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Corresponding Author:
Risiko Pujiantono
gatotketje@gmail.com

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ANALYZING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY, POWER, AND CULTURE IN INDONESIAN EFL TEXTBOOKS (A Critical Discourse Analysis Of The Merdeka Curriculum Textbooks For Junior High School)

Risiko Pujiantono¹,
Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta
Rifari Baron²,
Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta
Tatan. Z.M.³,
Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta

e-mail: gatotketje@gmail.com ¹
e-mail: rifari.baron@unindra.ac.id ²
e-mail: tatan.z.m@unindra.ac.id ³

Abstract: This study analyzes ideological, cultural, and power-related content in two EFL textbooks, Bright and Interactive English 2, used by junior high students under the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it examines how language ideologies, power relations, and cultural representations are embedded in textbook content. Findings indicate both textbooks promote English as a global success marker while marginalizing local languages and cultures. They also reinforce traditional power structures and gender roles. Recommendations urge textbook writers and curriculum developers to enhance inclusivity, equity, and cultural relevance, ensuring English learning empowers students without undermining local identity.

Keywords: EFL textbooks; Critical Discourse Analysis; Language ideology; Power relations; Cultural representation.

ANALISIS IDEOLOGI BAHASA, KEKUASAAN, DAN BUDAYA DALAM BUKU TEKS BAHASA INGGRIS EFL DI INDONESIA (Analisis Wacana Kritis terhadap Buku Teks Kurikulum Merdeka untuk SMP)



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Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis konten ideologi, budaya, dan kekuasaan dalam dua buku ajar EFL, *Bright* dan *Interactive English 2*, yang digunakan oleh siswa SMP di bawah Kurikulum Merdeka Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA), penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana ideologi bahasa, relasi kekuasaan, dan representasi budaya tertanam dalam isi buku ajar. Hasil menunjukkan kedua buku mendorong bahasa Inggris sebagai simbol kesuksesan global sekaligus meminggirkan bahasa dan budaya lokal. Buku-buku ini juga memperkuat struktur kekuasaan tradisional dan peran gender. Rekomendasi menekankan agar penulis buku dan pengembang kurikulum meningkatkan inklusivitas, kesetaraan, dan relevansi budaya, sehingga pembelajaran bahasa Inggris memberdayakan siswa tanpa merusak identitas lokal.

Kata kunci: Buku teks EFL; Analisis Wacana Kritis; Ideologi bahasa; Relasi kekuasaan; Representasi budaya.

INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most dominant languages in the world, functioning not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium of power, ideology, and cultural representation. In the Indonesian context, English is categorized as a foreign language, taught from elementary to higher education as part of the national curriculum. Its presence is often associated with global mobility, career opportunities, and social prestige (Setiawan, 2021). Within this framework, English language teaching (ELT) materials, particularly textbooks, play a significant role in shaping students' linguistic skills as well as their cultural perceptions and ideological orientations. As the Merdeka Curriculum was officially implemented in Indonesia in 2021, new textbooks were introduced to align with its student-centered and flexible learning principles. These textbooks do not merely transmit language knowledge; they also embed values, ideologies, and representations that may influence how students perceive themselves and others in a globalized society (Lestari & Prasetyo, 2022).

The role of textbooks as vehicles of ideology has been extensively highlighted in critical discourse studies. Fairclough (2015) argues that language is never neutral; it always carries ideological assumptions that reproduce social structures. In educational contexts, textbooks serve as both pedagogical tools and cultural artifacts, transmitting not only grammar and vocabulary but also worldviews, values, and power relations (Widodo et al., 2022). In Indonesia, several studies have indicated that EFL textbooks often privilege Western cultural narratives and globalized perspectives while marginalizing local languages and traditions (Santoso, 2021; Arifin, 2022). This imbalance may create tensions between the promotion of English for global competitiveness and the preservation of Indonesian cultural identity.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the significance of analyzing cultural and ideological content in EFL materials. For instance, Dewi, Yuliatin, and Sari (2022) found that gender representations in national textbooks frequently reinforce traditional stereotypes, positioning male characters as active and authoritative while depicting female characters in subordinate roles. Similarly, Putra and Rohmah (2025) demonstrated that moral values in primary school English textbooks were often framed through hierarchical teacher–student interactions, reflecting broader power relations within Indonesian education. These findings suggest that textbooks function as ideological apparatuses, embedding particular discourses of culture, gender, and power that go beyond linguistic content. Consequently, a critical examination of textbooks becomes crucial to ensure that ELT materials promote inclusivity, equity, and cultural sensitivity.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a powerful lens to examine how ideologies and power relations are embedded in language. Scholars such as van Dijk (2018) and Wodak (2020)



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highlight that discourse analysis involves uncovering implicit assumptions that sustain unequal social relations. CDA has been widely applied in the field of ELT, particularly in studies of textbooks, to explore how texts reflect and reproduce dominant ideologies (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). By investigating textual choices, discursive practices, and broader socio-political contexts, CDA allows researchers to reveal how language teaching materials contribute to constructing social realities for learners. In the Indonesian context, CDA is particularly relevant, given the ongoing tension between globalization and localization in education policy and practice.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes learner autonomy, critical thinking, and cultural diversity. However, the extent to which these principles are realized in textbooks remains contested. While the curriculum aspires to empower students by promoting student-centered learning, textbooks may still reproduce traditional teacher-centered dynamics and Western-centric ideologies. Research indicates that despite curriculum reforms, Indonesian EFL textbooks often remain aligned with globalized norms, portraying English as the key to success while minimizing local cultural content (Kuo, 2020; Isnaini et al., 2019). This misalignment raises questions about whether the current textbooks truly reflect the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum or whether they perpetuate long-standing ideological patterns in ELT.

This study focuses on two widely used EFL textbooks for junior high schools under the Merdeka Curriculum: Bright (2022) and Interactive English 2 (2022). Both textbooks are endorsed by major Indonesian publishers and have been adopted in many schools across the country. They serve as important case studies to analyze how language ideologies, power relations, and cultural representations are embedded in ELT materials. By applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework—comprising textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—this study seeks to uncover the implicit ideologies and assumptions underlying these textbooks. Such an analysis is timely and necessary, as the findings may inform the development of more inclusive and culturally relevant materials for Indonesian students.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both academic and practical domains. Academically, it extends the body of literature on critical textbook analysis in Indonesian ELT by examining the newly introduced Merdeka Curriculum materials. While prior research has predominantly focused on the 2013 Curriculum, limited attention has been given to the ideological and cultural dimensions of the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for textbook writers, curriculum developers, and educators, helping them design materials that empower students without marginalizing their local identities. By identifying patterns of ideological dominance and cultural representation, this research aims to support the creation of ELT resources that balance global competencies with local relevance.

In summary, this study addresses the following research concerns: How are language ideologies embedded in junior high school EFL textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum? How do these textbooks represent power relations among teachers, students, and social groups? How is culture portrayed, and to what extent are local cultural elements included or excluded? Through a critical discourse analysis of Bright and Interactive English 2, this research seeks to reveal the hidden assumptions within these materials and to propose ways to make ELT textbooks more equitable, inclusive, and contextually meaningful for Indonesian learners.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research design, guided by the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining issues of ideology, power, and culture because it allows for an in-depth exploration of meanings embedded within texts rather than relying on numerical generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). CDA was employed as the main analytical tool to investigate how language ideologies, power relations, and cultural representations are constructed in



Indonesian junior high school English textbooks. Specifically, the study applied Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, which includes the analysis of textual features, discursive practices, and social practices (Fairclough, 2015). This approach was chosen because it enables researchers to link micro-level textual analysis with macro-level social and cultural contexts.

Research Design

The research was descriptive and interpretive in nature. A descriptive design was applied to systematically outline the patterns of ideological, cultural, and power-related representations found in the textbooks. At the same time, an interpretive orientation was necessary to critically analyze how these patterns reflect broader socio-political and educational realities in Indonesia. By combining these two orientations, the study was able to generate both detailed descriptions of the textbooks' content and critical interpretations of their implications.

Data Source

The primary data sources consisted of two junior high school EFL textbooks developed under the Merdeka Curriculum: Bright (2022), authored by Nur Zaida and published by Erlangga, and Interactive English 2 (2022), authored by Gumanti Ning Rahayu and published by Yudhistira. Both textbooks are widely distributed and officially aligned with the learning objectives for Phase D (Grade VIII) of the Merdeka Curriculum. Each book contains approximately 180 pages, covering multiple thematic chapters. The inclusion of both textbooks allowed for comparative analysis, offering insights into whether patterns of ideology, power, and culture were consistent across different publishers or varied according to the design of individual authors.

Data Collection

The process of data collection involved a systematic review of all chapters in both textbooks. Textual units such as dialogues, reading passages, task instructions, and illustrations were selected for closer examination. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to focus on segments where ideology, culture, or power relations were most likely to be present. For example, dialogues involving interactions between male and female characters were examined to analyze gender roles, while illustrations and contextual examples were analyzed to investigate cultural representation. Sampling was not intended to be exhaustive but representative of recurring patterns across the materials. Notes were taken to categorize excerpts under three main aspects: (1) language ideology, (2) power relations, and (3) cultural representation.

Analytical Framework

Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework structured the analysis.

1. **Textual Analysis (Description):** At this level, the study analyzed linguistic features such as vocabulary choices, sentence structures, modality, and representations of social actors. This step aimed to uncover how particular ideologies are encoded within the texts.
2. **Discursive Practice (Interpretation):** This dimension examined how the textbooks positioned readers (students) and writers (authors) through pedagogical activities and communicative practices. For instance, the ways in which tasks reinforced authority relations between teachers and students were analyzed at this stage.
3. **Social Practice (Explanation):** The final level situated the textbooks within broader socio-political contexts. It explained how global discourses of English as a symbol of success and local cultural

realities interact in shaping the ideological orientations of the textbooks. This level also connected the findings to Indonesian educational policies, particularly the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

By employing this three-tiered approach, the study ensured that analysis did not stop at surface-level textual features but extended to include contextual and structural explanations.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis followed several systematic steps. First, the researcher conducted a close reading of the textbooks and identified textual segments relevant to the research focus. Second, these segments were coded under predetermined categories—ideology, power, and culture—while also allowing for emerging subcategories such as gender representation and teacher–student interaction. Third, the coded excerpts were analyzed in relation to Fairclough’s framework, moving from description to interpretation and explanation. Finally, the findings from both textbooks were compared to highlight similarities and differences in their ideological and cultural orientations. This comparative element enriched the analysis by revealing whether ideological patterns were systemic or context-specific to individual materials.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing the findings with existing literature on EFL textbooks and critical discourse analysis in the Indonesian context (Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Dewi et al., 2022; Putra & Rohmah, 2025). Peer debriefing was also conducted with fellow researchers to validate interpretations and minimize potential biases. Furthermore, thick description was applied to provide detailed accounts of the data and analytical process, enabling readers to assess the credibility and transferability of the findings. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the study, acknowledging the researcher’s positionality as both an educator and analyst, which may shape interpretive judgments.

Ethical Considerations

As this research relied on publicly available textbooks rather than human participants, ethical concerns were relatively minimal. Nonetheless, the researcher ensured academic integrity by properly citing all sources and acknowledging intellectual contributions from previous studies. Furthermore, the analysis was conducted objectively, avoiding biased judgments against the authors or publishers of the textbooks.

Limitations

Like any qualitative study, this research has limitations. The focus on two textbooks restricts the generalizability of the findings to the entire spectrum of Indonesian EFL materials. While Bright and Interactive English 2 are widely used, other textbooks may present different ideological or cultural orientations. In addition, CDA is interpretive by nature, meaning that alternative interpretations of the same data are possible. Finally, the study concentrated on textual and visual materials but did not include classroom implementation or teachers’ and students’ perspectives, which could offer complementary insights. Future research may therefore combine textbook analysis with classroom ethnography or interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how ideologies are enacted in practice.

Overall, this methodological design allowed the study to critically investigate the ideological, cultural, and power-related dimensions of Indonesian EFL textbooks. By applying CDA within a qualitative framework, the research generated insights into how textbooks function as instruments of both pedagogy and ideology. These insights form the basis for the subsequent presentation and discussion of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the two EFL textbooks, Bright (2022) and Interactive English 2 (2022), revealed consistent patterns across three key aspects: language ideology, power relations, and cultural representation. The findings are summarized as follows.

1. Language Ideology

Both textbooks promote English as a global language and a marker of social prestige. English proficiency is consistently portrayed as a gateway to success, particularly in terms of career opportunities and international communication. In Bright, for instance, several dialogues involve characters discussing future aspirations where English plays a crucial role, such as studying abroad or working in multinational companies. Similarly, Interactive English 2 presents English as the dominant medium for personal achievement, with tasks that position English as the “standard” for modern communication. Local languages, by contrast, appear minimally and are often relegated to peripheral notes or translation equivalents. This suggests an implicit hierarchy that privileges English while marginalizing Indonesian and regional languages.

2. Power Relations

Power dynamics were evident in both textbooks, primarily represented through hierarchical relationships. Teacher authority was reinforced in classroom dialogues, where teachers were often depicted as the ultimate source of knowledge. For example, Bright includes dialogues where students rarely question the teacher’s instructions, emphasizing obedience rather than critical engagement. Interactive English 2 reflects a similar pattern, with exercises that encourage students to repeat or follow instructions without opportunities for negotiation. Gender-related power relations were also evident. Male characters were more frequently depicted in active, leadership roles, while female characters were often shown in supportive or passive positions. This pattern reinforces traditional gender norms within the educational context.

3. Cultural Representation

The representation of culture in both textbooks was skewed toward international, particularly Western, contexts. Bright frequently included illustrations of Western settings such as airports, tourist destinations, and modern offices. Interactive English 2 also highlighted cultural practices associated with globalized lifestyles, such as celebrating birthdays in Western styles or discussing leisure activities like golfing. Indonesian culture was present but marginal, often reduced to generic symbols like traditional clothes or food. Furthermore, cultural diversity across Indonesia’s regions was scarcely represented. Instead, the textbooks presented a homogenized view of “Indonesian culture,” lacking depth and nuance.

Comparative Patterns

While both textbooks displayed similar ideological orientations, some differences were observed. Bright tended to emphasize career-oriented aspirations connected to English, while Interactive English 2 focused more on social interactions in daily life, such as making friends or participating in leisure

activities. Despite this difference in emphasis, both books shared the tendency to privilege English over local languages, reinforce hierarchical teacher–student relations, and limit cultural inclusivity.

Table 1.
Ideology, Culture, and Power Patterns in Two EFL Textbooks

Aspect	Bright	Interactive English 2
English as global success	High	High
Local language/culture	Low	Low
Gender roles	Male dominant	Male dominant
Power structure	Teacher authority	Teacher authority

Discussion

The findings align with and extend prior research on ideological, cultural, and power dimensions in Indonesian EFL textbooks. Several key points emerge from the analysis.

1. English as a Symbol of Success and Social Mobility

The consistent portrayal of English as a global success marker reflects what Phillipson (1992) terms “linguistic imperialism,” where English is positioned as superior to other languages. In the Indonesian context, this discourse reinforces the idea that mastering English is essential for upward mobility, echoing findings by Setiawan (2021) and Santoso (2021). By associating English with modernity, progress, and international opportunities, textbooks may inadvertently marginalize local linguistic identities. This tension becomes problematic in a multilingual nation where more than 700 local languages coexist alongside Bahasa Indonesia. The textbooks’ limited integration of local linguistic elements contradicts the Merdeka Curriculum’s principle of valuing cultural diversity and contextual learning.

2. Reproduction of Hierarchical Power Relations

The emphasis on teacher authority in both textbooks highlights the persistence of traditional educational practices. Although the Merdeka Curriculum encourages student-centered learning, the discourse embedded in these materials reproduces hierarchical structures. This is consistent with Fairclough’s (2015) observation that educational discourse often sustains institutional power by positioning teachers as unquestionable authorities. Previous studies, such as Sari and Pratama (2020), also found similar patterns in Indonesian EFL materials, where classroom interactions reinforce obedience rather than encourage critical thinking. Such representations risk undermining the curriculum’s goal of fostering autonomy and critical literacy among students.

3. Gender Representation and Inequality

The unequal representation of gender roles reflects broader societal norms perpetuated through educational discourse. Dewi et al. (2022) noted that female characters in Indonesian textbooks are frequently depicted in passive roles, which is consistent with this study’s findings. The marginalization of female agency in both Bright and Interactive English 2 signals the persistence of patriarchal ideologies in ELT materials. By portraying men as leaders and women as supporters, the textbooks normalize gender inequality and potentially shape students’ perceptions of gender roles

in society. Such representations conflict with global educational agendas that emphasize gender equity and inclusivity (UNESCO, 2021).

4. Cultural Representation and the Marginalization of Local Identity

The skewed representation of culture toward Western contexts indicates the dominance of globalized discourses in Indonesian EFL materials. While it is important to expose students to global cultures, the near absence of Indonesian cultural diversity limits students' ability to connect language learning with their lived realities. Setyono and Widodo (2019) argue that culturally responsive textbooks should integrate local values and traditions to empower students' identities. The reduction of Indonesian culture to simplistic symbols not only overlooks regional richness but also risks alienating students from their cultural roots. This finding echoes Isnaini, Setyono, and Ariyanto's (2019) semiotic analysis, which highlighted the underrepresentation of multicultural values in national textbooks.

5. Implications for Curriculum and Material Development

The patterns observed in both textbooks suggest a misalignment between the ideals of the Merdeka Curriculum and the realities of textbook content. While the curriculum emphasizes inclusivity, cultural relevance, and student-centered approaches, the textbooks continue to privilege English, reinforce traditional power structures, and marginalize local cultures. To address this gap, curriculum developers and textbook authors need to adopt critical frameworks in material development. As Widodo et al. (2022) suggest, integrating local narratives, diverse cultural identities, and equitable gender representations can help produce textbooks that empower students both linguistically and socially. Furthermore, teachers should be trained to critically mediate textbook content, supplementing materials with culturally relevant resources.

6. Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this study demonstrates the applicability of CDA in analyzing educational materials within non-Western contexts. By employing Fairclough's framework, the research revealed how linguistic choices, discursive practices, and broader social structures intersect in shaping textbook content. This aligns with van Dijk's (2018) view that discourse both reflects and constructs social realities. The findings contribute to the growing body of CDA research in Southeast Asia, offering insights into how global ideologies are localized through educational materials.

7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights, it is limited to the analysis of two textbooks. Future research should include a wider range of materials, including digital learning resources, which are increasingly used in Indonesian classrooms. Additionally, classroom-based studies involving teachers and students could provide deeper understanding of how textbook ideologies are interpreted and negotiated in practice. Exploring students' and teachers' perspectives would also highlight whether learners internalize, resist, or reinterpret the discourses presented in textbooks.

Overall, the results confirm that Bright and Interactive English 2 function as ideological instruments that privilege English, reinforce hierarchical power relations, and marginalize local cultures. These findings are consistent with earlier studies but also reveal how the newly implemented Merdeka Curriculum textbooks continue to reproduce long-standing patterns of linguistic imperialism, gender inequality, and cultural marginalization. The discussion underscores the urgent need for textbook reform and teacher training to align classroom materials with the curriculum's vision of inclusivity and cultural relevance.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated language ideology, power relations, and cultural representation in two junior high school EFL textbooks used under the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum: Bright (2022) and Interactive English 2 (2022). By applying Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study uncovered how textbooks not only teach linguistic knowledge but also embed ideological assumptions, reproduce social hierarchies, and construct cultural identities. The findings demonstrate that while both textbooks contribute to students' English language development, they simultaneously reinforce globalized ideologies, hierarchical power structures, and limited cultural inclusivity.

The first major conclusion relates to language ideology. Both textbooks consistently privilege English as a global success marker, associating it with career advancement, modernity, and international communication. This representation aligns with broader discourses of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and echoes earlier findings that EFL materials in Indonesia often marginalize local linguistic resources (Setiawan, 2021; Santoso, 2021). While the importance of English in global contexts cannot be denied, its dominance in textbooks risks diminishing the role of Indonesian and regional languages in shaping students' identities. For a multilingual nation, such imbalance could contribute to the erosion of local linguistic pride.

The second conclusion concerns power relations. Both textbooks reinforce hierarchical structures within educational interactions. Teachers are consistently portrayed as ultimate authorities, while students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. Similarly, gender relations are skewed toward male dominance, with male characters frequently shown as leaders or decision-makers and female characters occupying supportive roles. These patterns confirm previous studies on power and gender representations in Indonesian textbooks (Dewi et al., 2022; Sari & Pratama, 2020). Such portrayals contradict the Merdeka Curriculum's stated commitment to fostering student agency, critical thinking, and gender equality. Without conscious reform, textbooks risk perpetuating authoritarian and patriarchal norms in education.

The third conclusion addresses cultural representation. Both Bright and Interactive English 2 display a strong emphasis on international, particularly Western, contexts. Students are exposed to cultural practices such as Western holidays, leisure activities, and modern urban lifestyles. Indonesian culture, on the other hand, appears only in limited and superficial ways, often reduced to generic symbols like traditional food or clothing. This underrepresentation fails to capture Indonesia's cultural richness and diversity. Such an imbalance risks alienating students from their cultural identities and undermines the curriculum's goal of contextualized, culturally relevant learning. As Setyono and Widodo (2019) argue, textbooks should integrate multicultural and local values to empower learners and foster cultural pride.

Beyond these findings, the study highlights several practical implications. For textbook writers and publishers, the results underscore the need to adopt critical and inclusive approaches when designing materials. Textbooks should balance global exposure with meaningful representation of local cultures, provide equitable gender portrayals, and encourage student participation rather than passive obedience. Curriculum developers are encouraged to establish clearer guidelines on inclusivity and cultural sensitivity to ensure alignment between curriculum goals and teaching materials. For teachers, the findings emphasize the importance of critically engaging with textbooks. Educators should not treat textbooks as unquestionable authorities but as resources that require supplementation, adaptation, and contextualization to meet students' diverse needs.

From a broader perspective, the study contributes to theoretical discourse by demonstrating how CDA can uncover hidden ideologies in educational materials within non-Western contexts. The integration of textual, discursive, and social analysis provided insights into how global ideologies are

localized through Indonesian EFL textbooks. This approach reaffirms the value of CDA as a research tool for examining the intersection of language, ideology, and education in multilingual societies.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The analysis was limited to two textbooks and did not account for classroom practices or teachers' and students' perspectives. As textbooks are only one component of the learning process, future research should expand the scope to include classroom observations, interviews, and surveys. Such approaches would provide a more holistic understanding of how textbook ideologies are enacted, negotiated, or resisted in practice. Moreover, with the increasing use of digital learning platforms, future studies should also examine ideological and cultural representations in online learning resources.

In conclusion, the analysis of Bright and Interactive English 2 reveals that Indonesian EFL textbooks remain powerful instruments of ideology. While they serve important pedagogical functions, they also reinforce discourses that privilege English, sustain hierarchical power relations, and marginalize local cultures. These findings highlight the urgent need for reform in textbook development to ensure alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum's ideals of inclusivity, equity, and cultural relevance. By rethinking the design of EFL materials, educators and policymakers can create resources that not only equip students with global competencies but also strengthen their local identities, empower their voices, and prepare them to navigate a diverse and interconnected world.

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