



## Senior High School English Textbooks and Religious Aspects

**Alvia Nurrahma Ekasiwi**

Universitas Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

[alvnurrahma@gmail.com](mailto:alvnurrahma@gmail.com)

Orcid Id/URL: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3952-9687>

**Barli Bram**

Universitas Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

[barli@usd.ac.id](mailto:barli@usd.ac.id)

Orcid Id/URL: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2102-9676>

Received: 13 June 2022

Accepted: 7 September 2022

Published: 25 October 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v8i3.4177>

### Abstract

Indonesia is a diverse country consisting of various cultures and also religions. Currently, there are six official religions recognized by the Indonesian government, which are Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhi, and Confucianism. Thus, it is important for English book writers to design an English textbook that not only accommodates the needs of the students but also contains learning content which are representing all those varied religions and cultures in order to represent the background of the students. This study focuses on the portrayal of religious content found in the six Indonesian English textbooks published by the government and private sector. The purpose of the study is to assess, whether the six Indonesian English textbooks fairly distribute religious content through the textbooks' visual illustrations or not. Visual content analysis was used as the methodology of the study to answer the research question. Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that all the six Indonesian textbooks did not fairly distribute the religious contents. Some religions were having little to no representation in the textbooks. The religions portrayed throughout the contents were Islam, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

### Keywords:

*English textbook, religion, religious portrayal, visual image*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as one of the most populated countries in the world. Currently, it ranks at the fourth position as the most populated country in the world. Known as a country that

is built with thousands of islands, Indonesia is also packed with various ethnicity, languages, cultures, and also religions (Ena, 2016). Today, Indonesia has six official religions, which are Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucianism. Further, Islam holds the first position as the largest followed religion in Indonesia, then followed by Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Ena, 2016). In Indonesian education, religion has a crucial influence (Zein, Sukyadi, Hamied, and Lengkanawati, 2020). Religion has an important influence in the Indonesian education sector because all Indonesian people are obligated to follow a religion. Thus, starting from the elementary level up to the senior high school level, religion is specially taught through a religion class. Every student attends the religion class based on the religion they profess. However, religious values are also taught outside the religion class, although not as much, to spread the awareness of religious bias (Fua, Wekke, Sabara, and Nurlila, 2018). As a consequence, teachers must fulfill the demands of the students by offering appropriate textual, auditory, and visual information based on national and international cultural factors to avoid communication mistakes (Ena, 2016).

Furthermore, the representation of religion can be seen in some teaching aids, such as textbooks (Ali, Hassan, and Hanan, 2019). This can also be applied in the area of English teaching and learning (Zhao, 2020). The portrayal of religion can be seen in Indonesian English textbooks, both made by the government and the private sector. The religious portrayal can be in the form of names, reading passages, or even in the images used in the English textbooks (Isnaini, Setyono, and Ariyanto, 2019). Remembering that there are six official religions in Indonesia, it is important for Indonesian English book writers to fairly distribute the contents portraying religion (Niehaus, 2018). Moreover, textbooks play a great role in English teaching and learning (Bojanic and Topalov, 2016). Textbooks are one of the primary sources for students and teachers during the teaching and learning process (Tajeddin and Pakzadian, 2020). In addition to linguistic and thematic content, textbooks can serve as an authentic source of cultural aspects, and they are thought to be important mediators in imparting intercultural knowledge to the target language learners (Setyono and Widodo, 2019). As a result, English language textbooks can help English language learners to participate well in English communities in both linguistic and cultural activities (Meadows, 2020). Looking at the vital role of textbooks in English language teaching and learning, English book writers need to be very careful in using and choosing the contents portraying religion to avoid religious bias (Tafazoli and Egan, 2022).

Visual images used in English textbooks, too, have their own important role. According to Elmiana (2019), the use of visual images can enhance the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Through visual images, students can construct their understanding of the real-world context better and easily (Basal, Celen, Kaya, and Boğaz, 2016). Related to this, there were several previous studies discussing about religious portrayal through visual images in textbooks. First, Ena (2016) conducted research about the portrayal of religious content in Indonesian English e-textbooks. He analyzed the visual data used in eight Indonesian English e-textbooks for the senior high school level. Qualitative visual content analysis was used as his research methodology. From the findings of his research, it was revealed that the religions were not fairly distributed. Some religions were having low percentages of portrayal in number and role compared to the other religions. Then, Tafazoli and Egan (2022) tried to investigate the visual contents of

Iranian English textbooks. The focus of their study was on the representation of cultural references and cultural dimensions, especially on the Islamic ideology. Quite the same as Ena's research, their research also employed qualitative visual content analysis as the research methodology. The findings of their study showed that Islamic ideology covered most of the visual contents of Iranian English textbooks, which was not suitable for the vital role of teaching culture as the fifth language skill in language education. Third, Basal et al., (2016) conducted qualitative research about the role of illustration used in Turkish English textbooks. They tried to see the function of the illustrations and how often they appeared in the textbooks. They analyzed four different Turkish English textbooks. Content analysis was used as the research methodology. Based on the findings of their study, it was revealed that the English textbooks lacked some functions. The lack of functions could have negative impacts on the students' comprehension. Lastly, Zhao (2020) conducted research about the interpretations and representations of religious values used in Chinese social studies textbooks. His research used qualitative exploratory as the approach and content analysis as the research methodology. Based on the findings of his research, it was implied that, while the state's secularization aim is reflected in the framing of religion in China's social studies curriculum, it also provides room for a deeper examination of religion's meaning.

This paper aims to investigate the representation of religious content in the visual images used in six different Indonesian English textbooks created by the government and private sector. There is one research question employed in this research, namely "Does all the six English textbooks created by the government and private sector fairly distribute the religious content through the visual images?"

## **METHOD**

This qualitative research used visual content analysis as the research methodology. According to Seyidoglu, Roberts, Darroch, Hillsburg, Scheeberg, McGettigan-Dumas, Huddle, and Montaña (2021) visual content analysis can be used to obtain portrayals and representations in visual data. Using visual content analysis, the representations could be measured by classifying the visual data into precisely articulated groups (Jaspersen and Stein, 2019). Through this method, the researcher was allowed to study the immense imbalances that become obvious when the researcher tried to focus and examine visual identification (Seyidoglu et al., 2021). The said method was chosen by the researcher because it brought the imbalances of representation into a clear perspective amidst these complexities (Aldahdouh, 2018).

## **Data Sources**

The analysis conducted in this research was based on the visual data taken from six Indonesian English textbooks. The first three Indonesian English textbooks were Bahasa Inggris Kelas X, Bahasa Inggris Kelas XI, and Bahasa Inggris Kelas XII. Those three English textbooks were made by the government and published by Kemendikbud in 2017. Then, the last three Indonesian English textbooks were Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade X, Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade XI, and Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade XII. These English textbooks were published by Penerbit Airlangga, a private publisher, in 2018. Those Indonesian English textbooks were selected to be analyzed due to the reason that currently they are in use in Indonesian high schools.

## **Data Analysis**

The images used in the Indonesian English textbooks served as the research's analytical unit. Every image from all the chapters was analyzed, including the covers of the books. In this research, the researcher analyzed all the chapters from the six Indonesian English textbooks. The visual data representing religion analyzed in those chapters were visual data portraying humans, animals, and objects. The categories of the images related to religion were adapted from (Ena, 2016). Then, the results of the analysis were put into a table and categorized based on the official religions in Indonesia, which are Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucianism. Next, to categorize the data, simple descriptive tables were used by the researcher. After the visual data were taken from the textbooks, the researcher analyzed and divided them into each category. A qualitative approach in the form of simple descriptive tables was used to categorize the visual data representing religion found in the six different Indonesian English textbooks. The number of visual data from each category was then divided by the total number of all the visual data. Then, the researcher multiplied the results by 100% to get the percentage.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Human Images Portraying Religions**

The findings from all the six English textbooks analyzed showed that there was religious portrayal in the visual data used in the textbooks. However, it seemed that there was some religious bias. Islam is the religion represented with the biggest frequency in the pictures representing humans used in all the six English textbooks. There were some pictures portraying Muslim students and ordinary people used in the textbooks. The said pictures could be categorized so because the students were dressed using hijab, which is the symbol of Muslim women. There were also males who use 'peci', or a cap usually used by Muslim people.

Table 1 showed the frequency of occurrences of human pictures portraying religions found in the three Kemendikbud English textbooks. There are six categories of official religions in Indonesia, which are Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucianism (Ena, 2016). From the table, it could be seen that there were 12% occurrences of human images portraying Islam in the English textbook for grade ten. Some of them consisted of women pictures, depicted as students, wearing a veil. Then, the rest of the images consisted of male figures using a 'peci'. The male figures were also known as famous Muslim people. Quite similar to the previous textbook, in the English textbook for senior high school grade eleven, there were 8% of human images portraying Islam. All of the images were portraying male figures using a 'peci'. Lastly, there were 16% of human images portraying Muslim people in the English textbook for senior high school students in grade twelve. Mainly, the pictures were representing Muslim women using a veil. Then, there was one image portraying a famous male Muslim singer. Mainly, all the visual data were categorized as images representing Islam because of the clothing that the people used.

From the table, it could be seen that there was only a small amount of frequency of human images portraying religion, with only 12% of the total of 100% of human images found in the Kemendikbud English textbooks. The rest of the human images (88%) were not portraying any religion at all.



From the table, it could be seen that there was only a small amount frequency of occurrences of human images portraying religion, with 3% from the total of 100% of human images in the Pathway to English textbooks. The rest of the human images (97%) were not portraying any religion at any rate.

Based on table 1 and table 2, it could be inferred that both Indonesian English textbooks created by the government and the private sector did not fairly distribute the religious contents in the visual images representing humans. Most of the human images were portraying things that were not related to any religion or religious value at all. This was supported by Ena's (2016) findings. His findings showed that there was a lack of religious representation in the English e-textbooks he was analyzing. Similar to the findings of this research, he also found that the representation of Islam was highly dominating the visual images of humans in the English e-textbooks. Tafazoli and Egan (2022) also discovered the same findings in their research. It was shown that mostly the entire visual images representing humans were covered by Islam. There were only small representatives of other religions in the visual data depicting humans found in the Iranian English textbooks. Remembering the important role of textbook in English teaching and learning (Tajeddin and Pakzadian, 2020), it is very important to fairly distributed the religious contents. According to Niehaus (2018), the inequity of religious content might lead to the feeling of bias in students. Moreover, visual images have the power to construct students' understanding of the real-world context better and effectively. Hence, as Indonesia consisted of students with various religious backgrounds, it is very important for Indonesian English book writers to fairly represent all the six-official religions in the visual images used in the books.

### Animal Images Portraying Religions

Table 3. *Animal Images Portraying Religions in Kemendikbud*

Animal Images in Kemendikbud's English Textbooks								
	10	%	11	%	12	%	Total	%
Mu	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
P	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
C	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
H	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
B	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Cf	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Un	4	100%	4	100%	7	100%	15	100%
Total	4	100	4	100%	7	100%	15	100%

Mu: Muslim  
 P: Protestantism  
 C: Catholicism  
 B: Buddhism  
 Cf: Confucianism  
 H: Hinduism  
 U: Undetermined

Table 3 shows that there were no animal images portraying religion in all the three Kemendikbud English textbooks. Nevertheless, there were some animal images such as fishes, rabbits, birds, cats, wolves, and leopards found in the textbooks. Some of those animals were sometimes used to symbolize religious events, such as rabbits. The rabbit





representing Hinduism and Buddhism instead of Islam. Confucianism was also for the first time portrayed in the English textbook, although only once. In this English textbook, Islam was represented through object images showing mosques, which are places for Muslims to pray. It was also explained in the book that the mosques were worshipping places for Muslims. Hinduism was depicted in this English textbook through object images representing the Prambanan temple several times. Although the book introduced the Prambanan temple as a place for tourism, the researcher still categorized it as an object image representing Hinduism because the Prambanan temple is known as a worshipping place for Hindus. There were also some object images representing Pura as a place for Hindus to pray.

Table 6. *Object Images Portraying Religions in Pathway to English*

	Object Images						Total	%
	10	%	11	%	12	%		
Mu	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%
P	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
C	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
H	5	5%	0	0%	0	0%	5	2%
B	4	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	2%
Cf	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Un	87	88%	92	100%	74	100%	253	95%
Total	99	100%	92	100%	74	100%	260	100%

Mu: Muslim

B: Buddhism

U: Undetermined

P: Protestantism

Cf: Confucianism

C: Catholicism

H: Hinduism

Next, Buddhism was represented in the English textbook through object pictures showing the Borobudur temple. Quite the same as the Prambanan temple, in the textbook, the Borobudur temple was introduced as one of the most famous tourist places in Indonesia. However, the researcher still categorized it as an object image representing Buddhism because the Borobudur temple is a place for Buddhis to pray. Lastly, Confucianism in the textbook was depicted through an object image showing a temple for Confucians to pray. It was also explained that the temple was called as Confucius temple, a prayer place for Confucians. According to Niehaus (2018), the diverse images used in English textbooks could help the students to feel represented. This, later on, could also help them to understand the materials easier. Isnaini et al., (2019) also mentioned that through the use of images that depicted the religions fairly, students can feel appreciated as an individual, as they were coming from various religious backgrounds. However, unlike in Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade X, the object images in Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade XI and Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade XII were all categorized as undetermined images. It was categorized so because all the object images were not depicted any features that symbolized the six official religions acknowledged by the Indonesian government. This was supported by Basal's et al., (2016) findings. They also found lots of images not related to any religion or religious values

used in the English textbooks they analyzed. Based on their discussion, it was revealed that the images were only used as decorative images to make the English textbooks become more attractive.

## CONCLUSION

The current research attempted to analyze the distribution of religious content in six Indonesian English textbooks made by the government and private publisher. There were three different image categories being analyzed. The image categories were human images, animal images, and object images. Based on the analysis results, it was revealed that the six Indonesian English textbooks did not spread the religious content fairly. Almost all the English textbooks' visual images were covered by Islam. In the three Indonesian English textbooks made by the government, the percentages of images representing Islam amounted up to 14% (12% images representing human images and 2% images representing object images). This is then followed by Buddhism (4%). Meanwhile, there were a few differences in the three Indonesian English textbooks published by private publisher. In these English textbooks, the percentages of visual images representing Islam amounted to 3%, then followed by Hinduism also amounted up to 3%, Buddhism amounted to 2%, and lastly, Protestantism amounted to 1%. From the results, it could be seen that Indonesian English textbooks published by the private sector spread the religious content fairly more than the Indonesian English textbooks made by the government through its visual images. However, there was still one religion which did not depict in all the six Indonesian English textbooks, which was Catholic. Nevertheless, this research was only analyzing some Indonesian English textbooks made for senior high school students. Hence, the results might have differed in other Indonesian English textbooks. Future researchers who are interested in the same topic may investigate and analyze other Indonesian English textbooks made for elementary or senior high school students.

## REFERENCES

- Aldahdouh, A. A. (2018). Visual inspection of sequential data: A research instrument for qualitative data analysis. *Qualitative Report*, 23(7), 1631–1649. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3295>
- Ali, A., Hassan, S., & Hanan, F. (2019). Propagation of ideologies through textbooks: A study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa English textbooks. *Global Regional Review*, 4(1), 55–61. [https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2019\(iv-i\).06](https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2019(iv-i).06)
- Basal, A., Celen, K. M., Kaya, H., & Boğaz, Ş. N. (2016). An investigation into illustrations in English course books in a Turkish context. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 8(3), 525–536.
- Bojanic, B. B., & Topalov, J. P. (2016). Textbooks in the EFL classroom: Defining, assessing and analyzing. *Zbornik Radova Filozofskog Fakulteta u Pristini*, 46(3), 137–153.
- Chakraborty, C. (2021). Bollywood and Hindu nationalism bollywood view project masculinity, nationalism and Hindu asceticism view project. *Global Media Journal*, 13(1), 94-107.
- Elmiana, D. S. (2019). Pedagogical representation of visual images in EFL textbooks: A

- multimodal perspective. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 27(4), 613–628. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2019.1569550>
- Ena, O. T. (2016). Religion representation in Indonesian e-Textbooks: A visual content analysis. In *Language Literature & Society*.
- Fua, J. L., Wekke, I. S., Sabara, Z., & Nurlila, R. U. (2018). Development of environmental care attitude of students through religion education approach in Indonesia. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 175(1). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/175/1/012229>
- Isnaini, F., Setyono, B., & Ariyanto, S. (2019). A visual semiotic analysis of multicultural values in an Indonesian English textbook. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(3), 536–544.
- Jaspersen, L. J., & Stein, C. (2019). Beyond the matrix: Visual methods for qualitative network research. *British Journal of Management*, 30(3), 748–763. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12339>
- Lauritsen, M., Allen, R., Alves, J. M., Ameen, C., Fowler, T., Irving-Pease, E., Larson, G., Murphy, L. J., Outram, A. K., Pilgrim, E., Shaw, P. A., & Sykes, N. (2018). Celebrating Easter, Christmas and their associated alien fauna. *World Archaeology*, 50(2), 285–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2018.1515655>
- Meadows, B. (2020). Nationalism, nationalized cultures, and English language teaching (ELT): What teacher interviews reveal about culture teaching as vehicle for ideological reproduction/transformation. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 17(3), 143–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2020.1714443>
- Niehaus, I. (2018). The Palgrave Handbook of Textbook Studies. *The Palgrave Handbook of Textbook Studies*, 329–343. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53142-1>
- Setyono, B., & Widodo, H. P. (2019). The representation of multicultural values in the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture-Endorsed EFL textbook: A critical discourse analysis. *Intercultural Education*, 30(4), 383–397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1548102>
- Seyidoglu, J., Roberts, C., Darroch, F., Hillsburg, H., Schneeberg, A., McGettigan-Dumas, R., Huddle, M., & Montañó, A. (2021). Racing for representation: A visual content analysis of North American running magazine covers. *Communication and Sport*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795211000325>
- Sudarwati, T., M., & Grace, E. (2018). *Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade X*. Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga
- Sudarwati, T., M., & Grace, E. (2018). *Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade XI*. Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga
- Sudarwati, T., M., & Grace, E. (2018). *Pathway to English for SMA/MA grade XII*. Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga
- Tafazoli, D., & Egan, K. (2022). Antagonism between western and Islamic cultures in Iranian English textbooks. *Porta Linguarum*, 2022(37), 63–88. <https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi37.21243>
- Tajeddin, Z., & Pakzadian, M. (2020). Representation of inner, outer and expanding circle varieties and cultures in global ELT textbooks. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-020-00089-9>

- Widiati, U., Rohmah, Z., & Furaidah. (2017). *Bahasa Inggris untuk SMA/MA/SMK/MAK kelas 10*. Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Widiati, U., Rohmah, Z., & Furaidah. (2017). *Bahasa Inggris untuk SMA/MA/SMK/MAK kelas 11*. Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Widiati, U., Rohmah, Z., & Furaidah. (2017). *Bahasa Inggris untuk SMA/MA/SMK/MAK kelas 12*. Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Zein, S., Sukyadi, D., Hamied, F. A., & Lengkanawati, N. S. (2020). English language education in Indonesia: A review of research (2011-2019). *Language Teaching*, 53(4), 491–523. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444820000208>
- Zhao, Z. (2020). The religious world in Chinese social studies textbooks. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 42(2), 214–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2018.1516195>