

Cultural sensitivity in Indonesian secondary school ELT textbooks: Teachers' perspectives, challenges, and pedagogical responses

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ABSTRACT

English textbooks play a central role in shaping learners' linguistic development, cultural awareness, and intercultural understanding. In multicultural EFL contexts, textbooks are expected to represent cultural diversity inclusively and pedagogically. However, limited attention has been given to how Indonesian secondary school English teachers perceive cultural sensitivity in textbooks and how they respond to cultural representation issues in classroom practice. This study examined teachers' perspectives, pedagogical strategies, challenges, and recommendations regarding cultural sensitivity in English textbooks. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, the study collected quantitative data from a questionnaire completed by 35 secondary school English teachers from Central Java, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, West Java, and Bangka Belitung, Indonesia, and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with five selected teachers. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively, while interview data were analyzed thematically. The findings show that the textbooks used in the participants' schools tended to foreground Indonesian cultural perspectives, but provided limited representation of global, minority, and intercultural perspectives. Teachers responded by supplementing textbook materials, contextualizing cultural content, facilitating respectful classroom discussions, and using authentic cultural texts. The study suggests that culturally sensitive ELT textbook use requires inclusive textbook development, teachers' intercultural awareness, pedagogical agency, and institutional support, particularly where learners negotiate local identities and global communicative demands through English in classroom learning. These findings offer implications for textbook evaluation, teacher professional development, and collaborative curriculum design in Indonesian secondary English language education.

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Introduction

Indonesia, an archipelagic country with more than 17,000 islands, is characterized by substantial cultural diversity, including diverse ethnic groups, languages, religions, and traditions. This diversity not only shapes national identity but also influences educational practices, including English Language Teaching (ELT). As English functions as a global medium of communication, English language education in Indonesia is expected to develop students' linguistic competence while fostering intercultural awareness, respect for diversity, and sensitivity toward different cultural identities. In secondary school contexts, English textbooks play an important role in this process because they function not merely as language learning resources, but also as cultural texts through which learners encounter representations of local, national, and global identities. Therefore, the cultural content presented in ELT textbooks needs to be responsive to Indonesia's multicultural context and capable of supporting inclusive and intercultural learning.

Previous studies have highlighted the important role of cultural sensitivity in educational materials for promoting intercultural understanding, respect, and inclusivity (Byram, 2021; Gay, 2018; Haynes et al., 2023; Holliday, 2010; Kanno & Stuart, 2011). Gay (2018) argues that culturally responsive teaching requires instructional materials that acknowledge learners' backgrounds and create equitable opportunities for participation. In ELT, culturally sensitive materials can help students understand both local and global cultures while developing the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries. Celce-Murcia et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of integrating cultural content into language classrooms, arguing that authentic cultural materials can support language comprehension and intercultural understanding.

In the Indonesian ELT context, several studies have examined cultural representation in English textbooks. For example, Sihombing and Nguyen (2022), Ariawan et al. (2022), and Mulyani et al. (2024) indicate that cultural content in Indonesian English textbooks is often represented unevenly, with some cultural perspectives receiving greater attention than others. These studies have provided valuable insights into how cultures are represented in textbooks. However, much of the existing research has focused primarily on textbook content analysis, while less attention has been given to how English teachers perceive, interpret, and pedagogically respond to cultural sensitivity issues in the textbooks they use.

However, despite the growing body of research on cultural representation in ELT materials (Ariawan et al., 2022; Mulyani et al., 2024; Sihombing & Nguyen, 2022), limited attention has been paid to how English teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to cultural sensitivity in the textbooks they use. Existing studies have mainly focused on textbook content analysis, while teachers' classroom-based perspectives and pedagogical responses remain comparatively underexplored. This gap is important because teachers play a mediating role between textbook content and students' intercultural learning experiences.

Based on this background, this study aims to explore English teachers' perspectives on cultural sensitivity in English textbooks used in Indonesian secondary schools. Specifically, it investigates teachers' perceptions of cultural sensitivity, the strategies they

use to address cultural limitations in textbooks, the challenges they face, and their recommendations for improving culturally responsive ELT materials and classroom practices.

Literature Review

Cultural Sensitivity in English Language Teaching

Cultural sensitivity has become an important issue in ELT, particularly in multicultural educational contexts. In language learning, culture is not merely supplementary knowledge; it is an integral component of communication, identity formation, and intercultural competence. Byram (2021) argues that language learners need intercultural communicative competence to interpret, mediate, and respond appropriately across cultural contexts. Therefore, ELT materials should provide balanced and respectful representations of diverse cultures so that learners can develop both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the importance of integrating cultural sensitivity into teaching materials and classroom instruction. Holliday (2010) notes that language learning is closely connected to intercultural communication and identity formation, making cultural representation in ELT materials highly significant. Furthermore, Permatasari and Andriyanti (2021) found that cultural text-based instruction can improve students' intercultural communicative competence and cultural awareness. These findings indicate that culturally sensitive instruction not only supports language acquisition but also promotes empathy, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding.

However, scholars have also pointed out that cultural sensitivity in ELT is often inadequately represented in educational materials. Keles and Yazan (2020), for example, revealed that many ELT textbooks tend to privilege dominant cultures while marginalizing other cultural perspectives. Similarly, Ariawan et al. (2022) found that cultural representation in Indonesian EFL textbooks frequently reflects unequal power relations and limited multicultural perspectives. Such imbalance may restrict students' opportunities to develop broader intercultural understanding and reinforce cultural stereotypes.

Cultural Representation in ELT Textbooks

Textbooks remain among the most influential resources in English language classrooms. In addition to providing linguistic input, they shape students' perceptions of cultural identities, values, and worldviews. Consequently, the cultural content presented in textbooks plays a significant role in either promoting or limiting students' intercultural understanding. When textbooks present culture narrowly or stereotypically, students may receive an incomplete view of language use and cultural diversity.

Several studies have examined the representation of culture in ELT textbooks across different educational settings. Sihombing and Nguyen (2022) analyzed Indonesian English textbooks and found that local Indonesian culture dominated the materials, while representations of global and target cultures remained limited. Similarly, Wahyuni (2018)

and Zulkarnaen et al. (2017) reported that Indonesian junior high school textbooks mainly emphasized source culture, providing insufficient exposure to diverse international cultures. While the inclusion of local culture is important for maintaining learners' cultural identity, excessive emphasis on one cultural perspective may reduce opportunities for students to engage with multicultural viewpoints.

Research conducted in broader international contexts has produced similar findings. Keles and Yazan (2020) revealed that global ELT textbooks often prioritize Western and mainstream cultural narratives while underrepresenting minority cultures and local identities. These findings suggest that cultural representation in ELT materials remains uneven and may fail to reflect the multicultural realities of language use in global communication.

Moreover, studies have shown that culturally diverse materials can positively influence students' engagement and intercultural competence. Rass (2020) demonstrated that multicultural literature promotes tolerance, empathy, and language development among learners. Likewise, Hossain (2024) argues that integrating authentic cultural materials into language instruction helps students understand language use within meaningful social and cultural contexts. Therefore, culturally balanced ELT materials are essential to support students' intercultural awareness and global competence.

Teachers' Roles and Challenges in Promoting Cultural Sensitivity

Teachers play a central role in mediating cultural content presented in textbooks and instructional practices. Their beliefs, strategies, and classroom decisions influence how students perceive and engage with cultural diversity. Gay (2018) emphasizes that culturally responsive teachers connect instructional content with learners' cultural experiences while also broadening students' awareness of other cultural perspectives. In ELT classrooms, this mediating role is particularly important because teachers often need to adapt textbook materials to make them more inclusive, balanced, and pedagogically meaningful.

Previous studies indicate that teachers employ various strategies to address cultural sensitivity in language classrooms. Chuang et al. (2020) found that teachers often integrate supplementary materials, discussions, and collaborative activities to expose students to diverse cultural perspectives. Similarly, Samuels (2018) reported that culturally responsive pedagogy encourages students to appreciate cultural diversity and participate actively in classroom learning. Teachers also frequently use authentic cultural materials such as stories, films, and real-life texts to strengthen students' intercultural understanding (Abacioglu et al., 2023; Hossain, 2024).

Despite these efforts, teachers face numerous challenges in implementing culturally sensitive instruction. One major challenge is the limited availability of culturally diverse teaching materials. Sihombing and Nguyen (2022) noted that many Indonesian English textbooks provide limited multicultural representation, restricting teachers' ability to facilitate intercultural learning. In addition, curriculum demands and time constraints often hinder teachers from integrating cultural discussions into language instruction effectively

(Love-Kelly, 2020). Teachers must also balance language proficiency goals with intercultural learning objectives, which can be difficult in classrooms with diverse student proficiency levels.

Professional development is another important issue highlighted in the literature. Ateh and Ryan (2023) and Oliver et al. (2021) found that teachers who received training in culturally responsive pedagogy demonstrated greater confidence and effectiveness in addressing cultural diversity in the classroom. These findings suggest that institutional support and continuous professional development are necessary to help teachers implement culturally sensitive ELT practices successfully.

Although previous studies have examined cultural representation in ELT textbooks and the importance of culturally responsive teaching, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing research has focused on textbook content analysis rather than teachers' lived experiences, classroom strategies, and pedagogical decision-making. Second, limited research has examined how teachers address cultural sensitivity when textbooks provide insufficient multicultural representation. Third, few studies have integrated questionnaire and interview data to capture both general patterns and in-depth teacher perspectives in Indonesian secondary school contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to examine cultural sensitivity in Indonesian secondary school ELT textbooks from English teachers' perspectives. Specifically, it explores teachers' perceptions of cultural sensitivity, the pedagogical strategies they use to address cultural limitations in textbooks, the challenges they encounter, and their recommendations for strengthening culturally responsive English instruction. By using a mixed-methods approach, this study provides both descriptive trends and qualitative insights into how teachers mediate textbook content in culturally diverse ELT classrooms.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods approach by collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to investigate English teachers' perspectives on cultural sensitivity in textbooks used in Indonesian secondary schools. The quantitative component provided an overview of teachers' perceptions, strategies, challenges, and recommendations, while the qualitative component offered deeper explanations of teachers' classroom experiences and pedagogical reasoning. The use of a convergent design allowed the researchers to compare, complement, and integrate findings from questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews.

Participants

The participants in this study were English teachers working in Indonesian junior and senior secondary schools. They were recruited from four provinces, namely Central Java, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, West Java, and Bangka Belitung, in order to obtain perspectives from varied regional and sociocultural contexts. The study involved 35 English

teachers in the questionnaire phase, from whom five participants were subsequently selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews.

Participant recruitment was conducted through voluntary participation using purposive criteria. The teachers were selected based on their professional experience in teaching English at the secondary school level and their familiarity with the use of English textbooks in classroom instruction. These criteria ensured that participants were able to provide relevant insights into cultural sensitivity in ELT textbooks and the pedagogical responses used to address cultural content in classroom practice. The inclusion of teachers from different school levels and geographical areas was intended to enrich the data by capturing diverse perspectives on textbook use, cultural representation, and culturally responsive English teaching in Indonesian secondary education.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information

Biographical Information	Participants	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	11	31.43
	Female	24	68.57
Age (years old)	20 – 29	6	17.14
	30 – 39	20	57.14
	40 – 49	7	20.00
	50+	2	5.71
Years of Teaching Experience	1 – 3	3	8.57
	4 – 6	6	17.14
	7 – 9	12	34.28
	10+	14	40.00

Data Collection

Data collection involved two complementary instruments: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data on teachers' perceptions of cultural sensitivity in textbooks, their classroom strategies, the challenges they encountered, and their recommendations for improvement. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain richer qualitative insights into teachers' experiences, interpretations, and pedagogical responses related to cultural sensitivity in ELT textbooks.

The structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for collecting quantitative data. It consisted of closed-ended items using Likert-scale responses and selected open-ended prompts to capture teachers' views on cultural representation, inclusivity, and textbook relevance. The questionnaire items were developed based on the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, intercultural communicative competence, and cultural representation in ELT materials.

Complementing the questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants to explore their experiences, practices, and perspectives in greater depth. The interview questions focused on teachers' understanding of cultural sensitivity, their evaluation of textbook content, strategies for supplementing or adapting materials,

and challenges in implementing culturally responsive instruction. The semi-structured format enabled the researchers to ask follow-up questions while maintaining consistency across participants.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns in teachers' responses. The analysis focused on key dimensions related to cultural sensitivity, including cultural representation, textbook adequacy, classroom strategies, instructional challenges, and recommendations for improvement. Because the study aimed to describe teachers' perspectives rather than test causal relationships, descriptive analysis was considered appropriate.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The process involved familiarization with the interview transcripts, initial coding, identification of recurring patterns, theme development, and interpretation. The themes were then compared with the questionnaire findings to identify points of convergence, complementarity, and elaboration.

Finally, findings from the questionnaire and interviews were triangulated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives. Triangulation was conducted by comparing quantitative response patterns with qualitative excerpts and explanations. This process strengthened the interpretation of the findings by showing how statistical trends were supported, clarified, or extended by teachers' interview responses.

Results

This section reports the quantitative and qualitative findings on English teachers' perceptions and pedagogical responses to cultural sensitivity in Indonesian secondary school ELT textbooks. The findings are presented in four interrelated areas: teachers' understandings of cultural sensitivity, strategies for addressing cultural content in classroom practice, challenges in promoting culturally sensitive instruction, and recommendations for improving textbook design and instructional support.

English Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Sensitivity in English Textbooks

To explore teachers' perceptions of cultural sensitivity in English textbooks, participants were asked to identify keywords that they associated with the concept. This item was designed to reveal teachers' initial understanding of cultural sensitivity as reflected in their views on diversity, respect, representation, inclusivity, and intercultural awareness. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Defining Cultural Sensitivity

Keywords	Rank
Respect for cultural differences	1
Cultural empathy	2
Intercultural competence	3
Diversity appreciation	4
Inclusivity	5
Cultural responsiveness	6
Cultural competence	7
Cultural adaptation	8

The findings indicate that teachers primarily associated cultural sensitivity with respect for cultural differences, cultural empathy, intercultural competence, appreciation of diversity, and inclusivity. Participants emphasized that cultural sensitivity involves recognizing learners’ cultural backgrounds, avoiding stereotypes, and creating classroom interactions that respect diverse identities and values.

The interview data further revealed that teachers viewed cultural sensitivity as an important element in creating inclusive learning environments. Several participants explained that students should feel respected and valued regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Teachers also emphasized the importance of fostering empathy and equal respect toward different cultures.

To gain deeper insights into teachers’ perceptions of cultural sensitivity, participants were also asked to explain their understanding of the concept based on their own experiences and viewpoints. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Perspectives on Cultural Sensitivity

Question	Participants’ Sample Excerpts
Based on your point of view, what is meant by “cultural sensitivity”?	“To me, cultural sensitivity means being aware and respectful of the various cultures present in our classroom. Regardless of the students’ cultural backgrounds, they must feel valued and respected for who they are.” (Teacher 1) “Being culturally sensitive means fostering understanding and empathy among our students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.” (Teacher 2) “It’s about ensuring that every culture is given equal importance and respect.” (Teacher 5)

The findings showed that teachers perceived cultural sensitivity as the ability to respect, appreciate, and accommodate cultural diversity within classroom interactions and learning activities. Participants emphasized the importance of creating inclusive learning environments where students from different cultural backgrounds feel acknowledged and respected. To investigate teachers’ evaluations of cultural representation in English textbooks, participants were asked whether the textbooks used in their schools sufficiently promoted cultural sensitivity. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The Most Dominant Culture Represented in English Textbooks

Question	Participants' Sample Excerpts
Based on your assessment of the English textbook currently used in your school, does this textbook sufficiently promote cultural sensitivity?	"I don't think so. Most textbooks used in our schools predominantly feature Indonesian cultural references. I think it may alienate students from Western cultural backgrounds." (Teacher 1) "Insufficient, I think. My students are missing out on a valuable chance to learn about the cultural nuances of English-speaking countries like the United States and the United Kingdom." (Teacher 3) "It's disappointing that our textbooks focus mainly on Indonesian culture, overlooking the global diversity of English-speaking communities," (Teacher 2)

The findings revealed that most participants believed the English textbooks used in their schools did not sufficiently promote multicultural representation. Approximately 75% of surveyed teachers and three of the five interview participants stated that Indonesian cultural perspectives dominated the materials, while representations of global, target-language, and minority cultures were comparatively limited.

Teachers also reported that the textbooks tended to prioritize local cultural references, particularly Indonesian traditions, folktales, and customs. Although participants acknowledged the importance of maintaining local cultural identity, many believed that students should also be exposed to a wider range of global cultures to better understand English as an international language.

Strategies for Addressing Cultural Sensitivity in the English Language Classroom

The questionnaire results indicate that English teachers employed a range of pedagogical strategies to address cultural sensitivity in English language classrooms. These strategies reflect teachers' efforts to adapt textbook content, provide additional cultural explanations, encourage classroom discussion, and create more inclusive learning experiences. Table 5 presents the strategies reported by the participating teachers in addressing cultural sensitivity during classroom instruction.

Table 5. Strategies to Address Cultural Sensitivity

Question	Participants' Sample Excerpts
In your daily teaching process, how do you address cultural sensitivity?	"One of the strategies I employ is to integrate diverse cultural materials into my lessons. For example, I often include excerpts from Indonesian literary works such as <i>Lutung Kasarung</i> from my province, West Java, and <i>The Golden Goose</i> (which, to my knowledge, originates from England) when teaching narrative texts. These texts not only expose students to different cultural perspectives but also stimulate discussions about the values and traditions embedded within each culture." (Teacher 3) "I enrich the materials in the textbook by incorporating cultural background information into the texts. By doing so, I can help students better understand and appreciate different cultures. For instance, when teaching narrative texts

through a folktale like *Malin Kundang*, I provide historical context about the seafaring culture in Indonesia during ancient times. It can help my students understand why Malin Kundang decided to leave home and the dangers he faced at sea.” (Teacher 4)

One commonly reported strategy was the integration of supplementary materials containing diverse cultural perspectives. Approximately 80% of surveyed teachers and four of the five interview participants stated that they incorporated additional materials such as folktales, literary texts, films, songs, and authentic texts from different cultural backgrounds to broaden students’ cultural exposure.

Another strategy involved providing cultural background information when teaching English texts. Teachers reported that they often explained the historical, social, and cultural contexts behind stories, traditions, and practices presented in learning materials. Some participants also used comparisons between Indonesian culture and cultures from other countries to encourage students to reflect on cultural similarities and differences.

The findings further showed that teachers attempted to create inclusive classroom environments that encouraged students to share their cultural experiences and opinions openly. Approximately 90% of participants emphasized the importance of maintaining respectful classroom discussions and ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds felt accepted and valued.

Teachers also reported using authentic cultural texts, including advertisements, newspaper articles, and short stories, to help students understand how language is used in real cultural contexts. Participants believed that integrating cultural exploration into language learning activities helped students develop both linguistic competence and cultural awareness.

Challenges in Integrating Cultural Sensitivity into English Language Instruction

Despite their efforts to promote culturally sensitive English language instruction, teachers encountered several challenges in classroom implementation. These challenges reflected tensions between textbook content, students’ cultural awareness, instructional constraints, and the need for more inclusive teaching resources. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Challenges in Integrating Cultural Sensitivity

Question	Participants’ Sample Excerpts
What obstacles do you encounter when trying to integrate cultural sensitivity into your lessons?	“Finding appropriate materials that represent the diverse cultural backgrounds of our students is a constant struggle. Most textbooks available to us heavily emphasize Indonesian cultures, leaving little room for exploration of other cultural perspectives.” (Teacher 2) “The challenge is intensified when trying to balance cultural content with our language proficiency goals. It’s crucial for us, as teachers, to thoughtfully integrate cultural sensitivity into our curriculum without compromising our language learning objectives.” (Teacher 1)

“As teachers, we’re constantly battling against time. The challenge lies in finding enough time to cover all the required materials while also ensuring that cultural sensitivity is effectively integrated into our English language teaching.”
(Teacher 4)

One major challenge identified by participants was the limited availability of culturally diverse teaching materials. Approximately 85% of surveyed teachers and four of the five interview participants expressed concern about the lack of textbooks and supplementary resources representing a wider range of cultures. Many teachers reported that they had to search independently for additional materials to address this limitation.

Another challenge involved balancing cultural discussions with language learning objectives. Teachers reported difficulties integrating cultural sensitivity into classroom activities without reducing the focus on language proficiency development. Several participants explained that they had to carefully select cultural materials that simultaneously supported language learning outcomes.

Time constraints and curriculum demands also emerged as significant barriers. Approximately 75% of participants reported that the packed curriculum limited opportunities for extensive cultural discussions and activities. Teachers explained that they often struggled to cover required language materials while simultaneously incorporating cultural exploration into lessons.

Additionally, teachers identified students’ varying language proficiency levels as another challenge. Several participants stated that some students experienced difficulties understanding culturally related materials presented in English. Teachers also noted the challenge of designing culturally sensitive activities that were accessible to students with different levels of English proficiency.

Recommendations for Enhancing the Cultural Sensitivity of English Textbooks and Instructional Practices

The findings also revealed several recommendations proposed by teachers for improving cultural sensitivity in English textbooks and instructional practices. Teachers emphasized the importance of involving educators and cultural experts from diverse backgrounds in curriculum and textbook development processes. Participants believed that such collaboration would help ensure that English textbooks represent broader cultural perspectives and reflect students’ diverse experiences.

Participants also recommended increasing the inclusion of authentic cultural content in textbooks, including literature, folktales, traditions, and cultural practices from both Indonesian and international contexts. Teachers believed that authentic cultural materials could make learning more meaningful and promote students’ intercultural understanding.

Another recommendation concerned the importance of continuous professional development related to cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication. Teachers expressed the need for training programs that could help them improve their ability to

manage cultural diversity and implement culturally responsive teaching practices effectively.

Furthermore, participants suggested promoting experiential learning opportunities such as cultural events, guest speakers, and field trips to enhance students' cultural exposure. Teachers believed that direct engagement with diverse cultural experiences could strengthen students' appreciation of multiculturalism.

Finally, participants emphasized the need for ongoing evaluation and assessment of textbooks and instructional practices to ensure cultural inclusivity and relevance. Several teachers suggested involving multiple stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and community members, in evaluating the cultural sensitivity of educational materials.

Discussion

The findings indicate that English teachers view cultural sensitivity as an important component of English language education in Indonesian secondary schools. Teachers associated cultural sensitivity with respect for cultural differences, empathy, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding. These findings align with Byram's (2021) concept of intercultural communicative competence and Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching framework, both of which emphasize the importance of connecting language learning with cultural awareness and respect for diversity.

The findings also indicate that English teachers recognize the need to balance local cultural identity with broader multicultural representation in ELT materials. Most participants believed that English textbooks in Indonesian secondary schools mainly emphasized Indonesian culture while providing limited exposure to global and intercultural perspectives. Although local cultural representation is important for maintaining students' cultural identity, a lack of broader cultural representation may limit students' opportunities to develop intercultural awareness.

This finding supports Keles and Yazan's (2020) argument that ELT textbooks may present unequal cultural representation by emphasizing certain cultures while marginalizing others. Teachers in this study believed that students should learn not only about Indonesian culture but also about diverse cultural practices, values, and perspectives beyond their immediate context. Such exposure is essential for preparing students to communicate in multicultural and global settings.

To address these limitations, teachers implemented various culturally responsive teaching strategies. A common strategy was the integration of supplementary cultural materials, including literature, folktales, films, songs, and authentic texts from different cultural backgrounds. This finding suggests that teachers actively mediate textbook limitations by expanding the range of cultural input available to students.

Another strategy identified in this study was the contextualization of learning materials through explanations of the historical, social, and cultural backgrounds related to classroom texts. Teachers attempted to help students understand not only language

structures but also the cultural values embedded within texts. This finding supports Pulimeno et al. (2020), who argue that contextualized learning materials enable students to connect academic content with real-life cultural experiences. By contextualizing learning materials, teachers encouraged students to appreciate cultural diversity while strengthening their understanding of language use in different contexts.

The findings also show that teachers emphasized the importance of creating inclusive classroom environments where students feel respected and comfortable expressing their cultural identities and perspectives. Participants believed that culturally sensitive classrooms should promote mutual respect, openness, and intercultural dialogue. This finding supports Chuang et al. (2020) and Gay (2018), who argue that culturally responsive teaching strengthens students' sense of belonging and values their cultural experiences. Similarly, Androsof and Zhang (2023) emphasize the role of teachers in promoting positive intercultural interactions and reducing prejudice in diverse classrooms. Therefore, culturally sensitive instruction involves not only integrating diverse materials but also creating supportive classroom environments that encourage intercultural understanding and respect.

Despite these efforts, teachers faced several challenges in implementing culturally sensitive English instruction. One major challenge was the limited availability of culturally diverse teaching materials. Teachers reported that most textbooks mainly focused on Indonesian culture, making it difficult to introduce broader multicultural perspectives. This finding supports previous studies by Ariawan et al. (2022), Sihombing and Nguyen (2022), and Wahyuni (2018), which also found the dominance of local cultural representation in Indonesian ELT textbooks. As a result, opportunities for intercultural learning may become limited.

Another challenge identified in this study involved balancing cultural content with language-learning objectives. Teachers explained that integrating cultural sensitivity into English instruction requires careful planning so that cultural discussions do not reduce focus on language goals. This challenge reflects teachers' dual roles as language instructors and cultural mediators. Limited instructional time and curriculum demands often make it difficult to develop both students' language proficiency and intercultural awareness simultaneously. This finding supports Love-Kelly's (2020) argument that time constraints and curriculum demands can hinder culturally responsive teaching.

Interestingly, although Indonesian educational policies encourage flexible and student-centered learning, many teachers still perceived the curriculum as overloaded and restrictive. This finding suggests a disconnect between policy expectations and classroom realities. Teachers continued to experience pressure to complete language-focused targets within limited instructional time, causing cultural exploration to be treated as supplementary rather than integral to English learning. Therefore, implementing culturally sensitive instruction requires not only flexible policies but also practical support and sufficient classroom time.

Students' varying levels of English proficiency also emerged as a challenge in implementing culturally sensitive instruction. Teachers explained that some students struggled to understand culturally related materials in English, making it difficult to design activities that were both meaningful and accessible for all learners. This finding supports Anyichie and Butler's (2023) argument that culturally responsive teaching should consider both linguistic complexity and cultural relevance. Without sufficient linguistic support, lower-proficiency students may face difficulties participating in intercultural discussions and engaging with culturally diverse materials.

The recommendations proposed by teachers in this study provide important implications for English language education in Indonesia. Participants emphasized collaboration among teachers, curriculum developers, and cultural experts in developing culturally inclusive ELT materials. This recommendation aligns with Abacioglu et al. (2023) and Celce-Murcia et al. (2014), who stress that culturally relevant materials should represent diverse cultural perspectives authentically. Teachers also highlighted the importance of integrating authentic cultural content from both Indonesian and international contexts to promote cultural diversity awareness while maintaining students' cultural identities.

Teachers also highlighted the need for continuous professional development related to cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication. This finding supports Szelei et al. (2020), Ateh and Ryan (2023), and Oliver et al. (2021), who found that professional development can strengthen teachers' cultural competence and confidence in managing diverse classrooms. The findings suggest that teachers need both culturally diverse materials and institutional support to implement culturally responsive practices effectively.

Overall, this study contributes to research on cultural sensitivity in ELT by highlighting Indonesian secondary school teachers' perspectives and classroom experiences. Unlike studies that focus mainly on textbook content, this study shows how teachers interpret, adapt, and supplement textbook materials in response to perceived cultural limitations. The findings indicate that culturally sensitive ELT requires balanced textbook representation, teacher agency, professional development, and institutional support.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the importance of culturally responsive teaching and intercultural communicative competence in ELT. The findings suggest that cultural sensitivity should be integrated into language learning rather than treated as supplementary content. Practically, the study highlights the need for policymakers, curriculum developers, textbook writers, and teacher education programs to support culturally inclusive instructional materials and pedagogical practices.

Conclusion

This study examined English teachers' perspectives, strategies, challenges, and recommendations regarding cultural sensitivity in English textbooks used in Indonesian secondary schools. Using a convergent mixed-methods approach, the study found that teachers viewed cultural sensitivity as essential for creating inclusive English learning

environments and developing students' intercultural awareness.

The findings show that participants perceived an inadequate portrayal of multiculturalism in the textbooks used in their schools. Although Indonesian cultural perspectives were represented, participants reported limited inclusion of global, target-language, minority, and intercultural perspectives. In response, teachers incorporated supplementary materials, provided cultural background information, facilitated respectful discussions, and used authentic cultural texts to enrich classroom learning.

The study concludes that teachers play a crucial role in mediating cultural content and promoting culturally responsive ELT. However, their efforts are constrained by limited culturally diverse materials, curriculum demands, time constraints, and students' varying English proficiency levels. The findings suggest the need for more inclusive textbook development, continuous teacher professional development, and collaborative curriculum design involving teachers, curriculum developers, cultural experts, and other stakeholders. Future studies may expand the sample size, include students' perspectives, and conduct classroom observations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural sensitivity in ELT practice.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Rolisda Yosintha: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

Yeni Suprihatin: Data Curation, Validation, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing.

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