

# Cultural Contents of an EFL Textbook: How is the Potential for Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence Development During the COVID-19 Outbreak?

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## ABSTRACT

Culture constitutes an inseparable part of language teaching and learning process. Using the framework advocated by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and Yuen (2011), this study aims to scrutinize the potential use of a vocational high school textbook to facilitate students' intercultural communicative competence indicated by the coverage of the types of cultures comprising the source culture, target culture, and international target culture and the 4Ps elements of cultures comprising products, practices, perspectives, and persons represented in the textbook. A descriptive study by utilizing a set of checklists and interviews were employed to garner the data. Moreover, two English teachers at a school where the selected textbook was used were involved to construe their voices concerning the intercultural communicative competence learning and instruction process conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, some systematic procedures comprising initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding were employed leading to the findings, conclusions, and implications. The findings reveal all the types and elements of the cultures were found in textbooks even though with different proportions in each unit. The study reached a conclusion that the textbook was considered to have some potential for developing students' intercultural communicative competence for it has balance cultures in terms of the source cultures, target cultures, and international target cultures. Meanwhile, internet access and students' English proficiency were the common issues as the teachers developed the materials particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, target culture was believed by the teachers to have more benefits for students' learning.

**Keywords:** *COVID-19 pandemic, cultural contents, intercultural communicative competence*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It has been acknowledged that intercultural communicative competence (ICC: henceforth) is one of the pivotal competences to be acquired in this globalization era. More specifically, in the domain of education, Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) assert that it is not only grammatical knowledge that is required as language teachers teach their students the target language, but it is expected that the students have the ability to deal with communications by making use of intercultural communicative competence so that the students will be able to cope with any issues successfully both in terms of communication and build a good rapport with the students.

Moreover, in terms of language instruction, the importance of ICC has gained its own place. Siregar (2016) points out that ICC registers a rise in terms of its interest. Consequently, Celce-Murcia (2007) argues that

the integration of ICC into language instruction should be taken into account by teachers. To accommodate the teachers in dealing with such a challenging task, textbooks may become the essential medium to facilitate it as Richards and Richards (2015) point out that the textbook is the essential component that may assist the teachers' instructional delivery. Regarding ICC, the textbook can become a means of facilitating introducing culture (Chang, Holt, & Luo 2006). Nevertheless, using a textbook in delivering ICC to students can be challenging. As Richards and Richards (2015, p. 3) also assert, "... no commercial textbook will ever be a perfect fit for a language program." Considering this assertion, evaluating a textbook used by teachers is required so the textbook will be utilized by the teachers appropriately and effectively as the expected objectives.

In Indonesia, besides the prescribed textbook advocated by the government, some schools still make use of commercial textbooks as one of the essential

means of providing materials to students. The present study took one of the commercial English textbooks entitled *Forward, and English* is due to some factors and considerations. First, the book emphasized that it is in accordance with the latest formulation of Curriculum 2013. This is important to consider since ICC is implicitly mandated by the educational provision prevailed in Indonesia. The formulation of competence of social attitude pertains intercultural competence in the global era. The regulation of Ministry of Culture and Education (MoCE) of Republic of Indonesia Number 37, 2018 defines social competence as to demonstrate trustworthy, self-discipline, responsible, (mutual cooperative, collaborative, tolerant, peace), polite, responsive, and pro-active attitudes as a part of solutions from every problem in interacting effectively with natural and social environment as well as put one's self as national identity in global communication and interaction." (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia No. 37 Tahun 2018, 2018).

Moreover, concerning cultures, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) divide cultures into consisting of three types of cultures, namely source culture having to do with the teaching and learning materials associated with students' own culture, target culture having to do with the teaching and learning materials related to the culture from the countries in which English is used as the first language, and international target culture which has to do with teaching and learning materials associated with the cultures from the countries in which English is used as the international language or lingua franca. Meanwhile, Yuen (2011) classifies cultures into four elements, also known as 4Ps that stands for products (having to do with concrete cultural objects such as food, names, movies, literary works, tourism places, etc.), practices (associated with customs, daily life, sports, etc.), perspectives (i.e., inspirations, myths, world views, beliefs, etc.) and persons (having to do with famous people and the like).

Furthermore, the concept of intercultural communicative competence has become the interest of many experts, and hence a number of its conceptions emerge. This conception sometimes overlapped with intercultural competence. In this regard, the elements or components between intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence have some similarities. In addition, having adequate knowledge (cognitive), attitude (affective), and actions (skill) which are interdependent, inexplicable, and intertwined with one another are required to do effective intercultural interactions (Byram et al., 2002; Lusting & Koester, 2010; Sercu, 2005; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In addition to the experts' proposals with respect to the concept of intercultural competence above, Fantini (2009) adds one more component into the three essential components influencing intercultural competence (attitude, knowledge, and skill), that is, awareness.

In the Indonesian context, the development of intercultural competence in ELT meets some challenges and opportunities. For instance, Abdulrahman, Usu, and Tanifu (2016) report some issues that hinder the cultural transmission in English classrooms that comprise lacks the allocation time, curriculum requirements, cultural materials in the textbook used, and cultural knowledge owned by teachers. Besides, intercultural language learning has gained a positive impression among students (Miftakh, 2015), fostered students' activeness, critical analysis, and English skills (Miftakh, 2017) and surpassed the conventional learning model, particularly in teaching writing skill (Haerazi & Irawan, 2020). Also, implementation of intercultural communicative competence encounters challenges when it is delivered in the subjects other than the listening and speaking subjects (Fitriyah, Retnaningdyah, & Munir, 2019). Besides, some studies report that the intercultural contents or materials have not been presented adequately in the English textbooks (Rosyidi & Purwati, 2018; Silvia, 2015). Based on the reports above, English teachers are supposed to have more preparation and create alternatives to respond to the challenging issues above. For instance, English teachers are required to teach the multicultural aspects in a creative fashion and as well as use multimodal materials to foster the students' engagement in the cultural tasks (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). In addition, to ensure the intercultural language learning work as expected, teachers and students should use rigorously the principles of intercultural language learning comprising 'using active constructions within sociocultural context, making connections between previous knowledge and new knowledge, utilizing social interaction, using reflection, and being responsible for the learning conducted' (Liddicoat, 2004).

This study is the expansion of previous studies. There are many studies scrutinizing and evaluating textbooks at the high school level (Rosyidi & Purwati, 2018; Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Silvia, 2015), but still, limited studies investigating the textbooks used in the vocational high school level found. Moreover, to bear in mind, this study focuses on the use of a commercial textbook, as Sheldon (1988) argues that some publishers sometimes fail to include cultural issues appropriately in a commercial textbook. Likewise, a study conducted by Subekti (2017) reveals that the use of a commercial textbook still meets some challenges, i.e., being unable to facilitate the learning associated with the students' attainments, which leads to a deficiency of achieving the learning objectives. Moreover, it becomes even more challenging for the current situation, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, has induced every teaching and learning process should be moved on to the online setting (Anon, 2020). Due to such conditions, more rigorous planning and preparation, included the use of the textbook, are thrust on. Based on the rationales above, the present study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are the source culture, target culture, and international culture represented in the contents and tasks of the textbooks?
2. How do the English teachers perceive the role of the textbook in assisting the ICC learning and instruction, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**2. METHOD**

Descriptive analysis included as one of the types of qualitative research was employed in this study. The procedure encompassed the following: 1) the contents and tasks included in each chapter will be identified; 2) the identified contents and tasks will be categorized based on the frameworks selected. In this regard, the frameworks employed to encompass the framework advocated by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) consisting of three types of cultures, namely source culture having to do with the teaching and learning materials associated with students' own culture, target culture having to do with the teaching and learning materials related to the culture from the countries in which English is used as the first language, and international target culture which has to do with teaching and learning materials associated with the cultures from the countries in which English is used as the international language or lingua franca. Another framework used is that which is advocated by Yuen (2011). Next, a set some guiding interview questions adopted and adapted from Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, Draghicescu, Issaias, and Sabec (2003) and Lei and Soontornwipast (2020); it has to do with answering the second research question concerning the English teachers' voices of ICC in the textbook employed.

Moreover, a commercial textbook entitled *Forward an English Course for Vocational High School Students Grade X* is selected. The selection of this book is based on some considerations and rationales. First, the books emphasize that these are in accordance with the latest formulation of Curriculum 2013, comprising Core Competence and Basic Competence of 2017. This is important to consider since ICC is mandated by the educational provision prevailed in Indonesia. As aforementioned, it has to do with the formulation of Competence of Social Attitude pertaining to intercultural competence in the global era. In detail, MoCE regulation Number 37/2018 regarding the core competences and basic competences in *SMA/MA/SMK/MAK*. Next, this book worth evaluating because still limited studies investigating the textbooks used at the vocational high school level are found. Moreover, this study focuses on the use of commercial textbooks in terms of ICC, which were considered to have occasionally lack of integrating cultural issues (Sheldon, 1988).

Furthermore, the evaluation of the ICC of the textbook is conducted through some instruments. First, it

was conducted through a set of checklists developed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and mentioning the three aspects of culture required to be taken into account, i.e., source culture, target culture, and other culture apart from the previous two cultures and the checklist developed from the framework advocated by Yuen (2011). Some guiding interview questions were adopted and adapted from Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al (2003), and Lei and Soontornwipast (2020) were provided to the teachers.

**3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Challenged and obligated by the Regulation of the MoCE 2018 that the students from a vocational high school required to have social skills which have to do with having a communicative skill to have interaction in this globalization era. Aligned with this, to conduct a communication effectively, it is not only language skills but also intercultural communicative competence that enables the students to understand their own culture but also the other cultures from other countries are required (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). Thus, the English teachers are required to accommodate them with such a competence by using the appropriate textbook which may cover it. This book is supposed not only to provide the students' own culture from Indonesia but also the other culture from other countries.

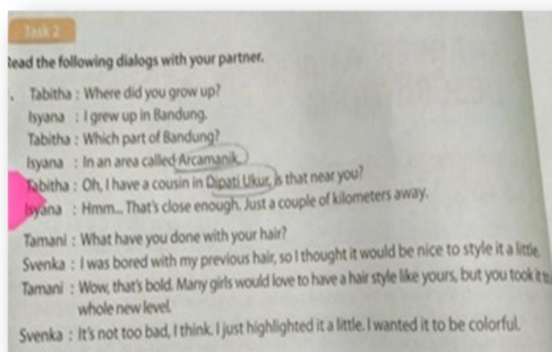
**Table 1.** The Overall Number of Occurrences of Cultural Contents

	Products	Practices	Perspectives	Persons
Source Culture	68	6	4	1
Target Culture	57	8	2	9
International Target Culture	42	13	5	2

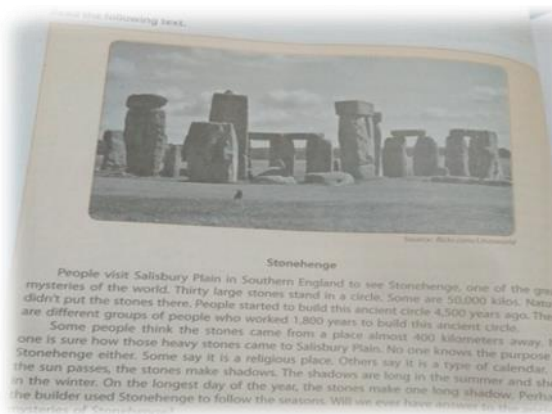
The three types of culture advocated from the framework Cortazzi and Jin (1999) required to be taken into account to accommodate the students' intercultural communicative competence analysed from the textbook. In this regard, the types of culture were scrutinized from the learning contents and tasks taken from the textbook.

The learning contents here have to do with contents shown in parts of the textbook: *Learning focus, Interlude, Kick off, Essential Grammar, and Brain Teasers*. All the parts from thirteen units of the textbook were analysed. The result of the content analysis is represented in the Table 1.

Table 1 above shows that the product elements surpassed the other elements of the cultures. Meanwhile, in terms of the types of cultures, it seems there are some balances among the three types of the types of cultures. Moreover, one of the most interesting findings was in regard to the source culture, it was found that some of local cultures appear in the textbook, for instance the names of the areas or streets, such as Arcamanik and Dipati Ukur (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Sample of Source Culture



**Figure 2** Sample of Target Culture

Meanwhile, in terms of the target culture, it was found that one of the texts explicates the text which discusses about Stonehenge which derives from the United Kingdom (see Figure 2). Moreover, a famous person, namely Emma Watson, was also described in the textbook (see Figure 3).

Furthermore, in terms of the international target culture, for instance, one of the findings points out the persons, i.e., Cleopatra, and also routine tasks around the

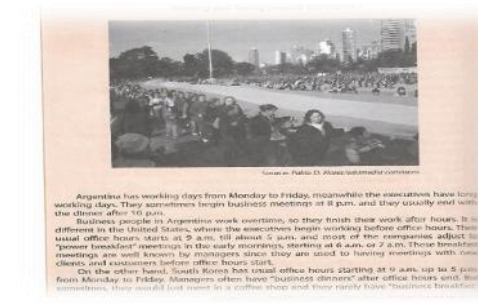
worlds, for instance from the Argentine (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).



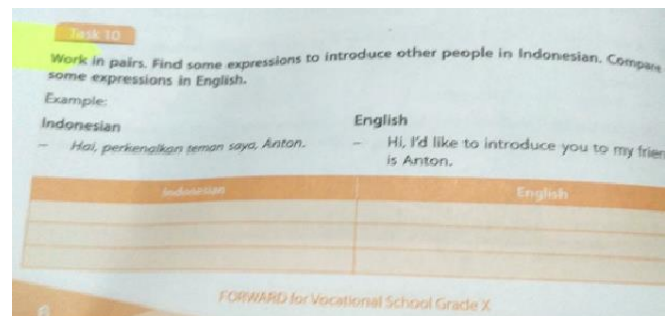
**Figure 3** Sample of Target Culture



**Figure 4** Sample of International Target Culture



**Figure 5** Sample of International Target Culture



**Figure 6** Sample of ICC Tasks

Moreover, Figure 6 above reveals one of the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) tasks mentioned in the textbook. In this regard, the students were asked to introduce someone, which is compared between the way they are introducing him/her in the Indonesian way and in English one.

The findings above were in line with the Interview conducted with the teacher, Ms. Tiara, who reported that the cultural contents of the textbook were balanced. These findings were in line with the content analysis conducted by Silvia (2015). However, the other subject, Mr. Saedi, mentioned that the textbook almost reveals more target culture or international culture in comparison with the source culture. This report from Mr. Saedi cannot be neglected since, as it can be seen over all the units presented in the textbook mostly dominated with the pictures of foreign countries, particularly those in terms of the personal elements of cultures.

Moreover, based on the interview conducted, the teachers mentioned that not all the materials presented in the textbook were employed. This report was mentioned by the two teachers as well as the staff of the curriculum. Such a report was due to some rationales. According to them, it was because of the current condition, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic in which it seemed not feasible to present all the materials due to some constraints that the students had, for instance, the internet access and quota and the limited time available. This finding was corroborated by a study conducted by Sugianto and Ulfah (2020), who mentioned that internet access became one of the primary issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, the teachers also considered that the students' English proficiency becomes another reason why they only took some materials presented in the textbook. In this regard, they revealed that some of the students still had low English proficiency. Thus, to make it easy for students to learn, they combined it by searching from the internet for Mr. Saedi; meanwhile, Ms. Tiara mentioned that she combines the materials taken from the students' worksheet (*LKS*). Such findings were in line with the assertion from Tomlison (2018) and Tomlinson and Masuhara (2013) when teachers try to use and develop the materials to be used in their teaching practice, it should accommodate the students' needs.

Furthermore, both the teachers emphasize the role of source culture in their classroom. It was due to the fact that they assumed that the students would get more understanding of the materials if it could relate to their contextual condition. Based on the findings, some of the source cultures represented in the textbook had also provided the contextual cultures, for instance, as can be illustrated in Figure 1 above. This finding follows what Tomlison (2003) reveals that target or local cultures are also required to have some emphasis.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The textbook was considered to have some potential for developing students' intercultural communicative competence, for it has balance cultures in terms of the source cultures, target cultures, and international target cultures. However, some adaptations are still required so that it can accommodate the students' needs. Moreover, target culture still becomes the primary resources that the teachers believed to bring benefits for the students as they are delivering the materials. Internet access and students' English proficiency were the common issues as the teachers develop the materials, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, for future research, some recommendations are advocated; these comprise: 1) classroom observation is advocated to know how this book further significantly serve its purpose to introduce ICC; 2) different frameworks concerning cultures can be employed; 3) comparing the textbook with other textbooks, for instance from the prescribed and created by the Ministry and Culture.

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