



## Master's students' perceptions of cultural diversity in junior high social studies textbooks

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### ABSTRACT

Indonesia's cultural diversity demands fair and inclusive representation in educational materials, especially in junior high school Social Studies (IPS) textbooks. This study aims to examine the representation of cultural diversity in IPS textbooks and explore the perceptions of Social Studies Education master's students, both those with and without teaching experience. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed from relevant literature and validated by experts. The data were analyzed using a Likert scale and presented in percentages to identify students' perception trends. The results show that IPS textbooks include narratives on cultural diversity, mainly related to religion and respect for differences. However, the students perceive that cultural representation remains uneven, particularly in terms of ethnicity, traditions, local languages, and regional perspectives. The textbooks tend to emphasize dominant cultures while underrepresenting minority ones. Multicultural values are mostly presented in general terms, lacking inclusive and detailed content. This highlights the need to enrich the narratives to better reflect the true diversity of Indonesian society.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received: 12 Feb 2025

Revised: 30 Jun 2025

Accepted: 4 Jul 2025

Available online: 26 Jul 2025

Publish: 29 Aug 2025

#### Keywords:

cultural diversity; social studies education; student perception; textbook

#### Open access

Inovasi Kurikulum is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

### ABSTRAK

Keberagaman budaya yang sangat kaya di Indonesia menuntut adanya representasi yang adil dan inklusif dalam materi pembelajaran, khususnya dalam buku teks Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS) tingkat SMP. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali representasi keberagaman budaya dalam buku teks IPS serta menelaah persepsi mahasiswa magister Pendidikan IPS terhadap materi tersebut, baik yang telah mengajar maupun yang belum. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif dengan pengumpulan data melalui angket terstruktur yang disusun berdasarkan kajian literatur dan divalidasi oleh pakar untuk memastikan relevansi dan keterukuran butir pertanyaan. Teknik analisis data dilakukan menggunakan skala Likert, kemudian hasil diklasifikasikan dan dipersentasekan untuk mengetahui kecenderungan persepsi responden. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa buku teks IPS SMP telah memuat narasi keberagaman budaya, terutama terkait agama dan ajakan untuk menghargai perbedaan. Namun, menurut mahasiswa magister Pendidikan IPS, representasi keberagaman budaya dalam buku tersebut masih belum merata, khususnya dalam aspek etnis, adat, bahasa daerah, dan perspektif lokal. Buku cenderung menonjolkan budaya dominan dan kurang memberi ruang pada budaya minoritas. Nilai-nilai multikultural lebih banyak disampaikan dalam bentuk pernyataan umum, bukan dalam konten yang benar-benar inklusif, sehingga masih diperlukan perluasan dan pendalaman narasi agar dapat mencerminkan keberagaman sosial masyarakat Indonesia secara utuh.

**Kata Kunci:** buku teks; keberagaman budaya; pendidikan IPS; persepsi mahasiswa

### How to cite (APA 7)

Sitorus, I. N., Wardana, A., Widiastuti, A., & Wijayanti, A. T. (2025). Master's students' perceptions of cultural diversity in junior high social studies textbooks. *Inovasi Kurikulum*, 22(3), 1447-1460.

### Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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## INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity plays an important role in education because it encourages the integration of diverse values in learning to build tolerance and mutual respect between cultures. In Indonesia, education that pays attention to this diversity aims to strengthen awareness of cultural, linguistic, and religious plurality (Arfa & Lasaiba, 2023). Social Science (IPS) subjects are an important means of instilling an understanding of cultural diversity in students so that they can actively and positively participate in a pluralistic society (Nurjanah et al., 2021). In this process, textbooks play a role as the main bridge in conveying learning materials, including conveying social and cultural values (Gultom et al., 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum supports flexibility in the preparation of cultural diversity materials and encourages teachers to adapt materials to the realities of life in diverse Indonesian communities, as said by Ramadhan (2024) in a book titled "*Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar*".

However, the representation of cultural diversity in textbooks is not free from challenges. Cultural content, though present, is often simplified or presented from a dominant cultural perspective, which may lead to misinterpretation or underrepresentation of minority groups. Teachers, as facilitators, need to possess a comprehensive understanding of the content and be able to deliver it in an engaging, relevant, and sensitive manner (Obielodan, 2022; Oliveira, 2024; Shiddiqi et al., 2024). However, in practice, limited instructional time and the strong reliance on textbooks often hinder the ability of teachers to explore cultural topics more deeply and creatively (Khazni et al., 2021). These constraints may lead to superficial discussions on diversity and limit opportunities for critical reflection. Furthermore, educators' perceptions and attitudes toward cultural diversity play a crucial role in how the material is interpreted and taught, which in turn has a significant impact on shaping students' openness and attitudes toward cultural differences (Strydom et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the cultural relativism approach developed by Franz Boas provides an important framework for addressing these issues. This approach emphasizes the need to understand each culture based on its own internal values and logic, rather than judging it through the lens of another culture. It firmly rejects universal or objective assessments imposed from outside, advocating for a contextual and empathetic understanding of cultural practices (Hahn, 2023). In line with this view, the presentation of material in textbooks should aim for balance and inclusiveness, ensuring that no single culture dominates the narrative. When textbooks reflect a variety of cultural voices equitably, students are more likely to develop an unbiased and respectful perspective on cultural diversity (Pesonen, 2024).

Previous research has discussed social studies textbooks from a variety of analytical perspectives, particularly about values and student perceptions. One study revealed that the value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) tends to be more prominently emphasized in textbook narratives compared to the value of inclusiveness, indicating an imbalance in the representation of multicultural values (Aryaningsih et al., 2024). In addition, research has also explored how social studies students understand disaster mitigation, interpreting it as an extension of their social responsibility and civic attitudes (Sugiharyanto et al., 2014).

However, these studies do not specifically investigate how cultural diversity is represented in junior high school social studies textbooks, nor do they explore how pre-service or in-service teachers particularly at the graduate level perceive such representations. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on analyzing the content of junior high school textbooks through the lens of cultural diversity, combined with an exploration of how master's students in social studies education interpret these representations as future educators. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which junior high school social studies textbooks represent cultural diversity and to explore the perceptions of master's students in social studies education regarding these representations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cultural Diversity in Education

Cultural diversity reflects the social reality of Indonesia, which is composed of various ethnic groups, religions, languages, and customs. Education plays a crucial role in introducing and instilling values that encourage respect for these differences. Through learning processes, students are guided to recognize cultural variety, appreciate its richness, and develop mutual respect, thereby reducing the potential for discriminatory attitudes. Culture itself is understood as a system of values, behaviors, and artifacts that are passed down and learned across generations, as stated by Koentjaraningrat in a book titled *"Kebudayaan, Mentalitas, dan Pembangunan"*. For this reason, cultural diversity must be presented in a comprehensive manner, enabling students to develop the attitudes and competencies needed to live harmoniously within a pluralistic society.

### Cultural Content in Social Studies Textbooks

Textbooks are one of the main sources in the learning process that is often used as a reference for teachers and students. In social studies subjects, the cultural content presented should illustrate the diversity of Indonesian society. Unfortunately, several studies have found that the presentation of culture in textbooks tends to focus on the majority culture as stated by Fadli et al in a book titled *"Sejarah Kebudayaan Indonesia"*, while other cultures are less featured. If not presented evenly, this can shape students' limited understanding of Indonesia's diverse society (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Therefore, it is important to ensure that textbooks display the diversity of religions, ethnicities, regional languages, and customs fairly and thoroughly.

### Students' Perceptions

Social studies education master students have a role as prospective educators who will deliver material to students in the classroom (Soraya et al., 2023). Their perceptions of textbook content affect the way they deliver material and choose approaches to teaching. Students who are able to see weaknesses or gaps in the presentation of cultural diversity will be better prepared to adjust learning to better reflect the lives of diverse communities (Rowan et al., 2021). By exploring their views, it can be seen how the content of social studies textbooks is assessed and understood by prospective teachers. This also gives an idea of whether the textbook has been able to describe diversity appropriately or still needs improvement in its presentation.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive quantitative approach to analyze the perceptions of social studies education master students on the content of cultural diversity in social studies textbooks at junior high school level. The sample was selected purposively, with the criteria of social studies education master's students who are currently studying at the master's level, both those who have teaching experience and those who are fresh graduates. This approach was chosen to capture the diverse academic and practical perspectives that arise from the different background experiences of the participants. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, which is considered effective for obtaining direct information about respondents' perceptions, as stated by Sugiyono in a book titled *"Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif dan R&D"*.

The research instrument was developed through a synthesis of relevant literature on cultural diversity in education. The concept of cultural diversity narratives was adapted from studies emphasizing the representation of religion, ethnicity, customs, and language in textbooks (Kholish & Wafa, 2022). Principles of balanced and fair representation were guided by the perspectives on inclusive cultural portrayal (Suhardiyanto et al., 2025), while critiques of cultural dominance and biased narratives drew from classical and anthropological views as stated by Furnivall in a book titled *“Colonial Policy And Practice: A Comparative Study Of Burma And Netherlands India”* as well as Boas in a book titled *“Handbook of American Indian Languages”*. Key multicultural values such as tolerance, inclusiveness, and educational integration were incorporated based on prior research in multicultural education (Kurniawati, 2020; Boucher & Maclure, 2018). All references were synthesized and aligned with the research objectives to construct an instrument that captures students' perceptions of cultural diversity in social studies textbooks. The questionnaire items were developed through literature review and subsequently validated by expert judgment to ensure their relevance and clarity (Naz et al., 2024). The indicator framework used in this study is presented below.

**Table 1.** Lattice of Teacher Perception Questionnaire Instrument on the Content of Cultural Diversity in Social Studies Textbooks

No	Category	Indicator	Description
1	Narratives of Cultural Diversity in Textbooks	Religious diversity	Textbooks narrate religious diversity
		Ethnic diversity	Textbooks narrate ethnic groups in Indonesia
		Diversity of customs	Portrayal of customs from various regions in textbooks
		Language diversity	Presentation of local and national languages in social studies textbooks
2	Representation of Cultural Diversity in Textbooks	Balance of depiction of cultural diversity	Extent to which textbooks reflect cultural diversity in a balanced manner
		Dominance of certain cultures in textbooks	There is a tendency to dominate certain cultures in textbook narratives.
		Perspectives used in narrating cultural diversity	Perspective of the local community vs. the author's perspective in describing culture
3	Narratives of Multicultural Values in Textbooks	Depiction of tolerance and inclusiveness	The extent to which textbooks instill the value of tolerance and inclusiveness
		Strengthening multicultural education in textbooks	Portrayal of multicultural education in social studies textbook materials

Source: Author's Documentation, 2025

Validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure data accuracy and consistency, as stated by Azwar (2012) in a book titled *“Metode penelitian”*. Data were analyzed descriptively to see the percentage distribution of responses and identify patterns of student perceptions of cultural diversity in social studies textbooks. Ratings were conducted using a five-level Likert scale: Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), to measure the level of perception towards the representation of cultural diversity. The analysis steps began with determining the number of classes (K), which was as many as 4 categories of perception. Then the range of values (R) is calculated using the formula:

$$R = X_t - X_r$$

Description

R = Range

X<sub>t</sub> = Highest observed value times the number of questions per variable

X<sub>r</sub> = Lowest observed value times the number of questions per variable

Next, the class interval is determined using the formula

$$I = \frac{R}{K}$$

After that, the data is classified and percented according to the category, to determine the tendency of student perceptions of cultural diversity in social studies textbooks.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This study aims to explore the perceptions of master's students in social studies education regarding the extent to which cultural diversity narratives are reflected in junior high school social studies textbooks. Data were collected from 30 respondents using a questionnaire consisting of 18 statement items that had been tested for both validity and reliability. The results of the validity and reliability tests are presented in the following section.

**Table 2.** Validity Test Results

Indikator	Item	R table	R count	Description
Cultural diversity narratives in social studies textbooks	Item 1	0.732	0.361	valid
	Item 2	0.657	0.361	valid
	Item 3	0.560	0.361	valid
	Item 4	0.486	0.361	valid
	Item 5	0.649	0.361	valid
	Item 6	0.567	0.361	valid
	Item 7	0.401	0.361	valid
	Item 8	0.665	0.361	valid
Representation of Cultural Diversity in Textbooks	Item 1	0.654	0.361	valid
	Item 2	0.553	0.361	valid
	Item 3	0.496	0.361	valid
	Item 4	0.687	0.361	valid
	Item 5	0.663	0.361	valid
	Item 6	0.593	0.361	valid
Narratives of Multicultural Values in Textbooks	Item 1	0.881	0.361	valid
	Item 2	0.871	0.361	valid
	Item 3	0.909	0.361	valid

*Source: Author's Documentation, 2025*

The validity test results in **Table 2** show that all items in the three indicators have a calculated r value greater than r table (0.361), so they are declared valid. Eight items on the Cultural Diversity Narrative indicator had r count 0.401-0.732; six items on the Cultural Representation indicator showed r count 0.496-0.687; and three items on the Multicultural Values indicator reached r count 0.871-0.909. Thus, all question items were declared feasible to measure student perceptions of the content of cultural diversity in junior high school social studies textbooks.



**Table 3.** Reliability Test Results

Indikator	cronbach's alpha Value	Description
Narratives of Cultural Diversity in Social Studies Textbooks	0.734	Reliable
Representation of Cultural Diversity in Textbooks	0.627	Reliable
Narratives of Multicultural Values in Textbooks	0.865	Reliable

*Source: Author's Documentation, 2025*

The reliability test results in **Table 3** show that all indicators have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.6, so they are declared reliable. The Cultural Diversity Narrative indicator recorded a value of 0.734, Cultural Diversity Representation 0.627, and Multicultural Values 0.865. This shows that all instruments have good internal consistency and can be trusted to measure student perceptions of cultural diversity content in social studies textbooks.

### Cultural Diversity Narratives in Social Studies Textbooks

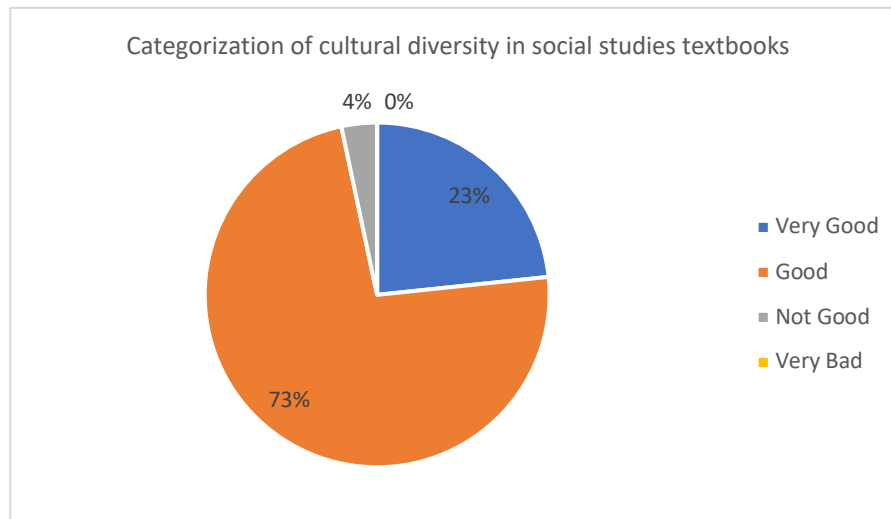
**Table 4.** Narratives of Cultural Diversity in Social Studies Textbooks

Indicator	Item	Scale (percentage)			
		1	2	3	4
Narratives of Cultural Diversity in Social Studies Textbooks	In your opinion, do social studies textbooks reflect religious diversity in a balanced way?	0	16.7	73.3	10
	Do you think social studies textbooks present accurate information about the various religions in Indonesia?	0	26.7	60	13.3
	Do you think ethnic representation in social studies textbooks has been presented equally?	3.3	46.7	50.0	0
	Do you think there is a tendency for social studies textbooks to emphasize certain ethnic cultures over others?	3.3	23.3	56.7	16.7
	Do you think that the customs of the various regions in Indonesia are well represented in the social studies textbooks that you use when teaching/learning?	3.3	66.7	30.0	0
	Do you think that social studies textbooks more often highlight the customs of certain regions only?	3.3	23.3	63.3	10.0
	As far as you know, are regional languages adequately represented in social studies textbooks?	2.2	66.7	30.0	0
	In your opinion, is the use of language in social studies textbooks inclusive and does not show bias towards certain cultures?	0	36.7	53.3	10.0

*Source: Author's Documentation, 2025*

The data in **Table 4** shows that most respondents (73.3%) agreed that religious diversity is adequately reflected in social studies textbooks, with 60% stating that the religious information presented is accurate. However, only 50% believed that ethnic representation is evenly distributed, while 46.7% disagreed, and 73.4% felt that certain ethnic cultures are overly emphasized—reflecting the dominance of majority culture, as described in earlier literature by Furnivall (1948) titled *“Colonial Policy And Practice: A Comparative Study Of Burma And Netherlands India”*. In terms of customary practices, 66.7% perceived that diversity in customs is underrepresented, supporting previous critiques about the lack of local cultural exposure, as stated by Koentjaraningrat (1985) in *“Kebudayaan, Mentalitas, dan Pembangunan”*. Similarly, 66.7%

considered the representation of local languages insufficient, although 53.3% viewed the textbook language as inclusive. These findings indicate the need to improve cultural representation in textbooks, aligning with the view that culture should be presented without bias. The categorization of cultural diversity was based on responses to eight statement items using a four-point Likert scale, and the results are summarized in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Categorization of cultural diversity in social studies textbooks  
*Source: Author's Documentation, 2025*

The results of the categorization of the eight statement items showed that 73.3% of respondents rated cultural diversity in social studies textbooks in the good category (scores 18-22), and 23.3% rated very good (scores 23-27). Only 3.33% rated it unfavorable, and no one rated it very unfavorable. This finding shows that in general the textbooks are considered to be sufficiently representative of cultural diversity, in line with the view of research that said textbooks function is to convey social and cultural values to students in a positive manner (Gultom et al., 2024).

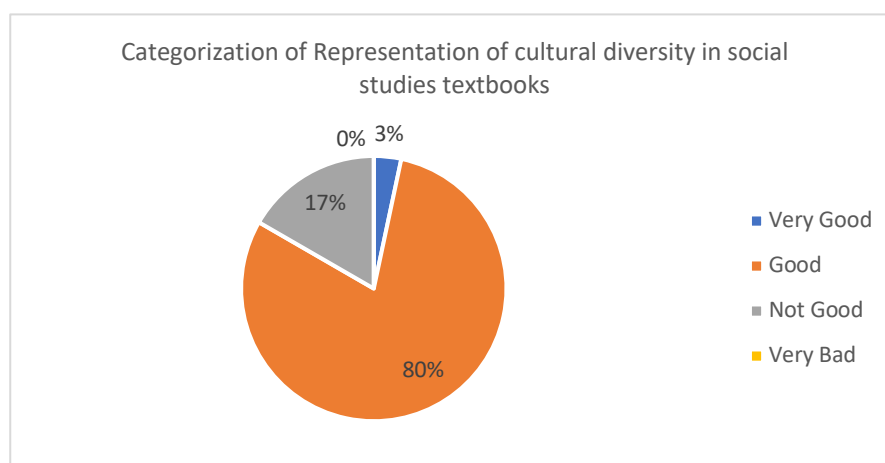
## Representation of Cultural Diversity

**Table 5.** Representation of Cultural Diversity in Social Studies Textbooks

Indicator	Item	Scale (percentage)			
		1	2	3	4
Representation of Cultural Diversity	Do you think social studies textbooks reflect the balance between cultures in Indonesia?	0	40.0	50.0	10.0
	As far as you know, do social studies textbooks show Java-centric tendencies?	0	33.3	40.0	26.7
	In your opinion, do cultures from outside Java get enough space in social studies textbooks?	0	66.7	30.0	3.3
	In your view, do textbooks use more local perspectives when narrating cultural diversity?	3.3	43.3	46.7	6.7
	Do you agree that social studies textbooks encourage students to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds?	0	6.7	73.3	20.0
	Do you think social studies textbooks teach that cultural differences are something to be valued, not avoided?	0	10.0	50.0	40.0

*Source: Author's Documentation, 2025*

The data in **Table 5** shows that 50% of respondents felt that social studies textbooks adequately reflected cultural balance, although 40% disagreed. Additionally, 26.7% strongly agreed that the textbooks displayed a Java-centric tendency, and 66.7% believed that cultures outside Java were underrepresented. Regarding perspective, 46.7% moderately agreed that the textbooks incorporated local community viewpoints, while 43.3% disagreed. On a more positive note, 73.3% of respondents felt that the books encouraged intercultural interaction among students, and 90% agreed on the importance of respecting differences. These findings reflect concerns about the dominance of certain cultural narratives in educational content and support the view that cultural representation should be inclusive and free from group-based bias as stated by Furnivall (1948) in a book titled *“Colonial Policy And Practice: A Comparative Study Of Burma And Netherlands India”* as well as Boas (1911) in a book titled *“Handbook of American Indian Languages”*. The categorization of cultural diversity representation was based on six statement items measured using a four-point Likert scale, and the results are illustrated in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Categorization of Representation of cultural diversity in social studies textbooks  
Source: Author's Documentation, 2025

The results showed that 80% of respondents rated the representation of cultural diversity in social studies textbooks in the good category (score 16-20), 3.33% rated very good, and 16.67% rated less good. There were no respondents who rated very poor. This indicates that the textbooks have adequately represented cultural diversity, although there is still room for improvement.

## Multicultural Values

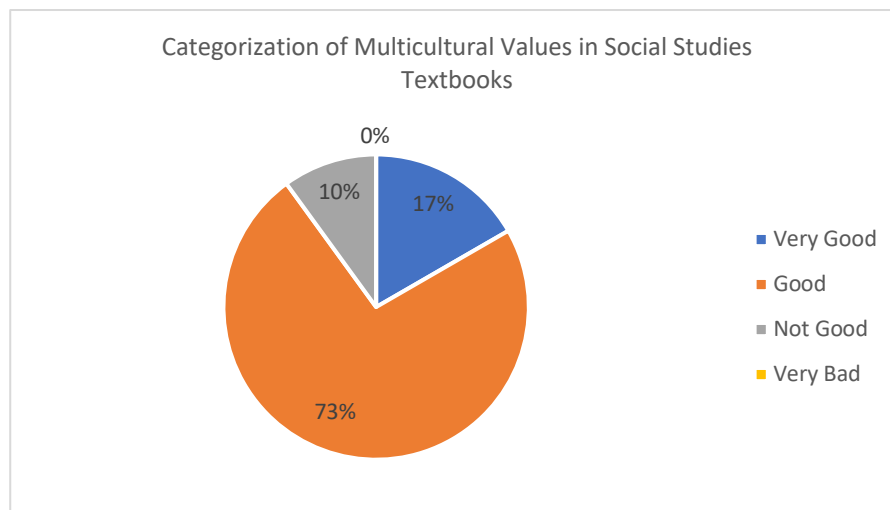
**Table 6.** Multicultural values in social studies textbooks

Indicator	Item	Scale (percentage)			
		1	2	3	4
Multicultural Values	In your opinion, do social studies textbooks provide concrete examples of the application of multicultural education in students' social lives?	0	20.0	66.7	13.3
	Do social studies textbooks reflect the value of tolerance and encourage students to appreciate cultural differences?	0	13.3	66.7	20.0
	In your view, do social studies textbooks help students understand the importance of inclusiveness in a diverse society?	0	13.3	66.7	20.0

Source: Author's Documentation, 2025



The data in **Table 6** shows that most respondents (66.7%) agreed that social studies textbooks provide sufficient examples of the application of multicultural education, while 13.3% strongly agreed. Similarly, 66.7% considered the values of tolerance and respect for cultural differences to be adequately reflected, with 20% strongly agreeing. The aspect of inclusiveness also received moderate agreement from 66.7% of respondents, and strong agreement from 20%. These findings support the view that integrating multicultural values in education is essential for fostering tolerant and inclusive student attitudes (Kurniawati, 2020; Boucher & Maclure, 2018). The results are based on the categorization of responses to three statement items related to cultural diversity, using a four-point Likert scale as presented in **Table 6**.



**Figure 3.** Categorization of Multicultural Values in Social Studies Textbooks  
*Source: Author's Documentation, 2025*

The results in **Figure 3** showed that 73.33% of respondents assessed the multicultural values presented in social studies textbooks as good, while 16.67% rated them as very good, and 10% considered them not good. Notably, no respondents rated the textbooks as very unfavorable. These findings indicate that, overall, social studies textbooks are perceived to adequately incorporate multicultural values. However, the presence of a small percentage of respondents who viewed the content less positively suggests that certain aspects still require improvement to ensure more comprehensive and balanced representation.

## Discussion

### Narratives of Cultural Diversity in Social Studies Textbooks

Based on the data analysis, most master's students in social studies education assessed that junior high school social studies textbooks have represented religious diversity in a balanced manner. A total of 73.3% of respondents agreed with this view, and 60% stated that religious information is presented with sufficient accuracy. This finding suggests that religious aspects, as part of cultural diversity, have been adequately accommodated within the narrative structure of the textbooks. The inclusion of religious diversity aligns with the perspective that the religious system constitutes one of the seven main elements of culture in Indonesian society (Imawan, 2024). Moreover, the representation of religion in textbooks supports the understanding that cultural diversity is a dynamic social construction that continuously evolves within community life (Suhardiyanto et al., 2025). The ethnicity and customs dimension in the textbooks was still considered uneven by most respondents, as 56.7% stated that the books tended to emphasize the culture of certain ethnicities, and 66.7% stated that customs from various regions were not well represented. Meanwhile, 63.3% also considered that textbooks more often highlighted customs from certain regions

only. The narrative of cultural representation has the potential to create a limited depiction of Indonesia's vast cultural diversity. Historically, this diversity has been formed through a long process, involving the dynamics of trade, migration, and colonialism in Indonesia, as stated by as stated by Fadli et al., in a book titled "*Sejarah Kebudayaan Indonesia*". The concept of cultural diversity according to Benhamou and Peltier includes variation, balance, and inequality in the depiction of cultures that develop in society.

Representation of local languages was also a concern for respondents; 66.7% felt that local languages were not sufficiently represented, although 53.3% considered the use of language in the book to be inclusive. This imbalance shows that language as a cultural element is still underrepresented. Koentjaraningrat emphasized that language is not only a means of communication, but also a marker of social identity (Imawan, 2024). This lack of representation shows that textbooks have not fully reflected the cultural symbols and locality of Indonesian society. Strengthening local identity through language and cultural expression in educational spaces also important to create community-based equality (Widiastuti et al., 2025).

In general, 73.3% of respondents rated the cultural diversity narrative in social studies textbooks as good, and 23.3% rated it as very good, while only 3.33% considered it unfavorable. This indicates that master's students in social studies education recognize the presence of efforts to present cultural diversity, though some still note imbalances in representation. The learning process, as emphasized by Vygotsky, occurs through socio-cultural interaction, which requires teaching materials to reflect diverse social contexts (Rasyidi, 2024). Cultural bias in textbooks, if not addressed, may reinforce stereotypes and hinder inclusive values as stated by Ustianti in a book titled "*Interaksi Manusia dan Kebudayaan*". A balanced portrayal of cultural groups is essential to foster intercultural understanding and social cohesion, in line with Banks' theory of multicultural education that calls for curricula reflective of student diversity (Khan, 2024; Zalli, 2024). Therefore, cultural content in textbooks should function not only as knowledge but also as a pedagogical strategy to promote inclusivity (Guberina, 2023). According to respondents, the dominance of certain regional cultures in textbooks highlights the issue of uneven representation, potentially marginalizing others. This concern aligns with Boas' principle of cultural relativism, which stresses that cultures should be understood from within their own contexts (Hahn, 2023). The imbalance found suggests a disconnect between textbook content and Indonesia's actual cultural diversity, which should be addressed in curriculum development.

## **Representation of Cultural Diversity**

The results of the analysis indicate that the perceptions of master's students in social studies education toward the representation of cultural diversity in textbooks remain critical, with many viewing the narrative as not yet fully balanced. Half of the respondents (50%) considered the representation to be quite balanced, while 40% disagreed, and only 10% believed it to be very balanced. These figures suggest that cultural diversity has not been positioned evenly within the teaching materials and that certain cultural groups may still be underrepresented or misrepresented. The importance of equitable cultural representation is rooted in the principle of cultural relativism, which rejects external judgments and calls for understanding cultures from within their own context (Hahn, 2023). Cultural minorities are often presented superficially without including their internal perspectives, thereby risking reinforcing cultural stereotypes.

The issue of the dominance of Javanese culture in textbooks is of particular concern. A total of 40% of respondents moderately agreed, and 26.7% strongly agreed, that the books exhibited Javanese-centric tendencies. Additionally, 66.7% of respondents stated that cultures outside Java have not received an adequate portion, indicating a regional bias in content development. Such imbalance may lead to cultural misrepresentation and undermine the diversity that exists across Indonesia. Viewing culture through a

dominant lens has been shown to obscure the complexity and richness of other cultural groups (Hahn, 2023). The lack of multicultural approaches in education may lead students to develop a narrow and fragmented understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity (Harmi et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a pressing need for textbooks to provide a more equitable and proportional representation of all cultures, ensuring that each cultural identity is fairly acknowledged in educational materials (Adam & Harper, 2023).

Most respondents also perceived the representation of local perspectives in textbooks as lacking emphasis. A total of 43.3% reported that such perspectives were rarely included, while 46.7% assessed them as only moderately represented. The use of narratives constructed from outside the cultural communities often fails to capture the intrinsic values, meanings, and symbols embedded within those cultures. This practice has been associated with a narrative bias that tends to privilege symbolic power centers (Hahn, 2023). In support of this view, it has been argued that, although local cultures are present in the texts, the discourse remains dominated by a generalized national narrative. These findings suggest that although current efforts are acknowledged, perceived inequalities in representation persist. A more dynamic and contextualized presentation of cultural diversity is needed, rather than a symbolic display, to reflect the actual social structures of Indonesian society (Fatmawati, 2021).

This finding is consistent with the view that junior high school textbooks still do not display local cultural diversity in an even and proportional manner, particularly with regard to underrepresented cultural groups, as stated by Adnyana in a book titled "*Pendidikan Multikultural*". The dominant culture tends to receive more attention and coverage, while other cultures are only featured in a limited and often superficial way. Similar concerns are reflected in other studies, which note that although cultural diversity is visible in the content, it often lacks depth and fails to portray the distinctive character and identity of each culture (Ridwanulloh et al., 2024). To address this issue, it is important that textbooks go beyond merely presenting cultural symbols and instead provide a more comprehensive depiction of the values, practices, and socio-cultural dynamics of each group, as stated by Sihabuddin in a book titled "*Komunikasi Antarbudaya: Satu perspektif multidimensi*".

## **Multicultural Values**

The majority of social studies education master's students assessed that the textbooks contained multicultural values, especially related to respect for differences and the importance of intercultural cooperation. 90% said the book teaches diversity, 86.7% said it encourages respect for differences, and 80% emphasized cross-cultural cooperation. However, only 50% saw a clear anti-discrimination stance, and 30% rated cultural inclusiveness as strong. This suggests that multicultural values appear more as normative messages than substantial representation in the content of the books.

Multiculturalism is not merely about conveying messages of tolerance; it also requires the active participation of cultural groups within social practices and educational structures, as stated by Adnyana (2025) in a book titled "*Pendidikan Multikultural*". This view aligns with the argument that recognition and redistribution of social spaces are essential to ensure equal involvement of all groups in educational contexts (Kartika et al., 2025). In the local context, the integration of multicultural values into the curriculum, school policies, and everyday social interactions has been identified as a critical factor in fostering inclusive learning environments (Budirahayu & Saud, 2021). Furthermore, the incorporation of local wisdom is considered necessary to prevent multiculturalism from being merely symbolic or superficial (Mariyono, 2024). Based on these insights, although respondents generally perceive the narratives of multicultural values in textbooks positively, there remains a need to strengthen their substance so that the materials reflect not only messages of diversity, but also promote inclusive and equitable social structures.

The survey results show that the majority of students perceive textbooks to contain normative multicultural values, especially in the form of calls for mutual respect and cooperation across cultures. However, this

finding shows that the normative dimension has not been fully accompanied by structural representations in the book's narrative. This is in line with the analysis that revealed that multicultural values in Indonesian textbooks are indeed present, but are more dominant in religion and ethnicity that are general in nature without elaborating on the dynamics of deep differences (Maulidiah et al., 2023). According to intercultural theory by James A. Banks, multicultural education should not only emphasize tolerance, but also challenge structural inequality and encourage the redistribution of cultural representations actively (Giwangsa et al., 2023).

A transformational approach in curriculum design enables students to move beyond symbolic acknowledgment of diversity toward meaningful engagement with cultural equity (Rodriguez et al., 2022). The integration of multicultural values in religious education has also been found effective in fostering inclusive social awareness, especially when connected to the realities of students' daily lives (Kurdi, 2023). Furthermore, multicultural values can be reinforced through project-based learning and cross-cultural community activities, which help cultivate appreciation for diversity and strengthen social cohesion within the school environment (Widiastuti et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, junior high school social studies textbooks have contained a narrative of cultural diversity, especially in terms of religious diversity and an invitation to respect differences. However, the perception of social studies education master students shows that the representation of cultural diversity in the book has not been fully equitable. Aspects of ethnicity, customs, regional languages, and local perspectives are still considered underrepresented. Most respondents also considered that there was a tendency to dominate certain cultures, especially Javanese culture. Multicultural values are conveyed, but more in the form of general statements and not yet strongly integrated in the content of the material. Therefore, social studies textbooks still need strengthening to present diversity more fairly, thoroughly and inclusively. These findings answer the research objectives, namely assessing the content of cultural diversity in textbooks as well as understanding the perceptions of master's students towards these representations.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author confirms that the data and content of the article are free from plagiarism.

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