

Teachers' Perceptions: The Benefits and Weaknesses of Local and Foreign Cultural Representation in English Textbooks in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Language and culture cannot be separated. Cultural integration in ELT now becomes the focus of many researchers and trends in recent years. Unfortunately, so far, there has been no in-depth investigation that focused on Indonesian teachers' perceptions of local and foreign cultural presentations in high school English textbooks. To fill the gap, this study aims to investigate the teachers' perception of the benefits and weaknesses of local and foreign cultural representation (LCFR) in the ELT textbook they used. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The nine senior high school teachers representing the city, district, and province in South Sumatra, Indonesia, were purposely involved as the participant in this study. A semi-structured interview supporting documentation was conducted and analysed following the interactive model of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman. Based on the findings, there are three main benefits of LCFR in ELT textbooks; first, LFCR helps teachers stimulate or catch students' attention at the beginning of the teaching process. Second, it improves students' intercultural knowledge, be aware of a different culture from other countries, and avoids culture shock. Next, it also increases students' curiosity and critical thinking, making learning more active and meaningful. Moreover, the weaknesses are dealing with the imbalanced portion of cultural representation and inadequate information on cross-cultural understanding which cause misunderstanding and confusion for the students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Textbook plays an important role in English learning and teaching (ELT). Using textbooks in ELT motivates students and maximises students' learning competencies, and can influence the level of success in learning English (Tomlinson, 2016). Arofah and Cahyadi (2019) in this context, the good textbook used as teaching materials ideally have to be in accordance with the needs of students and the curriculum because it can make learning activities more interesting, learners have more opportunities to learn independently, and get convenience in learning every competency that must be mastered until they can finally achieve the goal of learning.

Language and culture are two aspects of human life that cannot be separated. Even cultural components, including knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and others, play an important role in language learning (Akbar, 2019). Ismail (2017) said cultural-based learning material is one of the key terms that has become popular in recent years and has contributed to the formation of new insights in the language teaching and learning field. This cultural integration aims to help language learners develop the intercultural competencies that are inherently essential in the 21st century. Learning English as a foreign language can be said as cross-cultural education. In the learning process, students learn linguistic competence and the culture of the people who use the language being studied (Passakornkarn & Vibulphol, 2020). Ismail (2017), various linguists agree that it will be very difficult to learn a language without knowing the culture of the native speakers of that language. Soomro et al. (2015) state that learning a new language is the same as learning a new culture. An understanding of a language will not be complete without knowing the original culture of the language user (Brown, 2012). Teaching materials containing local and foreign cultures are increasingly needed in this era of globalisation as cross-cultural interactions increase (Sunardi, 2019). Furthermore, Ziaei (2012), on the impact of business, colonialism and social interaction, it is now recorded that more than 100 countries in the world have officially used English. These countries are then grouped into 3, known as 'Kachru's three circles of English', namely the inner circle, which is the first English-speaking country in the world, such as the United States, England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Furthermore, the Outer circle includes colonial countries such as India, Malaysia, Singapore, Ghana, Kenya, etc., and Indonesia (Al-Mutairi, 2019).

Departing from the theory above, in the era of world Englishes, the demands for English education are increasing, now learning achievements also focus on the students' awareness of the rich diversity of English from various countries that are included in the three concentric circles so that this has an impact on increasing the scope of integration of foreign cultures in English teaching material (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). In addition, globalisation, modernisation and puritanism are very worried about having an impact on the erosion of love for local culture. This aspect encourages education observers to continue voicing for stakeholders to continue to pay attention to education in Indonesia and maintain local wisdom as part of the nation's identity (Sumiati, et., al 2020). Alfian (2013) says that local culture is important and must be owned by all students because it contains positive values that are very useful as the basic capital in the formation of character and national identity (Sebayantaka et al., 2015). In the context of English Classroom, Mahmud (2019) point out that there are two important reasons for integrating local culture in teaching materials; as a medium to increase the spirit of nationalism and a sense of intimacy between students and then to strengthen the aspects of culture and national identity depicted in teaching materials. Hence, through local and foreign cultural-based English material, the teacher can fulfil two objectives: the first is supporting and facilitating the students' mastery of the target language, and the second one is enabling teachers to fulfil their obligations of local culture promotion (C1). Ideally, the cultural context in learning English is certainly not limited to the culture of the English-speaking countries (including three concentric circles) but also the source culture or local culture of students (Riadini & Cahyono, 2021). Understanding local culture and sensitivity to foreign cultural content is required in the context of foreign language learning (Sugirin et al., 2008).

Cultural integration in learning English through teaching materials is an important issue that has become the focus of many researchers and trends in recent years. Unfortunately, so far, there has been no in-depth investigation that focused on Indonesian teachers' perceptions of local and foreign cultural presentations in high school English textbooks, especially in the city, districts, and provinces of South Sumatra. The previous studies in this domain mainly focus on textbook analysis and research development of new cultural-based material; as a result, the users' voices of LFCR in the existing textbook are unheard, whereas Laumer et al. (2017) said that the voices of the users are needed in improving the quality of the product. Therefore, to fill the gap, the current study tries to investigate and describe how is the teachers' perception of local and foreign cultural representation (LFCR) in the textbook they use in teaching English. In line with the purpose of this study mentioned before, the research questions are: 1) what are the benefits and weaknesses of local and foreign cultural representation (LFCR) in English textbooks in Indonesia?

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

This study took place in South Sumatera, Indonesia, has involved nine English teachers of senior high schools, with three teachers of each representing city (Lubuklinggau), district (Musirawas) and province (Palembang). The teachers use the same textbook teaching English that the Indonesian government endorses. The chosen teachers were considered seniors that have been English teachers for more than 15-20 years with good competencies and achievements in English education.

2.2 Research Design

This current study uses qualitative research. Hancock (2006) defines qualitative research or qualitative methodology as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words or from the form of action policy. As a qualitative research, this study produces descriptive data collected directly from the first sources, the English teachers, then it became the main source for data analysis and interpreted descriptively (Subandi, 2011).

2.3 Technique for collecting the data

For collecting the data, the writer conducted a semi-structured interviews in order to dig in the depth teacher's perceptions toward cultural representation (both local and foreign) in the English textbook, they used in teaching. The questions were prepared before the interview began, but the questions were then developed naturally based on the teachers' responses during the interview process to get a deeper description or just for clarification. The interview was done using the Indonesian Language, and then it was recorded, transcribed and translated into English. The questions that became the focus of the interview were as follows: what are the benefits and the weaknesses of local and foreign cultural representation in English textbooks used in Indonesia? Additionally, documentation was also conducted to support the data from interviews. In qualitative research, the role of the documentation is very important; the data from the documentation is useful to help re-display some of the data that may not be available in an interview. Some written notes and pictures are required to assist in analysing the data in this study (Subandi, 2011). Data in the form of documentation is useful for checking the truth and supporting the description of the results.

2.4 Validity of the Data

In order to guarantee the validity of the data, the researchers used the triangulation technique. Heale and Forbes (2013) said triangulation is a technique of checking the validity of the data by using something other than the data for the purpose of checking or as a comparison against the data. The

validity of the data in this study was recognised through the following ways: (1) Comparing the data of interviews and the data from the documentation. (2) Comparing what people said in public with what they said personally, (3) comparing someone's statement and perception by sharing opinions and views.

2.5 Technique of analysing the data

Considering the research questions, the interview result was then analysed qualitatively by following an interactive data analysis model introduced by Miles and Huberman consisting of data collection, reduction, data display, conclusions drawing, or verification (Nafi'ah, 2019). Therefore, the researchers heard several times the recorded interview, then sorted or selected the data which was regarded in line with the formulated theme and could answer the research questions. After that, the researcher made a transcript of the conversation, coded it and categorised it according to the theme; which statements contained information regarding weaknesses and which were about benefits of LFCR in English Textbooks. The data was then displayed and re-checked; finally, this process was ended by making the conclusion.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *The Benefits of LFCR in English Textbook*

Based on the result of the interview and documentation, there are three main benefits of local and foreign cultural representation (LFCR) in the ELT textbook: *first*, the teachers confessed that *LFCR helps them easier to make stimulation or catch students' attention at the beginning of the teaching process*. The example of teachers' statement can be seen as follow:

"My students become very enthusiastic in every time they see the picture or read the title of the text that containing their own culture or the culture from abroad that already familiar with even before the teaching is not started yet, and they can't wait to read the book"(T1).

As pre-activity before the materials were given, the teachers have to first attract students' attention as long as preparing them for the main activity (understanding the material content). With the various unique themes and pictures of LFCR in the textbook, the teacher absolutely becomes easier to attract students' attention, and the students immediately felt curious when they were shown the pictures or just read the title of the text given. Supporting this finding, Laksana (2018) reveals that the cultural based material is a very good tool to be used in motivating students to apply knowledge, get comprehension and perceive the interrelationships between various subjects.

Second, the result of the interview shows that all teachers agree that having a good understanding of local and foreign cultures is needed in ELT; additionally, two teachers said that *LFCR can improve students' cultural awareness and avoid the students from a culture shock*. Comprehending cultural elements from many different countries is a form of English learning approach that allows students to gain cross-cultural understanding more quickly and optimally. Lack of this aspect will make us fail in communication and even lead to culture shock and intercultural conflict, which may become a big problem in multicultural countries (Sunardi, 2019). The teachers' statements can be seen as follow:

"After reading textbooks that contain many cultural elements from other countries, my students become more sensitive to cultural diversity between countries. For

example, in Indonesia, the food is different from the food in foreign countries. One of my students said: Later, when we go out of the country, we will eat bread, right?" (T5).

"...after they finished discussing a text with a topic about foreign culture, my student shouted something like, "Mom, in this text, there is the kid call their parents by name, that's okay in western culture, isn't it, but in Indonesia, we are not polite if we do that right?" (T9)

"The pictures showing the diversity of the two cultures Indonesian and America in the textbook make my students more sensitive and tolerant to cultural diversity between countries. For example, in Indonesia most of the female students wear hijab at school, but in other countries, they wear a casual outfit without hijab". (T7).

In order to make the arguments becomes clearer, the researchers then asked the teachers to show the picture on the book they meant, and the picture can be seen as follow and it is as one example of documentation:



Source: Dokumen Kemdikbud
Picture 2.14

Figure 1. Two students with different cultures and religions

Third, from the interview, it was considered that LFCR could increase students' curiosity and critical thinking so the learning process becomes more active and meaningful, that is shown in students' expressions and questions during the learning. The teachers' statement can be seen as follow:

"...the class gets crowded every time I show my students the picture of their own culture, I'm glad that my students can ignore their own culture. Then when I ask them to read something that related to foreign culture, some of them automatically ask me various questions, yay I like that, my students become more curious and active" (T4).

In addition to the finding above, related facts were also found in some previous studies. Cultural elements in English textbooks in form pictures or reading material play a role as a stimulus and scheme in acquiring a deep comprehension that may increase students' achievement in all English skills (Monica & Vianty, 2019); (Monica, Nursasongko, Bengkulu, & Bengkulu, 2021) and (Azizah,

Inderawati, & Vianty, 2021). Additionally, Sebayantaka et al. (2015) teaching materials containing local and foreign cultures have many benefits for students, both in terms of developing English language skills and developing student character, learning motivation, reading interest and students' self-confidence in learning then prevent students from misunderstandings in communication, prejudice and conflict with people from different cultures.

3.2 The Weaknesses of LFCR in ELT textbook

In addition to the benefits of LFCR explained above, based on the teachers' statements in the interview, it can be indicated that there are also two major weaknesses of LFCR in English textbooks used in Indonesia. First, *inadequate information on cross-cultural understanding (CCU)*, As a result of the interview, the teachers said that LFCR in the ELT textbook is not supported by Cross-Cultural Understanding. Thus, in the implementation, sometimes the students felt confused and misunderstandings. To avoid the risks, the teacher must clarify unclear information every time they end the meeting. Their statements can be seen below:

“Books about culture are good, but unfortunately, there is no more detailed explanation about cultural differences, sometimes my students get confused by the existing cultural differences, I think there should be additional information about cross-cultural understanding, especially regarding politeness, I'm afraid that reading a lot and interacting with foreign cultures will affect politeness in our culture”(T9).

As an international language, English is now used by more than 100 countries all over the world. The L2 students have to be ready for intercultural communication or communicating with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In this regard, the knowledge of cross-cultural understanding is the key to achieving that purpose. Andersen and Cushner (1994) say that cross-cultural understanding is education about cultural diversity. Understanding of other cultures will help a person easier in make communicate with people from that culture Ismail (2017). However, Sugirin, et., al, (2008) the existence of foreign culture in ELT textbook without completed by cross cultural understanding information can negatively impact students' character and perception, because most foreign culture is not suitable with Indonesian norms. The phenomena can be seen in the picture below:

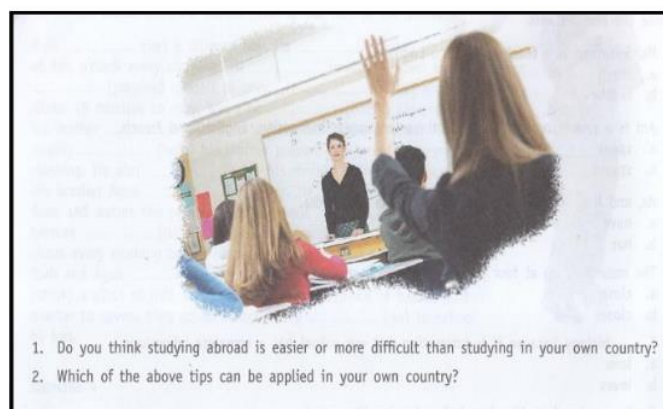


Figure 2. A student raises her left hand to ask permission to speak (Bates, 2007)

Figure 2 shows the contradiction of politeness phenomena; in western culture, raising your left or right hand as a sign to interrupt or ask a question, and giving or receiving something with your left or right is both polite and acceptable, in the other hand, that becomes impolite in Indonesian culture,

this phenomenon shows how important cross-cultural understanding is to being integrated in English textbook. Without a proper explanation of the difference between Western norms and Indonesian norms will give students the impression that they are also allowed to give books to teachers with their left hand. This is of course, against local norms or Indonesian norms.

Furthermore, the next weakness deals with *the imbalance portion of LFCR in the textbook used by the teachers*. The findings point out that two teachers confessed that cultural content in the textbook is dominated by the students' local culture (Indonesia), and one teacher (district teacher) thinks that the target cultures from the country such as America are mostly dominated, but all of the teachers agree that the international culture especially from Arab International culture, especially Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, is felt to have the least presence and must be added so that the cultural portion is balanced. A similar finding was found by Sugirin et al. (2008); through content analysis, they found that a portion of the integration of foreign and local cultures is not proportional that is dominated by elements of local culture that were 739 times. Next, Afriani (2019) shows that "target culture has the highest percentage, which is then followed by source culture and international target culture". On the other hand, Tajeddin and Pakzadian (2020), from the results of data analysis, found that most of the existing cultural content in the textbook is dominated by countries that are in the inner circle. Rome (2019) found that the reading content was dominated by international culture, with a presentation of 62.5%, while the content of local Indonesian culture was 20.8%, and the target cultural content (American and British) ranged from 16.7%.

4. CONCLUSION

Local and foreign cultural integration is very important in learning English because it helps students improve their reading comprehension and communication skills. Teaching materials that include local and foreign cultures have also been shown to improve students' attention to learning, character development, interest in reading, and self-confidence. Also, based on the results of the above analyses, we can say that CCU does not support the LFCR. As a result, it may lead to misunderstandings, so the teacher must clarify and explain things in depth. Also, the LFCR part is seen as not being balanced, but teachers still have different ideas about which culture is most dominant. Based on the results of this study, English teachers can be told to explain cross-cultural understanding and use more than one learning resource to make up for gaps in their students' knowledge. Also, advice can be given to researchers or people in Indonesia who are making new materials. The new English book was very needed, especially if it was made with cross-cultural understanding and a good mix of different cultures. Creating a new English textbook based on local and foreign cultures and using cross-cultural understanding would be a great way to solve this problem. So far, this research has been limited by the short amount of time available for research and the small number of people who agreed to be interviewed. Hopefully, future research will be able to do a better job by getting more teachers to take part, using different tools and focusing on different things.

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