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*Decolonize English at the Age of
Artificial Intelligence: Rethinking
Language, Literature, and Pedagogy*

The Paradox of Merdeka Curriculum in English Textbook at 7th Grade: Decolonizing Perspectives in English Teaching

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Abstract: In English language learning, teachers often use textbooks published by national publishers such as Bupena. Bupena (Buku Penilaian Autentik (Authentic Assessment Book)) was published by Erlangga Publishers in 2023 based on the independent curriculum. The relevance between textbooks and the colonial era will be discussed in this study. It will also examine the paradox of the term “Merdeka” (independence) in the national curriculum itself in English language learning. As a country that was once colonized by European nations, one of which was Britain, the colonial perspective is still ingrained in the daily lives of Indonesians, especially in how educators, policymakers, and textbook publishers view students as still being shackled by the perspective of the oppressor or colonizer. As discussed by Paulo Freire in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, about how oppressors view the oppressed and how education should not give birth to new oppressors. In this study, the author uses a descriptive qualitative method with a content analysis approach, focusing on the Bupena 7th grade junior high school textbook for the Merdeka curriculum, published in 2023 by Erlangga Publishers.

Keywords: Paradox; Textbook; Merdeka Curriculum; Decolonizing;

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Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that was colonized by Western countries such as Portugal, England, Spain, and the Netherlands. Colonialism in Indonesia lasted for centuries, starting in the 16th century after the fall of Constantinople and the mission to find spices. The Portuguese were the first nation to anchor their ships in Malacca in 1511 AD, followed by Spain, England, and the Netherlands in the following years. The Portuguese succeeded in occupying Malacca and establishing a fort until finally monopolizing the spice trade in Maluku. In addition to monopolizing trade, the Portuguese also actively spread Christianity (Catholicism)

(Nurmalasyari, Wulandari, & Putri, 2024). The longest colonization in Indonesia was carried out by a trading organization called the VOC (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) which received special privileges from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to manage and regulate trade affairs and establish diplomatic and military relations in the Asian region (Sinaga, Larasati, Tondang, & Simanjuntak, 2024).

Indonesia experienced colonization not only by Western nations, but also by other Asian nations. Japan entered Indonesia through Tarakan, North Kalimantan in 1942 by attacking Dutch military bases in Tarakan, Sumatra and Java (Simorangkir, et al., 2023). After 3.5 years of occupation, Japan was defeated by Allied forces. The power vacuum by Japan was exploited by national fighters, especially the younger generation, by bringing Sukarno and Hatta to Rengasdengklok to distance themselves from Japanese influence and to urge immediate Indonesian independence. In the end, the older generation agreed to read the proclamation text on August 17, 1945, at Jalan Pegangsaan Timur Number 46, Jakarta, Sukarno's own residence (Febrianti, 2024).

After independence, the colonial influences of Indonesia's colonial rulers remained deeply ingrained in the Indonesian people. The legacy of colonialism permeates school learning. One of the most significant areas of focus for the author is English language learning. In English language learning, teachers typically use English textbooks like Bupena as teaching materials. In this context, the author utilizes Alan Cunningsworth's theory, which analyzes and evaluates the criteria for a good English textbook, Paulo Freire's thinking in his book "Education of the Oppressed," and the paradox of the Indonesian education curriculum, which currently uses the term "Merdeka" as its name.

Literature Review

Merdeka Curriculum and Philosophical Studies

Indonesia has experienced several changes in leadership. These changes also influenced the curriculum used. After the end of the 2013 curriculum, Indonesia entered a new era with the "Merdeka" curriculum. The advantage of the Merdeka curriculum lies in the freedom of teachers and students in learning as expected. This allows learning to be more effective and efficient, able to adapt to developments in society and technology. The development of the Merdeka curriculum focuses on the needs of students and industry to compete globally. Furthermore, the Merdeka curriculum also frees teachers and schools to decide on their own learning, allowing teachers to design more contextual learning. The Merdeka curriculum itself was initiated by the Minister of Education of Indonesia during the leadership of President Joko Widodo, Nadiem Anwar Makarim. For him, the goal of Merdeka Learning is to foster freedom of thought and expression in students (Tunas & Pangkey, 2024).

Merdeka curriculum is motivated by efforts to improve the quality and development of education in Indonesia. The government has undertaken various efforts to improve the quality of education, including by completing educational infrastructure and equipment, and increasing and improving the quality of teachers. Furthermore, student learning outcomes measured by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), developed by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation), indicate the relatively low quality of learning outcomes in Indonesia (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024, hal. 1-2). The Independent Curriculum aims to create meaningful and effective learning that enhances faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character, while also fostering the creativity, feeling, and will of students as lifelong learners imbued with Pancasila character. Thus, the Independent Curriculum formulates 6 (six) dimensions of the Pancasila student profile, namely (1) Faithful, pious to God Almighty, and noble morals, (2) Mutual cooperation, (3) Critical reasoning, (4) Global diversity, (5) Independent, and (6) Creative (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024, hal. 14-15). Discussing further how to achieve the Pancasila student profile, among others; efforts to achieve learning objectives related to understanding cultural differences and appreciating them

while being able to educate the competencies of the Pancasila student profile, learning activities that involve collaboration and relevant technology in order to hone students' learning experiences, co-curricular activities to be able to understand contextual issues (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024, hal. 16-18).

Merdeka Curriculum is structured based on philosophical, sociological, and psychopedagogical foundations. In a document published by the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency (2024), the philosophical basis adopted is that according to Ki Hajar Dewantara (1928), education is an effort to build independent human beings, namely humans who are not physically or mentally dependent on others, but rely on their own strength. In addition, according to HAR Tilaar (2012), education is an effort to build an advanced human civilization that is still based on and considers the context in which education is carried out. By being described as achieving science, technology, values, and traditions that are humanist, democratic, sovereign, prosperous, socially just, and do not damage the environment. Education is meant in the context of Indonesia as a nation state that adheres to Pancasila with all the uniqueness and characteristics of Indonesia, including cultural, ethnic, religious, regional, traditional, and social diversity (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024, hal. 33-34).

Similar to the philosophical foundation used in the Merdeka Curriculum, namely the context in which education is implemented, the experience and local knowledge of indigenous people need to be involved in determining the instruments in learning. In the philosophy of empiricism that refutes the rationalist philosopher Rene Descartes whose framework is famous for cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), philosophers such as John Locke argue that knowledge is obtained from sensory experience (feeling, seeing and tasting). (Sultan, 2025). This means that knowledge is not born in a vacuum. In education, knowledge does not always come only from reason, but also from the experience of the learner himself. Likewise, the thinking of Ki Hajar Dewantara, for whom education must be in the form of creativity, feeling and intention which he called the "Trisakti Jiwa Concept" which is also known as reasoning, appreciation, and practice (Sofiyatun, Soesanto, Aulia, & Khairunnisa, 2025). The pedagogical theory born from the thoughts of Benjamin Samuel Bloom (1956) known as Bloom's Taxonomy theory, educational objectives include cognitive aspects, namely those related to remembering or recognizing, affective emphasizing behavior that reflects awareness, interest, attention, care and responsibility, then psychomotor as an integral that involves physical movement (Kasanah & Pratama, 2024). In the world of education, students' experiences as foreign learners cannot be separated from the values and culture of origin of the learner. In the Indonesian context, the empirical experience of Indonesian society that intersects with local culture should not be ignored. As a society that lives in a diversity of cultures, beliefs, ethnicities and tribes, as expected in the framework of the Independent Curriculum, that education must be in accordance with the context of Indonesian society.

Bupena as An English Textbook

English textbooks are crucial because they contain various instruments and materials to be studied. According to Cunningsworth (1998), a good textbook should support curriculum objectives, meet students' knowledge needs, and reflect the social and cultural contexts familiar to students.

BUPENA Merdeka English is one of the books commonly used in Indonesia for English language learning. Bupena is an abbreviation for "Authentic Assessment Book" published by Erlangga. This book is needed as a learning and assessment tool for students. Furthermore, this book is based on K13N, an abbreviation for the revised 2013 Curriculum, which aims to deepen understanding of the material through exercises such as practice questions, daily tests, and authentic assignments to stimulate students' critical thinking skills.

In other countries, several studies have shown an imbalance in ethnic representation in multicultural English Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. Components in English textbooks serve as instruments that reproduce the dominant culture and are not oriented towards introducing

different cultures. Forms of cultural understanding carry ideological and political burdens in shaping opinions that obscure students' existence. An epistemological, decolonial approach, and liberation from linguistic and cultural imperialism must be upheld. Colombian culture in English textbooks for foreign learners shows little to no local culture presence in the analyzed textbooks (Soto-Molina, Eduardo, & Pilar, 2020).

In contrast to Colombia, the Norwegian English textbook *New Flight* used in the Stavanger region shows 50% of the images representing indigenous people in a traditional setting without modern elements, wearing traditional clothing such as *bunad* (traditional Norwegian clothing) and performing *hallingdans* (traditional Norwegian dances). Although there are representations of indigenous Norwegian people in this textbook, the stereotype of indigenous people as primitive and unable to assimilate to the modern world can reinforce that stereotype (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017).

Colonialism and Inferiority Complex as a Colonized Nation

The colonialism experienced by the Indonesian people may have left remnants of a lack of self-confidence within the Indonesian people themselves. Feelings of inferiority are a psychological condition in which an individual feels unworthy or less capable than others. This condition affects various aspects of life, including mental health, social interactions, and academic achievement. An inferiority complex can hide an individual's academic abilities or professional achievements. Inferiority complexes can originate from within an individual or from outside, including their environment (Amani, Taqiyah, & Iswinarti, 2024).

What Freire (1970) mentioned in his book *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"* which is cultural invasion is the goal to perpetuate oppression. An imposition of one world onto another, in this case is the imposition of culture from the oppressor on the oppressed. Cultural invasion contains the superiority of the invader while containing the inferiority of the recipient of the invasion (Freire, 2025). As in English language learning, it is closely related to Anglo-normativity, a term introduced by McKinney (2017) referring to the expectation that people will and should be proficient in English, and are considered lacking, even deviant if they are not (Andersen, 2026). In addition, the idea of Anglocentrism which refers to the glorification of knowledge originating from Anglo-Saxon countries or the perspective of using Western nations or commonly referred to as Eurocentrism which views Europe as the center of science, while ignoring the rest of the world (Mas'oed, 2024). In English language learning, the representation of the Indonesian nation in English textbooks, characterized by white, brown, brown, and even black skin for some Indonesians from various ethnicities such as Malay, Javanese, Bugis, Papuan, and Chinese, is still not dominant. Meanwhile, the faces of Europeans who are Indonesianized in the *Bupena* English textbook are dominant, making this book questionable. Perhaps we all think that it is very natural for European faces to dominate in textbooks because we are learning the native language of the nation. However, English learning as mentioned by Alan Cunningsworth in his book *"Choosing Your Coursebook"* chapter 7 needs to be adapted to the local context, such as social and cultural values that need to be adjusted to the learner such as terms of location, social mores, age group, etc. So that the textbook can be relatable and interpretable to the learner (Cunningsworth, 1995). Therefore, English textbooks in Indonesia that are still Anglocentric need to be reviewed with the empirical experience of the Indonesian people.

Meanwhile, Paulo Freire in his book, *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"* describes various efforts for revolutionary leaders together with the oppressed to become subjects in a revolutionary action. A revolutionary leader must work together with the community to carry out dialogical work, because an anti-dialogical attitude is a method used by oppressors in maintaining their status quo, where the oppressors place the oppressed as objects rather than as subjects of change. If a revolutionary leader uses an anti-dialogical attitude, then his efforts to free the oppressed from oppression will only end up becoming a new oppression. A revolutionary action leader is on two sides that make it possible for him to internalize the attitudes and characteristics of the oppressors, when he feels that he is the subject of the revolution while forgetting his point of view and not carrying out a dialogical attitude with the oppressed so that he makes him only an object

of the revolution, then in fact he has internalized the methods used by the oppressors (Freire, 2025, hal. 79-133). Therefore, it is important for a revolutionary leader to accompany the oppressed, in this case the people who receive education, where the education is the output of a policy produced by policy makers, or textbooks published by major publishers in Indonesia, so that they do not forget what is truly forgotten by Indonesian society. In English learning, for example, a stakeholder or publisher of English textbooks, or perhaps a teacher, could internalize an anti-dialogical attitude when something is forgotten by Indonesian society. In line with Freire's (1970) thinking that a colonized nation, in this case the oppressed, can be on two sides, which can "absorb" the oppressors within themselves. As a people with two sides, the oppressed, in this case the Indonesian people, still accept the power that becomes bureaucracy (Freire, 2025, hal. 186). Thus, decolonizing English textbooks as teaching materials is also important to put aside the feeling of inferiority of the Indonesian people as a nation that was once colonized by European nations, which in this case is learning from a language from a country that once carried out imperialism against several nations, namely England.

Research Method

In this article, the author uses a qualitative research method with a content analysis approach. Qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of social phenomena and the meanings formed by individuals, focusing on processes, contexts, and experiences that cannot be reduced to numbers. The qualitative research paradigm starts from the interpretation of reality as the result of meaningful social interactions and is not singular or absolute. The main characteristic of this research is the flexibility of the design, which allows the researcher to adapt the research strategy and field dynamics. The goal of this research is to gain a deep understanding, not just measured data (Rohmad, Munjin, & Zulfa, 2025).

Meanwhile, the content analysis approach is a systematic approach to analyzing communication content in the form of text, images, and videos. Krippendorff (2018) explains that content analysis is a research technique designed to make reproducible and valid inferences from data to its context. The content analysis approach can be used in both quantitative and qualitative research. In qualitative research, it emphasizes in-depth interpretation of the meanings, themes, or narratives that emerge from the data, allowing for more contextual interpretations, understanding the implicit meanings in advertising narratives or visual symbolism. In qualitative research methods, content analysis is oriented towards interpretative analysis that reveals complexities and nuances that cannot be measured with numbers, while analysis focuses on patterns, themes, and categories that emerge in content, as well as on understanding the meanings formed in certain contexts. The qualitative approach in content analysis focuses on the elaboration and interpretation of data to gain a deeper understanding of the social or cultural context reflected in media or texts (Arianto, Anggraini, & Madu, 2025).

Finding and Discussion

The European Face as a Visual Norm: The Dominance of European Faces in BUPENA Textbooks

In Chapter 1, "The Beginning: 0," of the BUPENA Merdeka English textbook, a group of white students is depicted. This chapter features depictions of European facial features and family structures in which the textbook's illustrations are dominated by people with European features. Some physical characteristics, such as facial features strongly associated with European imagery, straight hair, and fair or light-colored skin, are prominent. Additionally, in Chapter 1, "Hi, How are you", there is also a woman with facial features identical to European visuals, and while some conversations or questions predominantly use Indonesian names, the visuals depicted feature individuals with European facial features.

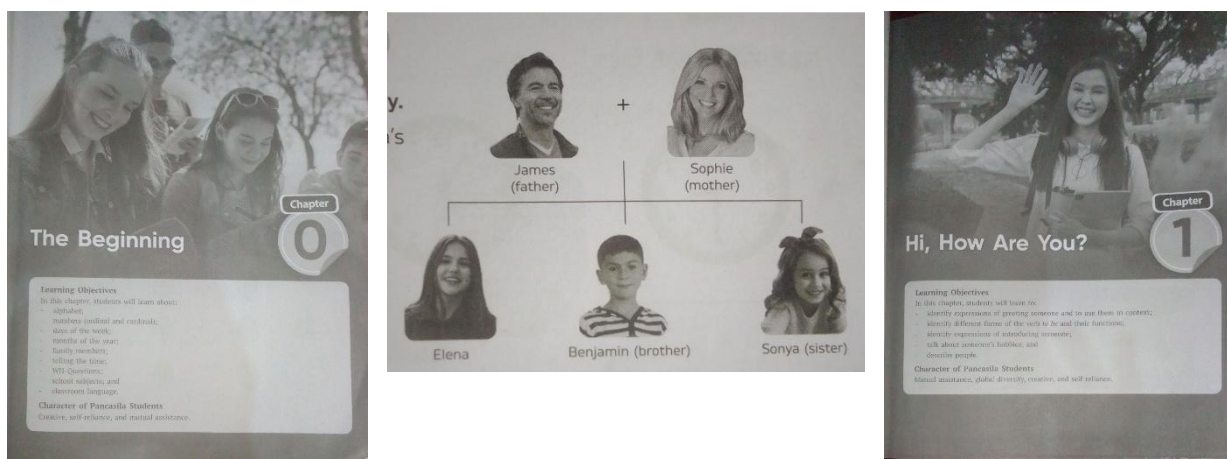


Figure 1.1 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

In one of the textbook questions in the BUPENA curriculum regarding self-introduction, a person from the Indonesian city of Palembang is featured. The image shows a woman with predominantly African facial features, though there are also European elements in the girl's appearance. Additionally, there is an image of a boy named Aldi, a name that is very common among local communities, particularly in Indonesia. However, in the description of the image, Aldi is not depicted with Asian features but rather with the features of a European boy.

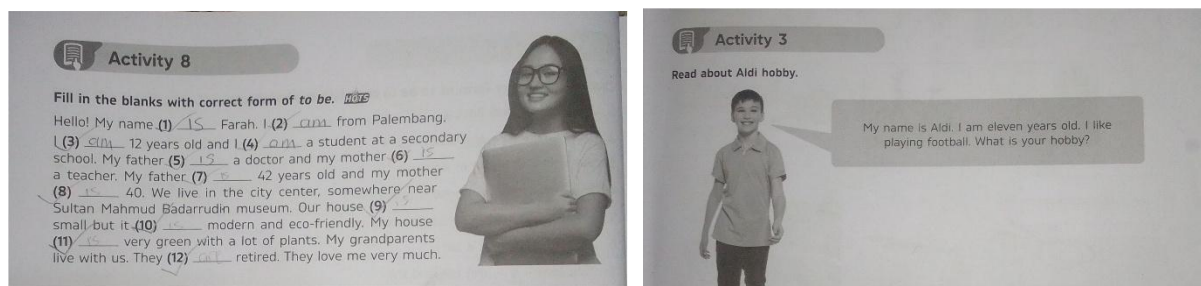


Figure 1.2 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

In contrast, the image shows several European faces depicted as Papuan residents. Generally speaking, the Indonesian public clearly recognizes the physical characteristics of the Papuan people: dark skin and curly, voluminous hair. However, the image in question depicts individuals who literally belong to the African-American racial group. Furthermore, the images throughout this chapter of the textbook are predominantly of European faces. This demonstrates that the visual representation of European faces in BUPENA textbooks is considered normal. According to Louie & Wilkes (2018) although formal curriculum guidelines emphasize equality in service and racial representation in education and textbooks, this balance is not achieved. Regardless of whether this minimal representation is intentional or not, it demonstrates that the marginalization of racial minorities in the world of education remains deeply entrenched. This is consistent with Bettache (2025) research indicating that visual representations of European faces serve as a normative standard considered to represent humanity universally, while groups with non-European features are depicted as less visible or as not meeting this normative standard. This demonstrates how colonialism and Eurocentrism continue to be perpetuated today through visual media in modern education.

Activity 13

Complete the text with the words in the boxes.

The boy's name is Farhan Raditya, but people call him Radit Infinity. He was (1) _____ in Papua in 2010. He is one of the members of Infinity Band.

Radit is a (2) _____ boy. He has two small (3) _____. He has curly, black (4) _____. He has an (5) _____ face. His height is about 150 cm and his weight is 40 kg.

Radit is a (6) _____ boy. He sings at many events. He also plays roles in some musical dramas. During his (7) _____ time, he likes to play football, futsal, ice skating, and tae kwon do. He also likes (8) _____. His favorite food is (9) _____ and of course any food prepared by his mother. Radit likes singing and acting very much, but he is (10) _____ about studying subjects at school. Teachers at school love him.



eyes toast reading born spare

handsome oval busy serious hair

Figure 1.3 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

One significant consequence of the use of European faces as the visual norm in textbooks is the tendency toward an “emotionscape”—that is, the interpretation of emotional expressions. According to Ma et al., (2022), East Asian participants demonstrated higher accuracy in identifying sad expressions on Asian faces, yet showed very high accuracy in recognizing neutral, happy, fearful, and disgusted expressions on white faces. This is a result of frequent exposure to European faces as emotional references. Because people are more familiar with European faces in textbooks or advertisements, this indirectly tends to create an emotional template.

Reflection of Western Hegemony in the Face of Young Environment Ambassador in Textbook

Gramsci was not the first to introduce the concept of hegemony. The concept of hegemony was first introduced by Russian Marxists in 1885, primarily by a Marxist named Plekhanov (1883–1984), as a strategy to overthrow Tsarism in Russia. The concept of hegemony was also used by Lenin to explain the leadership of the proletariat. Meanwhile, the concept of hegemony never explicitly appeared in Marx's work. However, the concept of hegemony in Marxist social theory was actually developed by Gramsci. In other words, the idea of hegemony is central and original to Gramsci's social and philosophical theory. Meanwhile, if we trace the term back to its roots in ancient Greek, *eugemonia*, the word refers to the dominant position claimed by a city-state over other city-states of equal standing.

According to Gramsci (1971), the concept of hegemony has two aspects. On the one hand, hegemony differs from “domination” (and is thus closely associated with the opposition or civil society). On the other hand, hegemony is sometimes used as the antonym of corporate or

corporate-economic to denote a historical phase in which a particular group moves beyond a corporate existence, maintains its economic position, and aspires to achieve a leadership position in the political and social spheres (Gramsci, 1992). Gramsci argued that fascism was not only dangerous for Italy but also had a tendency to seize power. At the height of Gramsci's intellectual development (1926–1937), he was instead isolated in a prison under the fascist regime led by Mussolini. While in prison, Gramsci actually further developed his ideas by compiling his writings into a book titled "Prison Notebook." Although he wrote under pressure, strict surveillance, and censorship, his writings were eventually smuggled out of prison (Fariyah, 2024, p. 101).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016) argues that the driving force behind diatopic hermeneutics stems from a destabilizing image known as "epistemicide"—the eradication of knowledge originating from subordinate groups, which leads to the demise of the social groups that possess it (Santos, 2016). In Santos's view (2016), the epistemology of the Global North cannot adequately address the power imbalances resulting from the colonialism and imperialism experienced by the Global South. Consequently, epistemological hegemony persists even in the absence of direct colonialism and imperialism. Dominance over developing nations no longer relies on colonialism in the literal sense but manifests as neoliberalism in these nations, characterized by discrimination and oppression stemming from prioritizing group profit over the principle of social justice. Epistemological privileges benefit the West by reinforcing Western supremacy over the world in science and technology against subordinate groups. The impact of epistemicide is the creation of a knowledge hegemony perceived as established knowledge (Krisnadi, 2023).

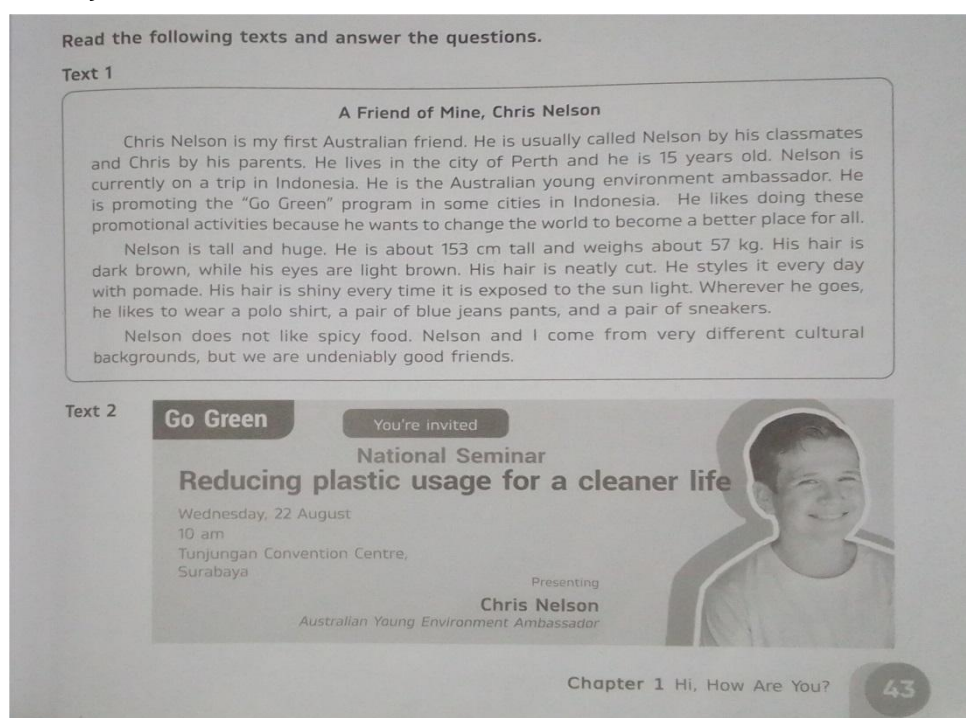


Figure 1.4 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

In the textbook, a photo is shown of a young man—a Young Environment Ambassador—speaking at a seminar titled "Reducing Plastic Usage for a Cleaner Environment," with a face strikingly similar to that of the European figure Chris Nelson. The Western knowledge hegemony reflected in this pamphlet could actually be replaced with an Indonesian figure or environmental activist. Environmental knowledge presented to Indonesian youth needs to engage local activists with more tangible empirical experience to ensure relevance to the context of Indonesia's societal issues. Indonesia is home to an environmental activist who founded Sokola Rimba, namely Butet Manurung, a graduate of Padjadjaran University. She initially approached indigenous

communities to understand their food security issues. Although repeatedly rejected by the indigenous people, she eventually succeeded in connecting with the forest people after adopting their way of life. She even developed a literacy method known as the Syllable Method. With this method, a child can learn to read within two weeks. The knowledge applied by the Sokola Institute is not intended to replace traditional knowledge and customs, but rather to serve as a supplement to address situations arising from outside the forest community (Kartikasari, 2024).

The Face of Domestication and the Double Burden of Women in Textbooks

According to Pantouw (1994), the arrival of the colonialists significantly changed the Minahasa social order for both men and women. However, these changes specifically changed the order of Minahasa women. Colonialism itself is synonymous with an inseparable patriarchal culture in which men are placed in a higher position than women (Ponto, Tampake, & Lauterboom, 2024). Feminism, a movement fighting for equality for women and men, originated in the church in Europe, originating from the culture of European families who exiled their unmarried daughters by locking them in monasteries. It was from these monasteries that women began to read, write, and find their own distinctive voices (Walters, 2022, hal. 13). The placement of women in certain spaces often sounds political when viewed historically. In the early 19th century, a married woman named Marion Reid (1843) published *A Plea for Women in Edinburgh*. "Motherly" behavior, which means humor, is being kind to one's husband and keeping one's children and house tidy and clean (Walters, 2022, hal. 44).

In 19th-century Germany, when Germany became an industrial nation, women began working outside the country to reduce their dependence on men. This system actually further oppressed women, because women have different biological conditions than men, making them less productive (Meylawati & Supriatna, 2023). In Indonesia itself, the arrival of colonial rule brought a new order that placed women as second-class and forced to marry at an early age, placed in domestic affairs and even considered as furniture. Minahasa society previously did not know patriarchal cultural patterns. Minahasa society recognized the role of women, namely Lumimu'ut as leaders, and it was explained that she was the one who divided the Minahasa regions as a place for her descendants. Not only women, men also occupied the same role and position. This is reflected in the motto of the Minahasa people, namely *si tou timou timou tou*, which means "people live to give life to others (Ponto, Tampake, & Lauterboom, 2024, hal. 358-359)."

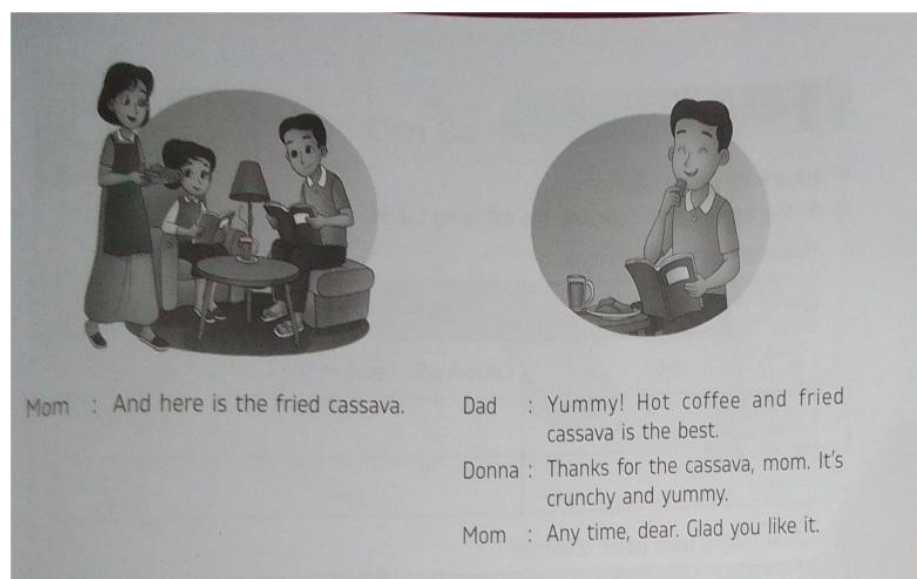


Figure 1.5 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

Activity 4

Act out the following dialogue.



Donna and her dad are reading books in the living room.



Donna : Dad, I am going to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. Do you want something?
Dad : Yes. Could you make me a cup of coffee, please?



Donna : Sure. How much coffee and sugar do you want?
Dad : Two teaspoons of coffee powder and a teaspoon of sugar, please.
Donna : OK, dad.



Donna : Here is your coffee, dad.
Dad : Thanks. Mmm.. The coffee smells good.

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Figure 1.6 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

Activity 2

Look at the pictures. Listen and repeat.



make the bed



tidy



do the laundry



iron



cook



lay the table



sweep the floor



mop the floor



dry the dishes



vacuum

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Figure 1.7(Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

In the textbook, a married woman serves a husband who is reading and chatting with his daughter. In the next image, women perform most of the domestic work, with men playing a less prominent role.

According to Suryadi and Idris (2010), there are psychoanalytic theories and structural functionalist theories in the division of roles between women and men in public-domestic social roles. Psychoanalytic theory views public-domestic social roles as originating from feminine-masculine traits. Meanwhile, in the view of cultural theory, public-domestic roles are inherited through demands that give birth to feminine or masculine traits. Providing miniature adult jobs in the form of toys from childhood to children introduces children to the different roles and functions between men and women. Girls are given toys that represent domestic roles such as dolls, miniature babies, and cooking utensils. From childhood, children are introduced to toys that are miniatures of adult jobs with different roles and functions between men and women. While boys are given toys that are identical to jobs that represent public roles such as toy cars, guns, robots, airplanes and others (Maulidia, 2021).

The reflection of women's roles in the domestic sphere and the faces of other women who occupy public roles in textbooks can lead readers to perceive the double burden experienced by women as inherent. Faqih (1996) defines gender bias as a perspective and attitude that prioritizes one sex over another, stemming from cultural beliefs that favor one sex. The double burden itself is a burden borne by one sex over another. This is often considered problematic because it affects women's health, social, and psychological abilities (Dewi, 2025).

The Culinary Identity Shift in Indonesia as Reflected in Textbooks

Suwandani & Hidayati (2025) argue that textbooks are products that not only present language content but also construct cultural representations through visuals. Their research shows that textbooks can represent culture within specific ideologies, whether locally or globally oriented. This is relevant due to shifts in Indonesian culinary culture or identity, as cuisine is one form of cultural interpretation that can be depicted through both text and visuals. Findings from the study conducted by Khoeriah et al. (2024) indicate that the most influential cultural dimension in the English textbooks of the Merdeka Curriculum is “products” (34%), which consists of folk tales, traditional foods, and cultural artifacts. Culinary traditions are not merely a matter of food; they can also serve as an identity and a cultural expression of a country or region. The shift in Indonesian culinary identity in the Bupena textbook is strikingly evident.

In the textbook, it is evident that the various foods—whether light or heavy—that are clearly illustrated are global dishes such as pancakes, cookies, cheese sticks, and others. The next image shows the procedure for making Gimmari, a traditional dish from South Korea, and the following image features a conversation about durian, a fruit commonly found in Asia. According to Lestari et al., (2026), the theory of gastrocolonialism views the dominance of global cuisine as an act of cultural colonization that can undermine the existence of local cuisine. Excessive exposure to global cuisine can serve as a symbolic movement that reinforces perceptions of global cuisine while simultaneously diminishing the visibility of local cuisine. The importance of representing local cuisine in textbooks stems from the fact that this constitutes an effort to preserve cultural identity amidst the pressures of globalization. Rajan (2024) notes that colonialism can shape cultural structures within food systems by positioning Western food as the high standard and local food as having lesser value; this influences how society perceives culinary identity. In the context of textbooks, the dominance of global culinary representations over local ones is seen as a symbolic representation of this cultural hierarchy, which has the potential to diminish or obscure the existence of Indonesian culinary identity.

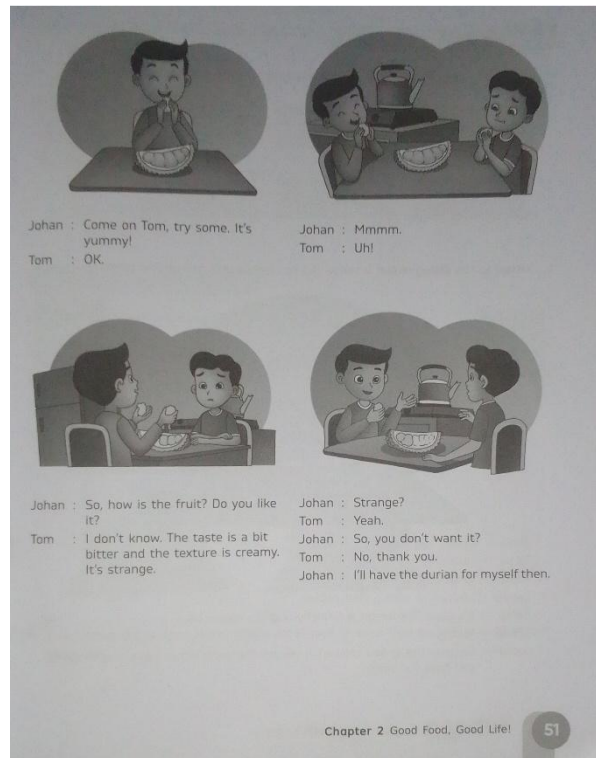


Figure 1.8 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

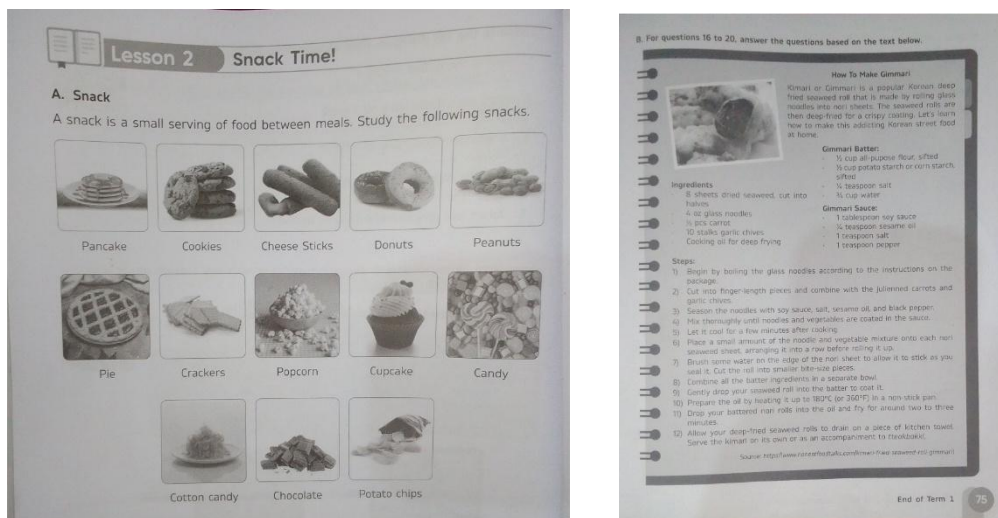


Figure 1.9 (Bupena Merdeka English, Zaida 2023)

Conclusion

The research shows that the English language learning process in Indonesia using the 2023 Bupena English textbook still contains remnants of colonialism and internalization of anti-dialogical attitudes and ignores dialogical approaches in pedagogy as mentioned by Freire. The use of the “Merdeka” curriculum in the textbook has not yet liberated the thinking and representations within it; aspects such as facial depictions, ecological knowledge, gender, and culinary content remain dominated by Western epistemology. As Gramsci argued, this hegemony ultimately marginalizes local figures in environmental and gender issues. Education should have

the purpose of liberating, as pointed out by Freire and Ki Hajar Dewantara. This can be seen in the rigid representation of gender roles in Indonesian society after the colonial era which is associated with certain feminine and masculine roles. This finding underscores the importance of deconstructing textbooks for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in the context of Indonesia, to make the acknowledgment of local knowledge the centre rather than only replicating colonial power structures as neoliberalism.

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