Local Culture in Social Studies Textbooks: Is It Contextualised?

Erna Mena Niman\textsuperscript{a}, Budijanto\textsuperscript{b}, I Komang Astina\textsuperscript{c}, Singgih Susilo\textsuperscript{d}, Hieronimus Canggung Darong\textsuperscript{e}, \textsuperscript{a,b,c,d}Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia, \textsuperscript{e}Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus, Email: \textsuperscript{a}ernaniman79@gmail.com, \textsuperscript{b}budijanto.fis@um.ac.id, \textsuperscript{c}komang.astina.fis@um.ac.id, \textsuperscript{d}singgih.susilo.fis@um.ac.id, \textsuperscript{e}ronybarera@yahoo.co.id

The purpose of this study was to examine the elements of local culture employed in the Indonesian social studies textbooks. Six Indonesian social studies textbooks were analysed following the principle of content analysis and purposefully selected teachers and students were interviewed to gain the data. This present study found that the proportion of the local culture elements was not balanced. Knowledge elements appear more than behaviours and artefacts. Moreover, the appearance of the elements does not meet the teacher and student needs. Overall, the insertion of local culture in the textbooks was not contextualised. This study might provide practical insights into how textbooks can be developed following the ideological basis of where the people (users) belong.

Key words: Local culture, textbooks, and context.

Introduction

As the emphasis changes from teaching toward learning, the growth of awareness of local culture in the classroom has increased. This awareness makes teachers pay attention to how the culture appears in classroom context supported by teaching sources carrying not only the culture in a broad concept but the sense of locality in its content. As such, when the teacher transfers his or her knowledge, the local culture should be inserted in such a way that it might be benefit to attain a learning goal. At this point, like other subjects, the content or what to teach in social studies is always, in some way, linked to local culture.

The locality would be of benefit for learners regarding the understanding of the topic being discussed. As transferring knowledge and making students learn actively, the more teachers rely on local-authentic materials, the better the learning instruction gets. Employing local...
context, besides helping them to understand and know what to say and to do, commonly there is something urgent that lies beyond behind the locality which unconsciously helps them to know who they are and where they belong. Then, the teachers should be resourceful to employ locality which is natural and contextual in the teaching-learning process.

However, humans do not always interact with others. At times solitude is needed. A long sail to the wide ocean, a walk along a tiny path, a climb along a stony hill, or even recording thoughts in some journals are often done alone. Within this social situation, individuals may work independently, (Richard, 2015). This means that the students (individuals) can learn something new without involving in some physical settings of the teaching-learning process (classrooms). There might be many inputs in which they learn. Saying it differently, to achieve learning goals in the classroom can be made by through various input sources, ranging from the participants themselves and classroom discourse to the employment of teaching devices (audio-visual internet) and printed materials such as textbooks, workbooks, activity books. Among those mentioned, the most important aspects which independently guide the students to learn is the textbooks. The textbook is a primary source of input and practice for learners. Without the presence of the teacher, the textbooks might be of benefit to attain learning goals. As such, textbooks can be used in many different ways, often depending on the teacher and his or her preferences or teaching style (Chu, 2017; Lucas & Passe, 2016).

Several studies have been carried out on social studies textbooks. The studies highlighted the importance of structure or organisation of the textbooks as a text where the local culture exists within (Ahghar & Eftekhari, 2016; Ahmed & Narcy-combes, 2011; Bauto, 2013; Beck, Mckeown, & Gromoll, 1984; Black & Bern, 1981; Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Brown, Smiley, Day, Townsend, & & Lawton, 1977; Chu, 2017; Frederiksen, 2016; Kintsch, Mandel, & Kozminsky, 1977; Krippendorff, 2013; Lucas & Passe, 2016; Nozari, 2016; Pearson, Hansen, & Gordon, 1979; Schank, 1975; Tomal & Yilar, 2019; Trabasso, Secco, & Van den Broek, 1984; Young, 1971).

Despite the fruitful findings of previous studies, what is left is the structure of the local culture element itself. The elements consist of knowledge, behaviour, and artifacts (Krippendorff, 2004). Moreover, little information is available from teachers and students themselves on how they view those three elements in the textbooks that are used in their classrooms and on how they use the textbooks containing such elements, especially when they have students in their classes who experience difficulty in understanding textbook materials.

In response to the gap offered, this study is an attempt to examine those three elements contained in the social studies textbooks. Ahmed and Narcy-combes (2011) proposed that textbooks should have a simplistic approach to the representation of a culture and share the same values or at least they should be familiar with the cultural norms of one another. Text
books should represent cultural aspects and not disregard the users. Thus, to contribute to the existing insights into the local culture in the social studies textbooks, this study focused on such elements, namely: knowledge, behaviour, and artifacts.

This paper is drawn from a wider study examining the textbooks used in Indonesian secondary school. This is a prickly issue as it generally contributes toward the creation and insight that a good textbook should take into account the method of teaching, the value and the level of readership are supposed to significantly touch student needs, standardise their knowledge and the recognised view of the subject matter. The present study, therefore, seeks to find answers to the following questions:

1. How is the local culture being employed in secondary social studies textbooks?
2. To what extent do teachers and students respond to and interact with the local culture inserted in the textbooks?

**Literature Review**

**Textbooks**

Textbooks are generally regarded to be the main source of teaching inputs. They are also claimed as a learning instrument to attain instructional goals, assist teachers in preparing lessons, tasks, and classroom activities to guide students in learning. Concerning this, Kaiser (2005) said that textbooks are used as a didactic instrument in schools due to their functions and practicality. The function is to make students learn actively and the practicality is about the learner being autonomous. Regarding the function, (Richard & Schmidt, 2002) confirmed that textbooks serve as binders to the teaching-learning process to subsequently create a system that enables the evaluation of elements, control them following their needs. Similarly, Wade (1993) and Fallahian (2012) claimed that textbooks are referred to as one of the most important guides of learning and regarded as an important reference and resource for student learning in any educational system. In addition to Fallahian (2012), Kaiser, (2005), Richard & Schmidt (2002), and Wade (1993), there has been a great number of research studies concerning what and how social studies textbooks should be as a text. The studies viewed the content of the textbooks which should focus of learning goals and provide students a more meaningful and powerful knowledge and learning experience (Ahghar & Eftekhari, 2016; Chiesi, Spilich, & Voss, 1979; Chu, 2015, 2017; Frederiksen, 2016; Kintsch, Mandel, & Kozminsky, 1977; Krippendorff, 2013; Miska, Szöcs, & Schiffinger, 2017; Lucas & Passe, 2016; Nozari & Siaman, 2016; Tomal & Yilar, 2019).

While these studies above mentioned being concerned with knowledge, other studies put forward the importance of local culture being integrated into the textbooks (Ahmed & Narcy-combes, 2011; Bauto, 2013; Khalis & Mustaffa, 2017). These studies have demonstrated that
some local features produced in the textbooks primarily mirror the source culture of the particular country or region rather than the global cultures. The social skills development, values understanding, emotional and mental pressures control, creative thinking skills, self-knowledge, decision-making and responsibility, and having communication skills with others are expected to face the global changes as the insertion of local culture.

Regardless of the necessity of locality, the most shocking one is that the relationship between power and the construction of textbook knowledge. Previous studies claimed that school knowledge is often constructed according to the interests and values of dominant groups in society while ignoring those of marginalised groups, which might cause inequality (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Banks, 1996). This fact triggers that textbooks for subjects are used to mobilise citizens and shaping identities as the united one. As noted by Westheimer & Kahne (2004), these embedded social norms in textbooks are regarded as the expectations of the state for good citizens serving ideological as well as pedagogical purposes. These shocking findings are disappointing as the textbooks disregard the authenticity and local values which are beneficial for students’ manner. Ideally, as purposed by Wade (1993) there is a need to consider the broader societal purpose of schooling in society and the ideological basis behind the use of textbooks.

**Local Culture**

Culture is a social construct where people live, learn, experience, interact and tolerate others, thus influencing someone in building their identity in society (Gay, 1997). The culture covers everything hence would be of benefit to the expansion of identity towards an individual for them to know who they are, where they belong and become flexible to be a part of the society (Eliot, 1962). When humans are interacting with different backgrounds and cultures, they are trying to accept and adapt to the differences which subsequently provides proof that culture can be learned and influenced (Hall, 1996; Hofstede, 1994; Taylor & Lennon, 2017).

Meanwhile, it has been widely acknowledged that every region has its own culture. As such, the local culture mostly deals with the term tradition and concerns with the transformation of customs, norms, values, ethics, conduct, and manner from generation to generation within a group of society. They are regarded as guidance to conduct life, to see the future, and to communicate both with living and unloving things. In other words, local culture refers to the beliefs, concept, way of thinking and behaving which consistently follow the norms and customs. It is already rooted, despite the changes, that makes the people live sustainably and continuously (Barrios & de Debat, 2014).

There have been several research studies regarding the importance of local culture in fields such as in English Language Teaching (Chan, 2013; Chang, 2008; Hafner, 2015; Iv &
Tenore, 2010; Li, 2004; Mahmoud, 2015; Mahmud, 2019; Motteram, 2016; Sugirin, Sudartini, Suciati, & Nurhayati, 2011; Syahri & Susanti, 2016; Taguchi, Xiao, & Li, 2016; Yang & Li, 2019); tourism destination (Zhuang, Yao, & Li, 2019), in social studies textbooks (Anderson & Armbruster, 1984; Bauto, 2013; Beck, McKeown, & Gromoll, 2016; Chu, 2015, 2017; K. Krippendorff, 2013; Lucas & Passe, 2016; Nozari & Siamian, 2016); in forest conservation, heritage, and landscape (Baker, Tanimola, & Olubode, 2017; Bi, Vanneste, & Borg, 2016; Mitin, 2018). These studies explicated that the insertion of locality is of benefit to attain a learning goal.

Methodology

This present study employed a qualitative approach through content analysis which is one of the research methods in which text data is analysed based on the content or contextual meaning of the text (Fangg Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The process of content analysis involves bringing together similar data based on certain concepts and themes and interpreting them in a way that is comprehensible for the reader (Chu, 2017). The data collection techniques used were documentation and interview techniques. The former which was about the 1st research question, six Indonesian social studies textbooks used in the 7th, 8th, 9th-grade levels in 2018-2019 were the document sources of the study.

Following (Krippendorff, 2004), the selected textbooks were discerned to find the local cultural aspects within namely, knowledge, behaviour, and artifacts. Audio-visual material such as songs, spoken texts, and videos, usually complement the textual input, but are offered as separate materials on CDs and DVDs were excluded in this study. Consequently, the data solely relied on the printed document (textbooks) employing some systematic steps intended for reviewing or evaluating the insertion of local culture in social studies textbooks. To analyse the data of the 1st research question, Byram's (1993) checklist was used and further quantified manually to know the percentage of the local appearance in the textbooks under study focusing on knowledge, behaviour, and artifacts. The latter, for the sake of the 2nd research question, an in-depth interview was carried out with the selected teachers, from each grade, teaching for a long time (more than 3 years) and using the textbooks under study. The data from the interviews was analysed following (Miles & Huberman, 1994) qualitative data analysis model including data reduction, data display and inference making. For the students, the focused group interview was done. There were 10 questions for 15 students taken 5 from each grade. The students were chosen following the teachers' recommendations. The data were analysed, counted into a percentage with some categories namely very good (80 above), good (60 above), enough (50 above), not good (50 below-30), bad (30 below). The reliability of the data was obtained through the triangulation process (textbooks analysis, in-depth interview with both teachers and students). This was conducted to counteract some of the possible prejudices and attitudes inherent in this research activity.
Results

As previously mentioned, culture, in general, includes three main aspects that are ideas (knowledge), behaviour (activities) and artifacts. For the sake of the 1st research question, content analysis was carried out to reveal the elements of the local culture appearance in the textbooks under study. Table 1 delineates the insertion of local culture along with its elements in the social studies textbooks. The table confirms that the appearance of local culture in social studies textbooks was quite a lot with the frequency of knowledge that appears at most and respectively followed by behaviour and artifacts. The presence of the knowledge aspects in each book has not been based on comprehensive planning due to pushing knowledge or ideas as the main target which is supported by behaviour (activities) and artifacts. This implicitly means that the existence of behaviours and artifacts are only supporters to build the knowledge.

Table 1: Local culture elements in the textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbooks</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>80 %</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>90 %</td>
<td>8 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>86 %</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80 %</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>87 %</td>
<td>9 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62 %</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: Total number of local culture contained in the textbooks

In addition to the content analysis, the interview (Table 2) with the teachers confirms that 6 teachers regard the insertion of local culture appears on the surface level only. Their existence does not reach the substance of what local culture should affect student ideas. In the meantime, in certain circumstances, the teachers themselves have difficulty in understanding the ideas along with artifacts provided in the texts due to unfamiliarity. The extracts presented in table 2 describe such conditions. The extracts show that the teachers were reluctant to regard the local culture appearing in the textbooks as being beneficial for the students even for the teachers themselves. Moreover, there is an expectation to dig further, rooted in every region, set up by curriculum developer accommodating the real local life both at the surface and deep structure level. In other words, knowledge, coherence, and considerateness contained in the textbooks are reconsidered and should go along with the students' needs. Furthermore, students might feel shocked having unfamiliar content or contexts being carried. Their cognitive burden would be more than their linguistic load sometimes and they are then loaded by the culture which inspires the feeling of strangeness and alienation.
Table 2: Teacher responses to local culture in the textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st grade teacher</td>
<td>What do you think the local culture containing in the textbooks used?</td>
<td>“Huuh, emm, it is difficult to even for the teachers. The content brings conceptual things. It is good. However, there might be a problem as the texts provide something unfamiliar to the students. The story, for example, is true that it is taken from Indonesian stories and the message is good such as moral values but then, our local value has deviated. Other regions story is used and our own not. But again it is on curriculum planning”. Yes, many. We often find the inconsistency between the ideas, activities and supporting pictures provided. It is difficult and takes much more time and extra works to relate it. Meanwhile, the assessment is not contextualised and force us to follow as the curriculum says. So, we can't do anything about that.</td>
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<td>2nd grade teacher</td>
<td>Do you think the local culture containing in the textbooks meet the learners' needs?</td>
<td>&quot;In some aspects yes. However, in some cases, the students have problems in understanding them. I see it is because of the familiarity of texts. We, as the teachers, expect more on our local topics. We want them to localise and assess their ethic, conduct, and manner. They are here, aren't they? And we want to make them here and bringing their minds everywhere&quot;.</td>
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<td>3rd grade teacher</td>
<td>Do you have any idea about the textbooks used? I mean the locality?</td>
<td>&quot;Well, locality is about local life. We cannot generalise certain region values to others. It must be rooted. Therefore, it should be facilitated the local books. Despite its general value and to reach that going deeper is a must. Deeper I mean is that our own&quot; including the assessment process. The clue should be on us.</td>
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Table 3: Student Responses to local culture in the textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>K (%)</th>
<th>B (%)</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

S=Students, K: Knowledge; B: Behaviour; A: artifacts

Despite the good category for some students, the data in the Table 3 shows that most of the students' answers belong to not the good category as their response to the textbooks. This indicates that the students were not satisfied with the local culture contained in the textbooks. The locality contained in the textbooks does not meet the learner's needs. What they had was something unfamiliar to properly accommodate their wishes.

Discussion

Two areas of focus for this study are namely aspects of local culture knowledge (ideas), behaviour (activities) and artifacts and the teacher and student responses toward the locality contained in the social studies textbooks. As such, those aspects serve as a base role for the understanding of the topic being taught with an emphasis on its interaction with students as they read. As shown in Table 1, this present study emphasised that the knowledge aspect appears more than the other two aspects. This indicates that through the idea the authors carried information on the topic being discussed. Despite the important role of the other two aspects, the locality is constructed in such a way that planting ideas (knowledge) might be beneficial and linked successfully to the topic and learning goals. These findings contrast with Tomal and Yilar (2019) revealing that the knowledge content was much richer in textbooks in the era before 2005. This recent study found that in the social studies textbooks, the knowledge aspect was richer, more powerful and has increased as the knowledge variety
has raised in time. As such, the findings mirror Young's (2013) statement saying that by considering more on the power of knowledge, results of textbook content analysis research have the potential to inform teachers on how to design their curriculum to provide students an equitable, powerful education. Putting it differently, despite the change of time, it is proof that knowledge aspects still appear at most. From the textbooks side (authors), knowledge or ideas were placed as an effective way of conveying information.

However, something different found in this study as referred to both the teacher and student response. From the interview (Table 2), there is a tendency for teachers and students not to regard it as the way it should be. This is due to the locality being inserted does not meet the student's needs and even the teachers, as background knowledge, get some difficulties to attain their learning goals. This is in line with the findings of Chiesi et al., 1979; Leko & Brownell, 2009; Pearson et al., 1979) revealing that the basic problem for the teachers to teach social studies is the background knowledge. The knowledge contained in the textbooks does not match with both teachers' and students' background knowledge and subsequently, they are reluctant to constructively understand the text. In other words, the inclusion of concepts for which the reader lacks a requisite background tends to be a problem.

In addition to the teachers, the result of the interview (Table 3) shows that the student responses toward the local content of the textbooks were not good. Most of the students (except 4 students saying good and 2 were categorised as enough) considered the knowledge inserted in the textbooks deviate from their expectations. This explicates students have difficulty in understanding the information being carried in the texts. Despite the student knowledge level, the reasons were students' background knowledge of the local content and the familiarity of the texts. The extent and depth of knowledge influences the quality of understanding derived from a text. In short, students are lacking of knowledge, except for students having high knowledge, and need some efforts to comprehend the message. This corroborates previous findings saying that high-knowledge people were likely to recall the time of events that constructed the theme of the text and to unite such events to the construction of text representation. At this point, one is actively interacting with the content of the text. Likely, the students having good knowledge of a topic could respond to questions drawn from the text that required inferences to be drawn (Pearson et al., 1979). Meanwhile, there is a passive manner for those having low-knowledge and are more likely to recall information peripheral to the main ideas of the text as the way it is (Ahghar & Eftekhari, 2016; Chiesi, et al., 1979). Thus, the quality of understanding the text is different depending on the depth of knowledge. As such, the knowledge aspect purposed by the authors does not guarantee the acceptance of the students and the teachers as the users.

The data from interviews confirms that the ideas (knowledge) in the textbooks were not their local culture which subsequently made the learners view a strange phenomenon such as
experiencing culture differing from what they imagine. As such the students were trapped and lead to a negative reaction and a pessimistic way of reflecting that culture. Further, students might feel shocked having unfamiliar content or context carried by others’ local culture. Moreover, their cognitive burden would be more than their linguistic load, they then were loaded by other local cultures which cause the feeling of strangeness and alienation. Saying it differently, the authors generalise the knowledge content to all regions which, in fact, every region has a distinctive way to cope with. This corroborates the previous findings on critical curriculum studies focusing on the relationship between power and the construction of textbook knowledge by some education researchers revealing that knowledge is a social construct that reflects and reinforces power relationships within and across social institutions (Ahghar & Eftekhari, 2016; 2004; Banks, 2004). School knowledge is often organised and presented regarding the interests and values of dominant groups in society while ignoring those of marginalised groups, which might reproduce unequal power relationships (Apple, 1993; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Tomal & Yilar, 2019; M. Young, 1971). Therefore, as suggested by Bauto, 2013, Chu, 2017, and Miska et al., 2017), textbooks might vary according to the country or certain region where it should belong to.

In addition to knowledge, this content analysis found an unbalanced proportion of the other two aspects. As it is shown in Appendix 1, in percentage, the appearance of behaviour (activities) and artifacts appears less than the knowledge aspect. Furthermore, the inconsistency occurred and was not supportive of that first aspect (knowledge/idea). This analysis was strengthened by the results of the interview showing the deviation of such aspects. To a certain extent, the connection of information being employed goes differently from the first aspect (knowledge/idea). In other words, the relatedness, sometimes, deviates from the course. This means that the text is not made of some connected aspects and not supporting each other. They are developed by considering the chronology from near-to-far principles. What is written should be supported by activities and artifacts carrying the same message. As such, it might be helpful to organise information, bring suitable ideas to bear, and draw relationships. In short, the content of textbooks should be in proper coherence and considerateness.

As noted by Anderson & Armbruster (1984), Beck et al., (2016), (1984), and Tomal & Yilar (2019) coherence relates to the extent to which the sequence of ideas or events in a text is logical and the extent to which the text makes the events and ideas and their relationships apparent naturally. A considerate text is made to reach the top level of the possibility for a reader to understand information and set up the relations among concepts. It is a structure that conveys its purpose, logical relationships among connected ideas, unity of purpose, and audience appropriateness. In this study, those two crucial things (coherence and considerateness) did not exist in the locality of the textbooks. This corroborates the previous findings revealing the ambiguity of references (Frederiksen, 2016), unclear relationships
among events (Black & Bern, 1981; Kintsch et al., 1977; Stein & Nezworski, 1978) and inclusion irrelevant events, ideas (Schank, 1975; Trabasso et al., 1984) in the social studies textbooks. The absence of coherence and considerateness might cause more burden to students understanding in addition to their background knowledge.

Another interesting aspect found in this current study was the assessment. Regarding the result of the interview (Table 2), the teachers explicate the assessment process as something difficult to do. The expectation is to discern the students based on their local values. Ethics, conduct, and manner must be relied on their own leading them to face the global changes out there. In fact, what has stated in the textbooks deviates from their expectations. Despite the cultural differences, there is a need to rely on the users' region. This means not to generalise the aspects contained but regards to specific consideration of the local values where it presents. As noted by Tremblay et al., (2012), there should be a consideration to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic having participants met the established technical standards and providing evidence of data comparability across contexts. As such, the goal of localization is to reach the highest possible level of equivalence across culture. Then, it is imperative to guarantee that the assessment might reveal the same skills and brings into play the same cognitive processes as set up in the curriculum while being culturally appropriate within the group of society.

By and large, the aspects of local culture in the social studies textbooks which were mostly dominant on knowledge was not coherent and considerate. They do not represent who teachers and students are and where they should belong. In addition, the teacher and student responses reflect their expectation not to generalise but to contextualise the locality and assess the students following the principles of norms, values, ethics, conduct, and manner to where they are.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study aims at investigating the aspects of local culture contained in the social studies textbooks and the teacher and student responses toward it. To the findings, we may draw some conclusions. First, based on the content analysis, the knowledge aspect appeared more than the behaviour and artifacts in textbooks. Also, in terms of coherence and considerateness, the three aspects were not supporting each other. Second, based on the interview, the teachers and students were not satisfied with the locality inserted in the textbooks. The local cultures inserted in the textbooks do not represent who they are. Furthermore, similar to the content analysis done by the researchers, the teacher and students respond to the inconsistency of coherence and considerateness of three aspects (knowledge, behaviour, and artifacts). Thirdly, moving further ahead to assessment, this present study
found that the assessment process is not rooted in the local value, ethics, conduct, and manner of users. Thus, the locality inserted in the social studies textbooks is not contextualised.

This present study suffered from limitations that should be taken into account for further studies. First, during the interview, the fact that most of the teachers did not discuss ways or strategies in which they handle their problem regarding the information in the textbooks is because of limitations of our data collection procedure. The inclusion of the teacher's strategies to go along with the content of the textbooks might be more challenging for further studies. Concerning the strategy, further, by considering locality aspects, we need also to know a more accurate picture of types of assessment and to what degree the teachers use them in the teaching-learning process. Such research might expand our understanding of how teachers use social studies textbooks and the strategies and techniques that they engage to accommodate the diversity of users in the classrooms.
REFERENCES


307


