THE USE OF INDONESIAN TEXTBOOKS
IN THE EFL CLASS AS ALTERNATIVE ELT MATERIALS
AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA

Y. E. Budiyana[1]

Abstract: The production of textbooks is both costly and time consuming. At the same time there already exists a vast amount of printed materials. Bearing in mind the constraints mentioned, it would seem sensible to make use of existing materials. The purpose of this article is to argue that other Indonesian textbooks with local cultural contents such as Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language), Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam (Science Education), Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (social science education), and Pendidikan Agama (religious education), can be adapted and developed for the teaching of English at Primary Schools.

Key words : local cultural content materials

INTRODUCTION

The idea for adapting and developing ELT materials for Indonesian learners at the Primary School stems from the fact that most commercially published ELT materials focus on elements about American or British culture. This argument is, firstly, based on my observations upon the ELT textbooks for young learners sold in the bookstores in Semarang (see Appendix 1). More than 70% of the textbooks are written by foreign ELT writers. Most of the textbook writers who claim that their books are made use of in both EFL and ESL contexts are native speakers who consciously or unconsciously transmit their views, values, beliefs, attitudes and feelings of their own society. They normally live in their own culture and therefore find it hard to compose data beyond their own cul-tural boundaries. As a result, other learners from

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other societies such as Indonesia find it difficult making use of them on account of their irrelevance to their own culture.

Secondly, in order to meet local needs, the ELT materials must be closely linked to the national curriculum which is obliged to be implemented nationally. Clearly, almost all of the foreign textbook writers do not base their text books on this curriculum. The 1994 National Curriculum places emphasis on Indonesian culture. Such topics as at school, in the classroom, in the library, in the school canteen, in the school garden, school activities, scouting activities and classroom regulations are culture-specific, while most of the textbooks on the above topics are English or American culture based.

Thirdly, the argument is also based on the fact that the English teachers in elementary schools, in particular Pangudiluhur elementary schools are class teachers who are the IKIP graduates of the English Department. In other words, being class teachers, all of them have been familiar with the teaching of other subjects. The implication is that they will find it easier to teach something familiar than that of being unfamiliar.

THE USE OF LOCAL CONTENT MATERIALS AS A SMOOTH DEPARTURE FROM WHAT IS CULTURALLY FAMILIAR IN THE DAY-TO-DAY ENVIRONMENT OF THE STUDENTS TO UNFAMILIAR SCHEMA

According to Widdowson (1990), in our daily life, there are two types of knowledge involved in expressing and interpreting meanings in a given language: *systemic* and *schematic* knowledge. *Schematic* knowledge refers to socially-acquired knowledge. In contrast, *systemic* knowledge refers to the formal properties of language, involving its semantic and syntactic systems. In native language learning, a child's *systemic* and *schematic* knowledge are believed to develop concurrently. However, Widdowson says that foreign language learning experience is different:

> Here learners have already been socialized into *schematic* knowledge associated with their mother tongue: they are initiated into their culture in the very process of language learning (1990: 163-164).

In tracing the connection between both kinds of knowledge, it is easier to give the evidence in a precise form. Let us take the word *breakfast* in

English which is culturally translated into *makan pagi* in Indonesian. Culturally speaking, *breakfast* cannot be simply and culturally translated into *makan pagi*. The concept of *breakfast* may give some different kinds of interpretations from that of *makan pagi.*.

It demonstrates how even a simple word like *breakfast* contains cultural information. While the Indonesian children will normally think of *makan pagi* as rice, an egg, *tempe* or *tahu*, and water, English children think of breakfast as milk, bread, eggs or bacon. We can have orange juice or apple juice for *breakfast* but not for *makan pagi* because if we do, our parents will be worried about the possibility of our suffering from a stomach-ache.

The two words presented above are authentic examples. Learning a particular language involves acquiring a whole set of concepts. If the concepts in both languages are different, there must be smooth transition from familiar to unfamiliar schemas. Alptekin further mentions that:

> Given what is known about the facilitating effects of familiar schemas (or schemata) on foreign language acquisition, it is most natural for learners to rely on their already established schematic knowledge when developing systemic knowledge (1993: 136).

The implication in teaching is that the learners who learn English for the first time, especially primary school students, must start from the elements related to their life environment and their background culture, something with which they are already familiar and then step-by-step they are introduced to the items related to the target culture after their mastery of the vocabulary items in their own culture. Through the process of adaptation, the concept of *makan pagi* (the Indonesian breakfast) should be introduced to the learners first although the textbook presents the concept of the English breakfast. The new concept should be introduced later. Comparing the two different cultural concepts will be interesting for learners as a cross cultural exercise.

Foreign textbooks sometimes show some patterns of behaviour in an English speaking social context that Indonesian learners may find strange. The picture below is an illustration taken from the book entitled *Teaching English in the Primary School* by Halliwell (1992:110).
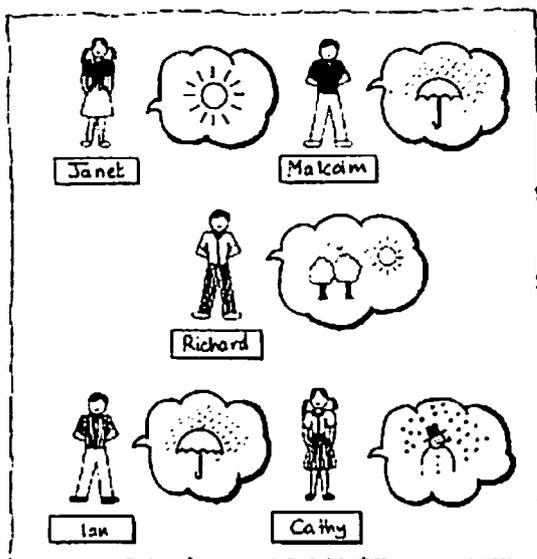
Picture 1:
The tasks are taken from *Teaching English in the Primary School* by Halliwell (1992:110).

There are four children, Derek, Ann, Rob, and Richard, who have different kinds of pets: a dog, a rabbit, a white mouse, and a cat. Indonesian learners, for example, find it uncommon or even disgusting to think of having a mouse as a pet because Indonesia is an agricultural country where mice are considered as farmers' enemies. Similarly, in countries where the majority of the population is Moslem, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, dogs will not be looked after as pets because they are strictly forbidden by their religion. Using a dog as a pet, particularly in Moslem schools, will not be an appropriate example and will result in the learners' unhappiness and discomfort. In this case, the teacher must be wise enough to adapt this kind of exercise to the local environment. Using textbooks without a process of adaptation in this case is not a wise decision. Instead of using *a dog* and *a mouse*, the teacher, for example, may use *a parrot* or *a pigeon* as examples of pets.

The following picture is also another example of adaptation taken from the same book. In selecting and grading vocabulary items from foreign textbooks, the teacher should start from those related to background culture. The word *snowing* is culture-specific. Therefore, it should not be introduced to the Indonesian learners at the same time as raining, hot, and foggy. The teacher can introduce *cloudy* instead because raining, foggy, hot, and cloudy are related to tropical weather.

Picture 2:
The tasks are taken from *Teaching English in the Primary School* by Halliwell (1992:79).

Most task based and problem solving activities above are taken from imported materials. They characterize communicative approaches and materials which are not value free models of behaviour and reflect the day to day situations in the native speaker's world which may not be in harmony with the situations of some cultures. In places where there is a growing shortage of local textbooks, the teacher's role is to make effective use of the existing foreign textbooks and background culture materials through various degrees of adaptation.

AN ALTERNATIVE TECHNIQUE OF EXPLOITING BACKGROUND CULTURE MATERIALS OF SUBJECTS OTHER THAN ENGLISH FOR EFL TEACHING
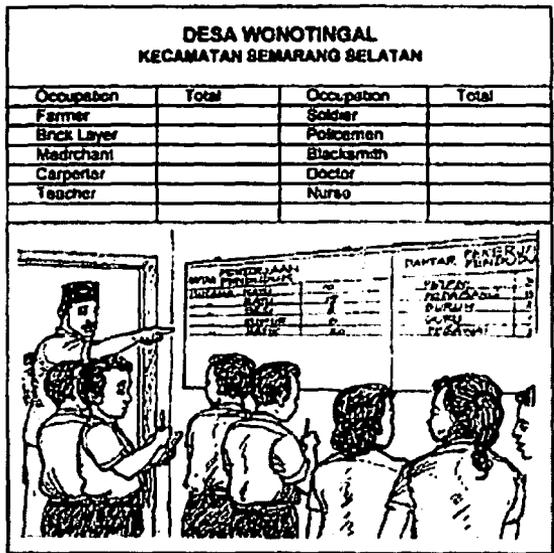
This section deals with several examples of how to exploit background culture materials of subjects other than English for EFL teaching. According to Halliwell,

> Learning other things in English will help children to learn English. In the process, they will be handling real meaning rather than just words and structures for their own sake (1992:131).

This section intends to show that there are tasks in the student textbooks of other subjects worthwhile for ELT materials by which students will be learning, at some stage, to record information diagrammatically.

A. Exploiting the materials of *Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* (social studies)

In social studies, the primary school students are usually asked to fill in the forms provided by the teacher to record informa-tion from the statistics in their own village offices showing, for example, the data about the number of population (adult, male, female, children), occupa-tions, religions, families, etc. Usually these surveys are conducted in either their mother tongue or Indonesian as part of social studies. The following tasks can just as easily and far more usefully be done in the English lesson.

DESA WONOTINGAL
KECAMATAN SEMARANG SELATAN

Occupation	Total	Occupation	Total
Farmer		Soldier	
Brick Layer		Policemen	
Merchant		Blacksmith	
Carpenter		Doctor	
Teacher		Nurse	

Picture 3:
The tasks are taken from *Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* by Bale (1989:34).

The task above is done after the students have been taught the different types of occupations. They are then asked to go to the offices of the chiefs of their villages to see the statistics and to fill out the forms provided by the teacher. They have to find the information about the distribution of occupations in their own village. In the following English lesson, they have to report it to the class orally as follows:

> *There are 100 farmers, 20 bricklayers, and 45 carpenters
> in my village.*

Although the purpose is to practice collecting information about their social environment, this exercise is eminently suit-able source of materials needed for English lesson. This authen-tic material collected by the students will become a good source for the teacher to teach other topics, for example, comparison. Using their own diagrams, the students are expected to be able to produce such sentences as:

> *There are more nurses than doctors in my village.
> There are more farmers than teachers in Wonotingal.
> The number of nurses and teachers in my village is the
> same.*

A follow-up activity allows students to compare the information of their village with that of others, for example:

> *There are more farmers in my village than in yours.
> There is the same number of teachers in both
> villages.*
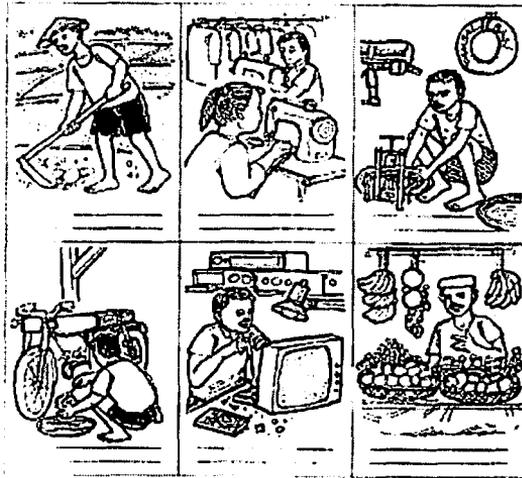
Picture 4

The task are taken from *Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* (1989:23)
by Asnawi and Rachmat (1989:23).

The task in *Picture 4* is taken from the student workbook of *Ilmu Pengeta-huan Sosial* (social studies for primary schools). The students are asked to write the names of the occupations in the pictures, the names of the people in their village whose jobs are shown in the pic-tures such as repairman, merchant, mechanic, etc., and then report it to the class in the following English lesson. Through this kind of activity, the students' learning is not limited to the classroom only, but they also learn how to learn outside and beyond the classroom. In line with this argument, Phillips further mentions the importance for students to learn not only inside the classroom but also beyond and outside as follows:

> Finally, it is increasingly recognized that children need to 'learn how to learn'. This means that their education and learning should not be confined to the limits of their classroom, text-books, and teacher, but that we should help them to acquire skills and independence that will enable them to continue learn-ing outside and beyond school (1993:6).

In other words, the students need to be aware of how they learn, and to experiment with different learning styles, to organize their work, and to be open and interested in all that surrounds them.

B. Exploiting the teaching materials of *Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam* (Natural Science)

The task in *Picture 5* is extracted from the student book of *Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam* (Natural Science) by Agus F. Tangyong (1990:29). The students are asked to observe the things in the classroom and then with the labels provided by the teacher, they must stick the labels to the items concerned. This kind of exercise is a simultaneously involving activity which builds on the children's desire to talk to each other. It provides them with a good reason to get out of their seats.
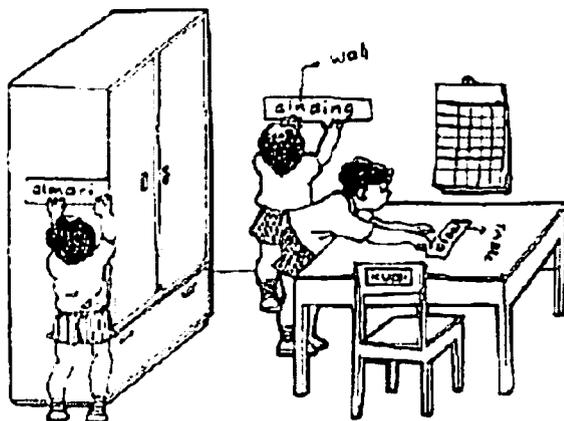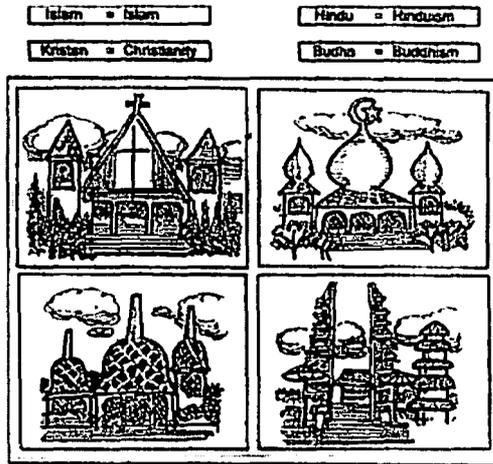

Picture 5:
The tasks are taken from *Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam*
by Tangyong (1990:29)

C. Exploiting the materials of *Pendidikan Agama* (religious education)

Indonesia is a country with multi-ethnic groups and religions. There are hundreds of ethnic groups living all over Indonesia with four major religions: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Religious education is a compulsory subject in all levels of education. Tolerance and a sense of

respecting other religions are emphasized in religious education. Students should know such things as religious holidays and places of worship.

Having read the textbook of religious education, I found that there are activities or tasks which can be applied to the teaching of English as shown in *Picture 6* below.

Picture 6:
The tasks are taken from *Ilmu Pendidikan Pengetahuan Sosial 4* by Asnawi and Rachmat (1989:43)

This was originally a mother tongue exercise designed to teach children the kinds of religions and places of worship. In fact, it works equally well in the early stages of English as a vocabulary exercise and a question and answer exercise in the present tense. The students are asked to draw a line to match the word and the picture and then expected to be able to use the vocabulary items in such sentences as:

Moslems go to mosque on Friday and Christians go
to church on Sunday.

According to Phillips it is common sense that "if the lesson is enjoyable, it will be memorable; the language involved will stick, and the children will have a sense of achievement which will develop motivation for further learning" (1992:8).

CONCLUSION

The rational for adapting ELT materials for Indonesian learners at Primary School stems from the fact that most commercially published ELT Materials focus on elements about target language culture. Most of the textbook writers who claim that their books are made use of in both EFL and ESL contexts are native speakers. They normally live in their own culture, and therefore find it hard to compose data beyond their own cul-tural boundaries. In contrast, the 1994 National Curriculum places emphasis on the Indonesian culture. As a result, other learners from other socie-ties such as Indonesia find it difficult making use of them on account of their irrelevance to their own culture.

Learning a particular language involves acquiring a whole set of concepts. If the concepts in both languages are different, there must be smooth transition from familiar to unfamiliar schemas. The implication in teaching is that the learners who learn English for the first time, especially primary school students, must start from the elements related to their life environment with their background culture, with which they are already familiar and then step-by-step they are introduced to the items related to the target culture after their mastery of the vocabulary items in their own culture. Comparing the two different cultural concepts will be interesting for learners as a cross cultural aspect.

With the growing shortage of time and money for writing textbooks, particularly in the seldom taught languages, there is a premium on making effective use of what already exists. The use of background culture materials and the idea of integrating English as a Foreign Language with other subjects are due to the fact that the work the teacher does in an English lesson and the work he/she does in other lessons, in terms of process, have similarities. Therefore, the tasks in student textbooks of science educa-tion, social studies, Indonesian subject, religious education, can be used for work in EFL classes.

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APPENDIX

ELT Primary Textbooks sold in Gramedia, Kharisma, Merbabu Bookstores, and used in language schools in Semarang

No	Title	Authors	Publisher
1	Primary Vocabulary Practice 1- 6	Chan Sun King	Binarupa & Preston
2	English Enrichment Exercise 1- 6	Loo Tek Yang Lim Lee Weng	Binarupa & Preston
3	Primary English Assessment 1-6	Wan Mun Ching (edit)	Binarupa & Preston
4	Preston Primary Composition Practice 1-6	Evelyne Len	Binarupa & Preston
5	Preston Assessment Papers 1-6	Linda Loo	Binarupa & Preston
6	Longman English Course	J.Hobbs	Longman
7	Reach Out	Catherime M. Frazer Julie Deferville May Tai	Prentice Hall
8	Step Out	Catherime M. Frazer Julie Deferville May Tai	Prentice Hall
9	W.O.W	Rob Nolasco	Oxford Univ. Press
10	Get Ready	Felicity Hopkins	Oxford Univ. Press
11	Mengenal Bahasa Inggris 1-3	Th. Nung Atasana	Gramedia
12	Get Ready	Drs. Marias (ed)	Erlangga
13	Start with English 1-3	Himawan	Erlangga
14	Integrated English for Children 1-3	Y. Mei Setyanto	Kanisius