intercultural competencies related to language and society (Lestariyana & Nurkamto, 2022). The function of English textbooks with multicultural values could drive students' respect and responsibility to be gratified by their culture and other cultural (Khalisah, 2022). Thus, it becomes essential to discover the multicultural values in English textbooks through semiotic analysis.

Semiotic analysis to discover multicultural values in English textbooks entangles the primary theories, which produce information comprehensively for students. Dabbagh and Atai (2022) mentioned that implementing semiotic analysis to explore the English textbook could establish the comprehension of language and cultural concepts. Language and culture have a connection during the English language process. Barthes (1977) explains that texts and pictures contain explicit meanings; the semiotic analysis gives the steps to understand those meanings by using denotative through actual concept and connotative through figuration concept. Also, Isnaini et al. (2019) mentioned that in semiotic analysis of English textbooks, denotation seeks to explain the picture by who and what questions, while connotation attempts to know values and ideas through picture representation by how questions.

The use of semiotic analysis is to understand the sign and the meaning. According

to Barthes (1977), semiotic analysis is the process of catching the meaning of the signs and the interpretation influenced by cultural aspects. The signs consist of denotative (have actual meaning) and connotative (have different meanings). Also, Nöth (1990) writes that semiotic analysis defines as discovering the system sign of language or codes that determine language features. In addition, the semiotic analysis of multicultural values in English textbooks could embrace several concepts, such as respecting other people's traditions (ROPT), appreciating women's equal rights (AWER), appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP), and appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP) (Isnaini et al., 2019). Also, Husain et al. (2020) write that the semiotic analysis in English textbooks considers the four cultural content. Source culture means the content from the users' books. The content of unspecific culture is neutral. Target culture means native language users, such as the US, UK, and Australia. International culture consists of worldwide content.

There are procedures to get the essence of signs and meaning of texts and pictures related to multicultural in English textbooks through semiotic analysis. Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) pointed out pictures that have the meaning of discovering the social field from semiotic analysis perspectives. The semiotic analysis process entangles visual artefacts through denotative and connotative in discovering the multicultural concept in the English textbook (Khalisah, 2022). The images and text in English textbooks contain multicultural values that can be understood from natural and distinct essence. Weninger and Kiss (2013) write that semiotic analysis to discover the cultural values in English textbooks emphasizes the logical meaning involving dynamic concepts for students to get cultural knowledge. Utilizing the book with cultural-related pictures could deliver the significance of the social concept in comprehending the English language; the semiotic analysis assists in recognizing the sign and meanings (Jam et al., 2021). Semiotic analysis is essential in recognizing the essence of English textbooks with multicultural values.

Discovering multicultural values in English textbooks through semiotic analysis provides sufficient information for students. Weninger and Kiss (2013) pointed out that analyzing the cultural values in English textbooks through semiotics offers potential opportunities for students to acquire the English language by providing linked pictures and text. Semiotic analysis in English textbooks promotes students to comprehend the language through cognitive skills by understanding the sign of pictures (Sovič & Hus, 2016). The function of pictures in English textbooks to present cultural values is not merely an ornament yet emphasizes a figure of cultural meaning through semiotic analysis understanding (Derakhshan, 2021). Semiotic analysis to discover the cultural values in English textbooks could assist teachers and students in obtaining much information about the language and the cultural concept (Husain et al., 2020). Therefore, semiotic analysis in an English textbook becomes necessary to discover multicultural values.

Previous studies discover the multicultural values in English textbooks through semiotic analysis. The study by Isnaini et al. (2019) implemented Barthes's theories in semiotic analysis of multicultural values in an English textbook at a vocational high school. It showed that the book must support students' intercultural understanding. Also, Derakhshan (2021) investigated cultural values in an English textbook at a senior high

school in Iran through semiotic analysis by involving interviews. Then, Sinaga et al. (2020) conducted a semiotic analysis of cultural values in an English textbook for a senior high school student; it indicated that English textbooks need to direct students to have good character and ideology. In line, Husain et al. (2020) present the research related to a semiotic analysis by Pierces in an English textbook at senior high school; it presented that cultural contents were necessary materials. In addition, Khalisah (2022) conducted a semiotic analysis of multicultural values in an English textbook for junior high school; it showed that using that book could encourage students to have various perspectives. Also, Harahap et al. (2022) conducted a study to discover multicultural values in an English textbook at an elementary school through semiotic analysis. The study indicated that the book could give actual learning experiences.

By understanding multicultural values through English textbooks, students could enlarge their understanding of respecting and appreciating other cultural aspects. The new thing teachers, students, and readers could learn are that identifying multicultural values could assist our understanding of diversity in society. In addition, English teachers and students need to facilitate suitable English textbooks covering language materials and multicultural values. Using semiotic analysis to discover the sign in pictures or texts in English textbooks provides the direction to acquaint young learners with recognizing and respecting their culture and other cultural knowledge. Hence, multicultural values in English textbooks could strengthen students' understanding of using English appropriately. In this study, the researchers would like to investigate the multicultural values in an English textbook under the title "Big English 5." used in a private primary school through semiotic analysis of the pictures and texts by embracing several theories. The English textbook is used at one private primary school in Indonesia, but the publisher of the English textbook is not from a local publication. Thus, exploring the multicultural values in that English textbook became interesting, whether it could cover all multicultural information or merely contain certain cultures in the English language materials. This present research formulates the question: "*What are the multicultural values in an English textbook for a primary school?*"

## **Method**

### **3.1 Method and Design of the Research**

This present research used a qualitative methodology to explore the semiotic analysis of multicultural values in an English textbook. Creswell and Creswell (2018) mentioned in the qualitative method that specific procedures are necessary when the data consists of texts or pictures; it involves the research's protocol in collecting and analyzing the data. Also, the researchers used semiotic analysis used Barthes's theory (1977) and several theories related to multicultural values to explore the cultural aspect of the English textbook. Hence, the researchers implemented qualitative and semiotic analysis of multicultural values in an English textbook for primary school.

### **3.2 Place and Time of the Research**

The research process needs a timeline to assist researchers in completing the

research steps. Leedy et al. (2019) mentioned that specific time and place are necessary to fulfill the research needs of data collection and analysis. This present study used the English textbook for the research object, the textbook used at a private primary school. The English textbook was under the title "**Big English 5**" by Herrera and Cruz (2013), with Pearson as the publisher. The research activities started from October 5, 2022, to December 7, 2022. The researchers collected the data from October 10, 2022, to November 2, 2022.

### **3.3 Research Instruments**

The instrument of this study used documentation. It discovers the values of multicultural in an English textbook through semiotic analysis. The researchers used several theories in this study to conduct semiotic analysis and discover multicultural values. The semiotic analysis employs Barthes's theories (1977) related two steps to find out the meaning of the signs in pictures and texts, namely denotative and connotative. Discovering multicultural values embrace two main theories, the first theory from Isnaini et al. (2019) about four multicultural values consisting of respecting other people's traditions (ROPT) about celebration, habits, and norms; appreciating women's equal rights (AWER) about equality role of women and men; appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP) about places, foods, money, things, and native language; and appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP) about everyone point of view. Also, the researchers followed the theory by Husain et al. (2020) about the cultural content consisting of sources (Indonesia), neutral (unspecific), target (US, UK, and Australia), and international cultures (other countries from the target). Those theories were implemented in a semiotic analysis of multicultural values in an English textbook for a primary school.

### **3.4 Technique of Data Collection**

In this research, the data collection embraced several steps. First, the researchers collected the data by reading an entire English textbook to get ideas of multicultural values implied in pictures and texts. Then, the pages with multicultural values were marked to recognize each characteristic. Next, the researchers selected the multicultural values in pictures and text following the characteristics based on the theories in the instrument. Furthermore, the data analysis followed the theories by Barthes (1977), Isnaini et al. (2019), and Husain et al. (2020).

### **3.5 Technique of Data Analysis**

The researchers conducted semiotic analysis in pictures and texts related to multicultural values for the data by following the theories by Barthes (1977), which consists of denotation (first step) and connotation (second step). The researchers used two characteristics to analyze multicultural values in the English textbook. First, the researchers analyse the texts and pictures by categorizing the multicultural values by Isnaini et al. (2019): ROPT, AWER, AOPCP, and AOPP. Second, the multicultural values in an English textbook follow Husain et al. (2020) by identifying based on source culture (SC), neutral culture (NC), target culture (TC), and international cultures (IC). After the data

analysis, the researchers presented the results by showing pictures and texts containing multicultural values; each item describes to give detailed information. While presenting the data, the researchers displayed it through the table of each chapter containing multicultural values. Next, the researchers wrote a discussion based on the findings to answer the research questions by integrating theories to complete the result. Finally, the researchers provided the conclusion and suggestions at the end of the research procedure.

## Results

The English textbook under the title Big English 5 contained nine chapters presenting various themes. Seven chapters covered multicultural values. There were 28 pictures and texts containing eight aspects of multicultural values. The value of respecting other people's traditions (**ROPT**) has five items. The value of appreciating women's equal rights (**AWER**) has six items. The value of appreciating other people's cultural products (**AOPCP**) has eleven items. The value of appreciating other people's perspectives (**AOPP**) has five items. The value of Sources Cultural (Indonesia) (**SC**) has two items. The value of Neutral Cultural (Not specified) (**NC**) has four items. The value of Target Cultural (US, UK, Australia) (**TC**) has three items. The value of International Cultural (around the world) (**IC**) has eleven items. The total of multicultural values in the English textbook was 47 items. The data is presenting as below:

*Table 1. Multicultural Values in Chapter 1*

Chapter	Theme	Multicultural Values	Page	Number of Representation
<b>1</b>	My Interest	AWER	p.3, p.9	2
		NC	p.4	1
		IC	p.9	1
		<b>Total</b>		<b>4</b>

In the first theme of this book, the most dominant multicultural values were about appreciating women's equal rights (AWER).

*Table 2. Multicultural Values in Chapter 2*

Chapter	Theme	Multicultural Values	Page	Number of Representation
<b>2</b>	Family Ties	AWER	p.19, p.25	2
		ROPT	p.21, p.23	2
		SC	p.20	1

	IC	p.21	1
	<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>

In the second chapter of the book, other multicultural values were found, such as respecting other people's traditions (ROPT) and source culture (SC).

*Table 3. Multicultural Values in Chapter 3*

Chapter	Theme	Multicultural Values	Page	Number of Representation
<b>3</b>	Helping Others	AWER	p.27	1
		AOPP	p.26, p.33, p.34	3
		NC	p.26	1
		TC	p.33	1
		<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>

Chapter 3 found other multicultural values, such as target culture (TC) and appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP).

*Table 4. Multicultural Values in Chapter 4*

Chapter	Theme	Multicultural Values	Page	Number of Representation
<b>4</b>	Shopping Around	AOPCP	p.48, p.49	2
		ROPT	p.42	1
		SC	p.42	1
		NC	p.43	1
		IC	p.42, p.48, p.49	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>		

In chapter 4 of this book, the most dominant multicultural values were about international culture (IC) and appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP).

*Table 5. Multicultural Values in Chapter 5*

Chapter	Theme	Multicultural Values	Page	Number of Representation
<b>5</b>	Vacation Time	ROPT	p.73	1
		AWER	p.73	1
		AOPCP	p.61,	2



		p.73	
	AOPP	p.73	1
	NC	p.55	1
	TC	p.61	1
	IC	p.73	1
	<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>

In chapter 5, it was found all multicultural values except for source cultural (SC). At the same time, the most multicultural value was found in appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP).

*Table 6. Multicultural Values in Chapter 8*

Chapter	Theme	Multicultural Values	Page	Number of Representation
<b>8</b>	Where Do They Come From?	AOPCP	p.96, p.97, p.98, p.101, p.102	5
		TC	p.101	1
		IC	p.96, p.98, p.101, p.102	4
		<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>

In chapter 8 of this book, the most dominant multicultural values were appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP) and international culture (IC).

*Table 7. Multicultural Values in Chapter 9*

Chapter	Theme	Multicultural Values	Page	Number of Representation
<b>9</b>	How Adventurous Are You?	AOPCP	p.107, p.117	2
		AOPP	p.110	1
		ROPT	p.119	1
		IC	p.117	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>5</b>	

Chapter 9 the most found the multicultural value about appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP), while there were three other multicultural values.

According to the table, the most found of multicultural values in every chapter were

about international culture (IC) and appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP). Unfortunately, the source culture (SC) means Indonesian culture merely has two items, even though the English textbook is used at a private primary school in Indonesia.

## Discussion

The multicultural values in an English textbook need to entangle the content of international culture and cultural products. As an international language, English textbooks need to furnish the content of international culture as part of multicultural values. Students could get information about international culture in preparing to interact with people from every country, and the multicultural values of international culture need to be present in English textbooks (Labtich & Teo, 2020). English textbooks containing international culture could represent the globalization situation that could increase students' awareness & intercultural competence about cultural diversity that has its characteristics (Aoumeur & Ziani, 2022). In addition, the information about international culture provides students to recognize every culture. The culture consists of products and traditions with characteristics that need to be respected and appreciated by English language learners (Kara Özkan, 2022). Also, Efron (2020) mentioned that international culture contained in English textbooks could drive students to have interactive activities about the language and cultural context. Students could learn the English language from international sources in English textbooks to enhance their language understanding (Alsaawi, 2021). Thus, the content of international culture in an English textbook could enlarge students' knowledge.

The multicultural values in English textbooks encourage students to appreciate and respect people's other products. According to Wang and Hemchua (2022), the images in English textbooks presenting cultural product correlates with human life; students could gain more information about the characteristics of each product from every culture. The cultural product contains the foods, things, and places that become necessary to recognize by students to appreciate the uniqueness of the product through multicultural values in English textbooks (Dewi, 2019). In addition, English language learners embed the cultural concept by understanding the product of multicultural since they grow up and understand the diversity of language and cultural aspects (Sharifian, 2017). Also, Yusup and Suryaman (2021) mentioned that every product's character has the essence represented in the texts or pictures in English textbooks. Students could learn new things from other products through multicultural values in English textbooks and need to know unique products from each culture (Ayu, 2020). Hence, students could identify the product from local or international culture in English textbooks containing multicultural values.

Unfortunately, the source culture of Indonesia has limited content, whereas students need to recognize Indonesian cultural content through an English textbook. Pratama et al. (2021) mentioned that implementing multicultural values in English textbooks needs to entangle the global and local aspects of respecting and appreciating diversity in classroom activities. The source culture contained in English textbooks could acquaint the original cultural product and traditions. The study by Deswila et al. (2021) emphasized that the users of English textbooks in Indonesian classrooms must provide the

language materials and cultural aspects describing the Indonesian conditions. In addition, Husain et al. (2020) proved that their study discovered that English textbooks covered the source culture of Indonesia, which was part of striving for the cultural product and traditions of the locals. The English textbooks need to contain the cultural aspect of the source culture related to the traditions, perspectives, and products to assist students in language meaning-making (Derakhshan, 2021). Also, English textbooks with source culture as part of multicultural values could embed students to construct habits, customs, and thinking by integrating culture and ideology in school and society (Aoumeur & Ziani, 2022). Hence, it becomes necessary to have the Indonesian culture or local cultural content in English textbooks.

In addition, the multicultural values instilled in an English textbook have substantial knowledge for young learners at primary school in using the English language. According to Dabbagh and Atai (2022), English textbooks must encompass language materials consisting of practices and values from international and local sources. Students need to have the learning content in English textbooks related to lifestyle, foods, and values from various cultural aspects to promote understanding of specific cultural products (Dewi, 2019). Also, Jam et al. (2021) mentioned that explaining specific places around the world in English textbooks significantly increases students' knowledge by presenting the actual location. Multicultural values need to embrace international culture in developing students' awareness of various communities' environments, customs, and products (Latic & Teo, 2020). The texts and pictures containing multicultural values in English textbooks could embrace the different backgrounds of students to respect and have social relations (Herbyanti, 2020). Hence, the multicultural values in English textbooks could assist students in learning the English language and culture.

Moreover, English textbooks furnish language teaching and learning by involving multicultural values to strengthen language and social-cultural aspects. The multicultural values in English textbooks could establish students' understanding of diversity and tolerance of culture, ethnicity, and gender (Sultan et al., 2020). English textbooks contain language materials and intercultural competence to embed students in developing the use of the English language in globalization (Nguyen et al., 2020). English textbooks give the concept of multicultural values through the content of language materials in texts or images covering cultural information (Saeme & Ra, 2021). Visual aspects in English textbooks become a vital tool to integrate the communication process by involving multicultural values to enlarge students' attention to diversity and develop intercultural competence (Yusup & Suryaman, 2021). Using English textbooks containing multicultural values could internalize students' capability to implement cultural aspects in English (Riadini & Cahyono, 2021). Hence, the content of multicultural values in English textbooks offers useful things for English language learners.

Furthermore, using English books containing multicultural values could promote students' English proficiency in concepts and experiences. Multicultural values in English textbooks could encourage students to reinforce their identity, build communication with various cultural values, and develop students' ethical principles (Özkan, 2022). Students could acquire English from native and non-native speakers with various cultural aspects

by utilizing English textbooks containing multicultural values (Keles & Yazan, 2020). Since English is a lingua franca, English textbooks with multicultural values provide information about the use of the English language from local and international cultural aspects (Saemee & Ra, 2021). In addition, English language learners could grasp the ideas about the values and norms, such as preventing radicalism from the communities through the materials of multicultural values in English textbooks (Alsaawi, 2021). Also, the essence of multicultural values in English textbooks could direct students to participate in a concordance society (Harahap et al., 2022). Therefore, English textbooks with multicultural values could encourage students to use the language properly and appreciate the cultural aspect.

## Conclusion

Multicultural values in English textbooks could encourage students to learn the English language by increasing students' awareness about the diversity of every community. Respecting and appreciating traditions, women's equal rights, cultural products, and people's perspectives need to embed for young learners to construct their intercultural understanding. Also, sources, neutral, target, and international cultural content need to be present in furnishing English language materials and multicultural values. Unfortunately, this English textbook merely has two items of source culture or Indonesian culture, which is poor content to present and explain the wonders of Indonesian culture to young learners.

This research suggest that the English textbook needs to give additional information related to the source culture for the user of the English textbook. Besides, the role of English teachers and students becomes necessary to utilize English textbooks with multicultural values involving suitable language activities and implement them into actual life and society. In addition, Big English 5 need to attach more source culture (Indonesian culture) as the user of the English textbook that could enhance students' comprehension of their own culture. Also, English teachers must select and design appropriate lesson plans using the Big English 5 textbook. The limitation of this study was the focus on the book at primary school for grade 5. Further researchers can discover English textbooks with multicultural values at other levels.

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