



# Multicultural Values in English Textbook for Senior High School: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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## Abstract

This research examines the representation of multicultural values in the 12th-grade high school English textbook "Life Today". In the era of globalization, incorporating cultural values into English Language Teaching (ELT) is very important to foster intercultural understanding and tolerance. This research uses qualitative descriptive methods and critical discourse analysis, focusing on visual and verbal content in textbooks. Visual data was analyzed using Barthes' visual semiotic theory, and verbal data was examined using Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and Cortazzi and Jin's cultural components framework. Findings show that the visual content in textbooks represents multicultural values such as Appreciating Other People's Cultural Products (AOPCP), Appreciating Women's Equal Rights of Women (AWER), and Appreciating Other People's Perspectives (AOPP), with limited representation of Respecting Other People's Traditions (ROPT). Meanwhile, the multicultural value of verbal content in textbooks shows a bias towards universal culture. This study highlights the importance of balanced cultural content in ELT textbooks to improve students' intercultural communicative competence and suggests further research on strategies for teaching multicultural values.

**Keywords:** *multicultural values, ELT textbooks, intercultural competence*

## Introduction

In the contemporary period of globalization, integrating cultural norms into English Language Teaching (ELT) has become crucial in curriculum design due to its role in fostering intercultural comprehension and acceptance among students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Baker, 2012; Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015; Nault, 2006). Learning a language requires an understanding of its

cultural context, as students need cross-cultural skills and knowledge (Ariawan et al., 2022; Tika & Fithriani, 2023). Education plays a pivotal role in advancing a multicultural curriculum, recognized globally as a fundamental tool for enhancing intercultural understanding and interaction (Derico et al., 2019; Alawlaqi & Basya, 2023). Hapsari (2021) emphasized that intercultural education is increasingly important, especially in multilingual contexts like Indonesia, to achieve educational goals. Regardless of cultural, religious, linguistic, ethnic, and ideological diversity, education remains a powerful method to influence future generations with a focus on peace (Habibah et al., 2024).

Incorporating diverse cultural representations in educational materials can broaden students' perspectives on various racial and ethnic groups, creating a more inclusive classroom environment (Banks & Banks, 2016). Bianco (2016) argued that multicultural education extends beyond beliefs to include social equity and justice, addressing historical and ongoing marginalization. Given English's status as a global language, recognizing multiculturalism in ELT textbooks is essential (Tika & Fithriani, 2023). A balanced representation of cultural references enriches awareness of local and global cultures in both native and non-native contexts (Zhang & Su, 2021). In Indonesia, government-endorsed ELT textbooks highlight the importance of exploring multicultural values, such as respect for diversity, indigenous rights, and harmonious coexistence with nature (Setyono & Widodo, 2019).

Previous studies have identified imbalances in the representation of multicultural content in EFL textbooks. Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw (2019) revealed disparities in ethnicity, gender, social class, and disability portrayals in Inner Mongolia's textbooks, favoring the dominant Han ethnic group. Tajeddin and Pakzadian (2020) found that international textbooks predominantly favored Inner-Circle cultures, emphasizing the need for more equitable cultural representation. Similarly, Santi and Pratolo (2022) and Ariawan et al. (2022) identified underrepresentation of target and international cultures in Indonesian high school textbooks. This study examining the representation of multicultural values in the 12th-grade EFL textbook "Life Today," focusing on both visual and verbal content.

Analyzing this textbook contributes to ELT studies in Indonesia by highlighting how multicultural values are integrated into official educational materials. This research aims to answer the following questions: (1) How are multicultural values represented in EFL textbooks? (2) What multicultural values are more dominant in EFL textbooks? By addressing these questions, the study offers insights into the effectiveness of current ELT materials in promoting intercultural competence among Indonesian students.

## Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method (Creswell, 2014) combined with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as outlined by Fairclough (2013). CDA was chosen because it effectively uncovers hidden meanings and power dynamics within texts, allowing for a deeper understanding of how multicultural values are represented in educational materials (Widodo, 2018).

The textbook analyzed in this research is the 12th-grade EFL textbook "Life Today," which was selected based on its official recommendation by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and its widespread use in high schools across Indonesia. This selection ensures the textbook's relevance in reflecting current educational practices and policies related to multicultural values.

The analytical frameworks applied in this study include Barthes' semiotic theory (1977), Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (1978), and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) study of cultural components. Barthes' semiotic theory is suitable for this study as it provides tools to decode visual elements, uncovering the cultural messages embedded in images. Halliday's SFL and Cortazzi and Jin's cultural components, on the other hand, is instrumental in analyzing verbal texts, as it explores the relationship between language and its social context, revealing how cultural ideologies are constructed through linguistic choices.

Data collection involved selecting both verbal and visual content from the textbook that depicted cultural representations. The process included three steps: (1) identifying and extracting relevant texts and images that reflect specific cultural themes; (2) categorizing these elements based on predefined multicultural indicators, 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) for visual elements, meanwhile Source Culture, Target Culture, International Culture, and Universal Culture for verbal elements; and (3) coding the data to facilitate analysis.

## Result

### Multicultural-Visuals Representation in EFL Course Textbook

The analysis of the 12th-grade EFL textbook "Life Today" revealed distinct patterns in the representation of multicultural values. The visual and verbal content showcased multicultural elements across various units, with noticeable trends in the frequency and type of values depicted. Overall, the most prominent multicultural values identified were Appreciating Women's Equal Rights (AWER) and Appreciating Other People's Cultural Products (AOPCP), while Respecting Other People's Traditions (ROPT) was significantly underrepresented.

Table 1. Visual Culture Representation

Theme	Description and Location	Multicultural Values
Unit 1. Narrative Text: The Story of a Friendly Future	Female wearing hijab (p. 2, p. 4, p. 9, p. 31); A female presentation (p.2); Women have different style (p. 4, p. 31); A female writing in book (p. 4)	AWER
	Boy using earphone, boy looking with binoculars, and boy writing in paper (p.2); Man using handphone (p.4)	AOPCP
	People having conversation (p. 4, p. 9, p. 11, p. 13, p.31)	AOPP
	People worked together (p.13); People helping each other (p.13)	ROPT
Unit 2. Argumentative text: E-money	Female wearing hijab (p. 55, p. 56, p. 58, p. 84); A female presentation (p. 56); Women have different style (p. 84, p. 88); A female reading a book (p.56)	AWER
	Boy using E-money, boy using earphone, boy using projector, and hands writing in paper (p. 56); An illustration of junkfood from Italy (p. 57)	AOPCP
	People having conversation (p. 55, p. 57, p. 58, p. 69, p. 84, p. 88)	AOPP
	A photograph of people from Baduy Dalam and Luar (p. 69)	ROPT
Unit 3. Hortatory Exposition: Netiquette	Two females learning with devices and women having different style (p. 97); A female reading a book and a female studying with social media (p. 98); A female wearing hijab (104)	AWER
	Boy learning with devices (p. 97); Boy and girls using teknologi, boy using earphone, and hands using electronic media (p. 84, p. 98)	AOPCP
	People having conversation (p. 97, p. 104); Many people make conversation with social media (p. 99)	AOPP
	An illustration having express the feeling with social media (p. 101)	ROPT)
Unit 4. Discussion Text: Carbon Footprints	Female wearing hijab (p. 148, p. 150)	AWER
	Boy using earphone, boy using laptop, and man using loudhailer (p. 148)	AOPCP
	People having conversation (p. 147, p. 149, p. 150, p. 163, p. 182)	AOPP



Figure 1. AWER & AOPCP

### Appreciating Women's Equal Rights (AWER)

For example, in units 3 p. 84 there were two women, one wearing the hijab and the other not. This illustration also can be represented as education and emancipation. Describes women who are seeking knowledge and freedom of thought. This can also be a sign of social progress and human rights or gender.



Figure 2. AOPCP & AOPP

### Appreciating Other People's Cultural Products (AOPCP)

Figure 1. "Boy and girls use technology" unit 3, p. 84. In the illustration, there are earphones, a laptop and a microphone. Using earphones allows users to access and interact with cultural content from various countries and cultures. Meanwhile, laptops can be used to display traditional art and folklore or even to show documentaries that enrich the understanding of cultural heritage. It shows how modern technology, such as laptops, can be used to preserve and appreciate local cultural riches. Another example is in unit 2, p. 57. In the illustration, two people are seen carrying out a transaction to purchase pizza. Pizza is a fast food item that originated in Italy. This illustration illustrates that Italian people like fast food.



Figure 3. AOPP

### **Appreciating Other People's Perspectives (AOPP)**

Examples in unit 3 p. 84 Figure. 1, there is an illustration of three high school students conversing on a digital platform, namely a podcast. Then, in unit 3, p. 99 Figure. 3, "Many people make conversations with social media", such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on. Social media provides a platform for intercultural dialogue and exchange. This could take the form of discussions about global issues, exchange of perspectives on cultural traditions, or even increased understanding and tolerance of cultural differences.

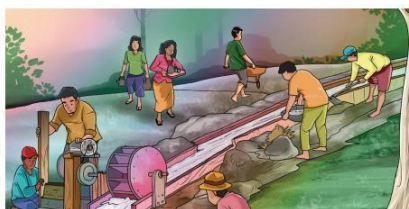


Figure 4. ROPT

### **Respecting Other People's Traditions (ROPT)**

For example, in units 1 p. 13 Figure. 4, the ROPT represented in the picture is a tradition of mutual cooperation carried out by the residents of Gurung Mali, West Kalimantan residents. In the picture, there are several people doing community service to build a micro hydropower plant. The picture depicts how people help each other to get work done.

### **Multicultural Values of Verbal Texts in EFL Course Textbook**

Grade 12 EFL textbooks also contain verbal texts that are often combined with visual texts. From a semiotic perspective, according to Widodo (2018), verbal text includes oral and written communication. Multicultural findings from verbal texts in EFL textbooks include cultural sources found in unit 1, p. 13 and p. 38. Then, unit 1, p. 46, shows international and target cultures. In unit 2, p. 88; unit 3, p. 99, p. 115, p. 126, p. 143, and p. 149.

For example, in unit 1, p. 13, "The Breakers of Limitations from Gurung Mali": "One night, in the village of Gurung Mali in Sintang district of West Kalimantan, the night was colder and darker ". "They had a deal. Nayau and several supportive

friends such as Apoi, Sinko, Hisako, Noh, Dasen, Supardi, Mio, Nino and several other women began working together to build a dam and a mill house along. "

The text mentions a village in the province of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. It also describes how the people in Gurung Mali village worked together to build the town. Mutual cooperation is categorized as a practice because it is one of Indonesian people's behavioral patterns or habits. This text is included in source culture because it represents the culture of a country that does not speak English. Next, in unit 1, p. 46, "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind":

"In a small village in Malawi where people have no money for lights, nightfall comes quickly and rushes for farmers to bed. But for William, the darkness is the best way for dreaming...". ", Without water, the sun rose angry each morning and scorched the fields, turning the maize into dust. Without food, Malawi began to starve....". ". His cousin Geoffrey and best friend Gilbertsoon appeared. "Muli bwanji," they greeted"

The text mentions Malawi, one of the places in East Africa included in international culture. The cultural elements were evenly distributed with perspective and person. The perspective elements describe the social and economic challenges faced by local residents, as well as traditional values and local wisdom. Also, names from target countries, such as William, Geoffrey, and Gilbert, are mentioned.

Another example, in unit 2, p. 88, "E-payments – why, when and how to use them": "Are you worried about giving out your credit or debit card details online? There is another option – an e-money account from a payment company which offers an e- payment account as a way to send and receive money online without needing your credit or debit card details.

This text found universal culture, where the culture in the book did not refer to any culture. E-payment has been adopted in various countries around the world with different names and implementations. Examples include e-wallets in Asia, payment apps in Europe, and digital payment platforms in the United States. Each country and culture have its own way of using e-money according to its local customs. This can represent the influence of technology and globalization.

In the residual findings, the researcher found that the visual and verbal content adopted in EFL textbooks was adapted to current developments. For example, in visual illustrations, many images show the use of technology such as earphones, devices, and projectors. Then, there is social media, which everyone already uses. This is one of the cultures that is happening in the current era. Apart from that, the verbal text mentions e-payment, a digital payment system used almost worldwide and has become an instant culture for society.

## **Discussion**

The findings presented demonstrate the instrument indicators associated with multicultural values found within the high school 12th-grade English Textbook "Life today." Initially, the visual material utilized in this study was developed by employing elements of multicultural values drawn from Barthes (1977) in order to scrutinize the multicultural values conveyed via images. Visual semiotics is used in textbooks to reveal the visual elements of multicultural values. These results found AWER and AOPCP were frequently highlighted through visual depictions of diverse female representations and cultural artifacts.

For instance, (AOPCP) images of women in different attires, including those wearing hijabs and those with modern styles, emphasized gender equality and cultural diversity. This is in line with Bianco (2016), who states that multiculturalism is not only about beliefs but also involves social justice and equality issues. However, this finding contrasts Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw (2019), who found an imbalance of ethnicity, gender, social class and disability in EFL textbooks used by junior high school students in Inner Mongolia, China.

Similarly, (AWER) illustrations featuring global products like Italian food and modern technology reflected an appreciation for cultural products from various regions. As mentioned by Moran (2001), culture comprises five dimensions, with Products being one of them. It could be musical instruments, food, traditional clothing, technology, etc, what can be called a cultural artifact. According to Mutiara

Ayu (2020), cultural artifacts serve as tangible manifestations of different cultural elements. Consistent with the findings of Aiello & Cacia (2014), numerous cultural artifacts necessitate a physical presence in order to reach the wider audience. Students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and develop an understanding of various cultures through the appreciation of their cultural artifacts.

In contrast, ROPT appeared less frequently, with limited illustrations depicting traditional customs or indigenous practices. Examples include occasional depictions of community cooperation in rural Indonesian settings that lead to conversations or communication in person or via social media. As Moran (2001) points out, culture can encompass practices (behaviors, daily activities, and social interactions) and perspectives. However, these were sparse compared to the abundant representations of gender equality and modern cultural products.

Students can appreciate the traditions of different regions and countries by appreciating the traditions of others. This is in line with what Banks & Banks (2016) stated: that elements of racial and ethnic differences in EFL textbook materials can increase students' perceptions of good depictions and diverse content, thereby fostering a better and more holistic educational environment.

The underrepresentation of ROPT compared to AWER and AOPCP may reflect a broader trend in Indonesian EFL materials that prioritize contemporary global cultures and gender inclusivity over traditional practices. This trend could be influenced by globalization and the growing emphasis on preparing students for international contexts, where modern cultural competencies are seen as more relevant. Additionally, the curriculum's focus on universal values may inadvertently sideline local traditions, contributing to this imbalance.

The research findings of visual multicultural representations are in line with those (Setyono & Widodo 2019), which emphasizes the importance of studying multicultural value themes, including respecting plurality and the rights of Indigenous peoples, promotion of peace and symbiotic connections with nature and various life forms, and acknowledgement of cultural heritage. In this case, visual representation expresses a multicultural point of view by accepting and appreciating differences in style, perspective, gender equality, and cultural and social products.

In the context of this study, the analysis of verbal content in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructional materials revealed a notable inclination towards promoting a universal cultural perspective. The diversity of sources, targets, and international cultures must be adequately represented in grade 12 EFL textbooks. In a multicultural context, EFL textbooks must cover various ethnicities and cultures. In contrast, this textbook focuses primarily on cultural universals without referring to culture.

This is also in line with the findings of Ariawan et al. (2022) that high school EFL textbooks for grades 10 and 11 in curriculum 13 have an unbalanced culture, which means that the target culture and international culture are underrepresented. Apart from that, in this textbook, the researchers found that the content created was adapted to current developments, where visual and verbal texts show the culture that is happening in the current era.

## Conclusion

In the EFL textbook for 12th grade secondary schools, the independent curriculum "Life Today" examines multicultural values visually and verbally. The findings show that the dominant multicultural values are AWER, AOPP, and AOPC. Meanwhile, the multicultural values of ROPT are underrepresented in the textbook.

Verbal multiculturalism includes source culture, target culture, international culture, and universal culture. However, the verbal representation reveals a bias towards universal culture. Since English is a lingua franca, the introduction of multiculturalism in language textbooks is essential. Students should prioritize target language acquisition, cross-cultural communication skills development, and appreciation of interrelated cultural information and values. This underscores the need to include cultural content in EFL textbooks.

Therefore, multicultural values from world cultures should be included in English textbooks so that students can learn about world cultures and prepare themselves for the world in the future. Incorporating cultural values into language learning is essential for curriculum developers, as it has the potential to enhance intercultural understanding and foster tolerance among students. However, educators must pay attention to each cultural element included in order to obtain balanced knowledge between local and foreign cultures.

One potential limitation of this study is the reliance on one textbook, "Life Today," which may not fully represent the diversity of EFL materials used throughout Indonesia. This study only discusses the components of multicultural values represented in EFL textbooks. This study reveals a multicultural perspective by accepting and respecting cultural, product, gender equality, and social differences. The official support and widespread use of the textbook indicate its significant influence, but regional variations in educational materials may present different patterns of multicultural representation. From the results of this study, further research is needed on how educators' strategies can integrate multicultural values that are underrepresented in textbooks according to the curriculum and how multicultural values teaching strategies are implemented, especially for second learners.

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