CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The importance of culture in second language learning has become a topic of increasing attention (Sofiah et al., 2024). Scholars have emphasized that language learning cannot be separated from cultural aspects. In this case, culture is considered an important component that helps students understand the context behind the language they are learning. This is in line with the view that language is not just a collection of words and grammar, but also a reflection of the values, habits, and worldview of a society. Rodríguez (2015) even emphasized that culture must be at the center of language education. By understanding culture, students will be better able to understand the deeper meaning of a language, including how the language is used in specific social and cultural contexts. This allows students to develop intercultural competence, namely the ability to interact effectively with people from different backgrounds. Gibbons (2017) added that the language learning process from the start has been closely related to culture. Given the close relationship between language and culture, EFL textbooks inevitably carry cultural values, both directly and indirectly, which in the literature is referred as the "hidden curriculum" (Cunningsworth, 1995; Hinkel, 1999 in Liu & Laohawiriyanon, 2012). In Indonesia, the *Merdeka* curriculum reflects this principle by aiming to develop students' intercultural competence through an understanding of both Indonesian and foreign cultures, as outlined by the BSKAP decree.

One of the ways to incorporate culture in language learning is to develop English textbooks that include cultural categories, such as source culture, target culture and international culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999 in Rahmannia, 2020). The *Merdeka* Curriculum English textbook is expected to not only focus on technical language teaching, but also pay attention to cultural aspects. Intercultural communication competence is an important element that needs to be introduced to students. According to Straub (1999, in Arslan, 2016) one effective way to strengthen students' intercultural competence is to include the source culture and

target culture into EFL textbooks. The representation of various culture in the textbook can provide students understanding of cross-cultural perspectives that different from them.

Research on the analysis of cultural values in ELT textbooks has been conducted. Lembah et al. (2023) conducted research analyzing cultural representation in English textbook "Think Globally Act Locally" using the theory of Cortazzi and Jin (1999). The result of their study showed the dominance of source culture (50%), target culture (38%) and the international target culture (12%). The dimension used include using the aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. Although this research provides significant insights into cultural representation in textbooks, there is a gap in research analysis regarding the role of multimodal elements such as images and text in conveying cultural values. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) offers a comprehensive approach to examining the interaction between visual and textual elements. By applying MDA, this study will uncover how these elements work together to present cultural values and how they contribute to achieving the educational goals of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Furthermore, textbooks often include multimodal elements such as images and text to convey certain values (Hidayat et al., 2023), there is a gap in our understanding of how these elements work together to convey cultural values. Multimodal elements such as images and text are often used to support learners' understanding, but the interactions between these elements in conveying meaning is not fully understood. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is a method that can help explain how visual and textual elements in textbooks interact with each other to create meaning. This research attempts to fill this gap by conducting a multimodal analysis of the *Merdeka* Curriculum English textbook used in elementary school. This textbook integrates cultural values that align with the curriculum's goal of fostering intercultural competence. Additionally, preliminary observations indicate that the book contains a mix of local and international cultural elements, making it relevant for analyzing how cultural values are represented.

B. Formulation of the Problem

How are cultural values represented in the 'My Next Words Grade 3' ELT textbook?

C. Operational Definitions

The researcher plans to investigate the cultural values represented in a selected chapter of an elementary-level Indonesian ELT textbook by using the theory of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). To avoid any misunderstanding about the terminologies in this study, the researcher has provided the following definitions:

1.	**Cultural Values**	:	Cultural values refer to the representation of customs, human behavior, and shared practices within a society. These values are expressed through ideas, societal activities, and tangible artifacts, reflecting the beliefs, norms, and traditions that shape a community's identity.
2.	**ELT Textbook**	:	The corpus that will be used in this research is a series book designed based on the current curriculum (*Merdeka* Curriculum) with the title *My Next Words Grade 3*. The book is provided for Indonesian EFL elementary school.
3.	**Multimodal Discourse Analysis**	:	Multimodal Discourse Analysis is a research approach used to understand how meaning is constructed through the combination of various modes of communication, such as text, images, layout, and color.

D. Aim of the Study

The research aims to investigate how the cultural values are represented in the 'My Next Words Grade 3-for Elementary School' textbook endorsed by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture.

E. Significances of the Study

   1. Theoretical Significance

The study contributes to the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework by applying Visual Grammar and Transitivity theories to investigate how cultural values are represented through text and images in ELT textbooks.

   2. Practical Significance

This research provides insights for educators and textbook developers on enhancing ELT materials to reflect both Indonesian and foreign cultures better, supporting the goals of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

   3. Empirical Significance

This research fills a gap in previous research by focusing on multimodal discourse analysis at the elementary school level, particularly the *Merdeka* Curriculum' ELT textbooks.