

Cultural Stereotypes in Foreign Language Textbooks: A Systematic Review of Visual Representation

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Abstract—This systematic review examines cultural stereotypes depicted in visual content of foreign language textbooks, considering their impact on intercultural education. The research addresses the critical need for understanding how stereotypes in textbooks influence students' cultural perceptions and biases. Using a PRISMA-guided review of 24 articles, the study analyzes how textbooks visually represent different cultures and gender roles. Findings reveal that cultural stereotypes are frequently reinforced, with visuals heavily dominated by Anglo-Saxon target cultures, while local cultures are often exoticized and depicted in static, traditional images. Additionally, gender stereotypes remain pervasive, portraying women in passive roles and men in dominant positions. These stereotypical portrayals potentially hinder intercultural understanding and reinforce existing biases among learners. However, the review identifies examples where textbooks successfully promote cultural inclusivity and diversity through balanced representations. This study implies that textbook developers should intentionally incorporate inclusive, dynamic, and balanced visuals to facilitate critical intercultural learning. The paper concludes with recommendations for addressing existing gaps, including the need to explore teachers' and students' perceptions, internal cultural diversity, and visual content in digital textbooks.

Index Terms—cultural stereotypes, foreign language textbooks, gender bias, intercultural competence, visual representation

I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language textbooks play a crucial role in language learning, not only as sources of linguistic materials but also as primary mediums for introducing the target culture to students (Amerian & Tajabadi, 2020; Zu & Kong, 2009). As cross-cultural learning tools, textbooks provide students with initial access to the traditions, values, and social life associated with the language being studied (Huang, 2019). Textbooks are often the first instruments to build cultural understanding, strengthen cross-cultural communication skills, and develop intercultural competence. Therefore, textbooks are responsible for delivering accurate and inclusive representations of culture (Hua et al., 2023; Yuen, 2011).

In language textbooks, visual elements often reinforce linguistic and cultural messages. Visual representations in images, illustrations, or infographics help students grasp cultural concepts more concretely than text alone (Purwaningtyas, 2020; Syarif & Mulyono, 2023). These visuals have the potential to instill profound cultural insights, foster cross-cultural empathy, and enhance understanding of broader social contexts. Visual elements play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between students and the target culture by providing symbolic representations of real-life experiences (Wang & Hemchua, 2022). Additionally, visuals enrich the learning experience by offering precise and measurable depictions of specific societies' traditions, customs, and cultural values (Ampera et al., 2021; Derakhshan, 2024).

However, cultural representations in language textbooks are often disproportionate and reflect specific cultural biases. Research indicates that in many cases, target cultures, particularly Anglo-Saxon cultures in English language textbooks, dominate visual representations. For instance, English textbooks used in Taiwan prioritize Western cultures, especially those of the United States and the United Kingdom, while local and other international cultures are underrepresented (Lu et al., 2022; Su, 2014). This imbalance not only reflects the dominance of certain cultures but also reinforces homogeneous cultural stereotypes while sidelining diversity (Syarif & Mulyono, 2023).

Moreover, cultural bias in representation is not limited to target cultures. Some studies reveal that local cultures are often reduced to simplistic symbolic elements (Dinh & Sharifian, 2017; Hao et al., 2023; Lee, 2023; Motschenbacher, 2019). For example, visual elements in English textbooks used in Vietnam tend to portray local cultural aspects such as the Lunar New Year (Tet) in a clichéd manner, focusing on specific traditional elements like kumquat trees or traditional attire (Dinh & Sharifian, 2017). Such representations often disregard the dynamics of modern culture, creating static and essentialist stereotypes of local cultures.

The issue of cultural stereotypes in textbooks becomes increasingly critical when considering its pedagogical implications. Biased representations can limit students' perspectives on cultural diversity, creating a narrow view of target and local cultures (Lu et al., 2022; Ndura, 2004). This can hinder the goals of cross-cultural education, which aim

to develop intercultural competence and global understanding. Research highlights the importance of visual elements in challenging stereotypes and encouraging students to appreciate cultural diversity (Isnaini et al., 2019; McConachy, 2018).

Visual analysis in language textbooks is grounded in strong theoretical frameworks, particularly within multimodal and semiotic approaches. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), in their theory of multimodality, visual representations are not merely textual supports but convey independent meanings and communicate complex cultural messages. Such frameworks are applied to analyse how visuals in Spanish language textbooks create cultural meanings through combinations of symbols, colors, and layouts (Hao et al., 2023; Wang & Hemchua, 2022). Furthermore, visuals in textbooks are often used decoratively without clear pedagogical relevance, undermining their potential as tools for cultural learning (Derakhshan, 2024).

Despite extensive research on cultural representations in textbooks, a significant gap remains in exploring how visual stereotypes specifically influence intercultural competence and understanding among language learners (Lu et al., 2022; Syarif & Mulyono, 2023). Previous studies have proposed various solutions, including adopting multimodal frameworks (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) and advocating inclusive visual representation (Hao et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these approaches have rarely been systematically reviewed in the context of cultural stereotypes across different languages and educational settings, highlighting the need for this current systematic review.

The primary objective of this study is to address the aforementioned gap by systematically reviewing the portrayal of cultural stereotypes in visual content, critically evaluating existing practices, and identifying pedagogical implications and solutions. This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the methodology, detailing the PRISMA-guided systematic review process used. Section 3 presents the key findings regarding cultural stereotypes identified in textbooks. Section 4 discusses pedagogical implications based on these findings. Lastly, Section 5 provides conclusions and recommendations for educators and textbook developers to enhance intercultural competence through improved visual content in textbooks.

The lack of systematic studies on cultural stereotypes in the visual elements of foreign language textbooks is a critical concern, as it limits our understanding of how stereotypical visuals may impact students' intercultural awareness and cultural learning (Hao et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2022). Previous studies addressing this topic, such as those conducted by Dinh and Sharifian (2017) in Vietnam, Su (2014) in Taiwan, and Ampera et al. (2021) in Indonesia, have largely been partial, focusing only on limited local contexts without broader comparative analysis across different languages or regions. A comprehensive review is urgently needed to understand how visual elements in textbooks reinforce or challenge cultural stereotypes and their impact on students' cross-cultural learning. For example, the importance of multimodal analysis lies in evaluating how visuals interact with text to create cultural narratives (Gheisari & Akbari, 2022; Hua et al., 2023).

Although previous studies have offered solutions such as advocating more inclusive visual representation (Hao et al., 2023) and applying multimodal analytical frameworks to textbook content (Wang & Hemchua, 2022; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), these approaches remain fragmented and context-specific. Therefore, this study aims to fill the existing gap by providing a comprehensive, systematic analysis of cultural representations across various contexts and languages in the visual elements of foreign language textbooks. This comparative and integrative perspective distinguishes the present research from earlier studies. The primary focus is identifying the types of cultural stereotypes represented visually, evaluating how visual elements reinforce or challenge these stereotypes, and examining their pedagogical implications for students' cross-cultural understanding.

The research is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What types of cultural stereotypes are represented in the visual content of foreign language textbooks?
2. How do visual representations in foreign language textbooks reinforce or challenge cultural stereotypes?
3. What are the pedagogical implications of visual cultural stereotypes in foreign language textbooks for learners' understanding of target cultures?

By addressing these questions, the findings from this study aim to provide significant contributions to the development of foreign language textbooks, guiding educators and textbook developers to create more inclusive, equitable, and culturally balanced visual content. Consequently, this could effectively enhance students' cross-cultural competence, critical cultural awareness, and foster more meaningful intercultural learning experiences.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign language textbooks have long been recognized as essential tools in language learning, serving not only as sources of linguistic material but also as mediums for introducing target cultures. Previous research has established that textbooks significantly influence students' understanding of the cultures embedded within the language (Huang, 2019; Zu & Kong, 2009). Visual elements in textbooks—such as images, illustrations, or infographics—reinforce cultural and linguistic messages, enabling students to grasp cultural concepts more concretely and deeply than text alone (Purwaningtyas, 2020; Ampera et al., 2021).

However, despite the significant potential of visuals to enhance cultural understanding, they are often influenced by cultural stereotypes that can narrow students' perspectives. Several studies have shown that certain cultures dominate visual representations in textbooks, whereas local cultures frequently become marginalized or reduced to simplistic

symbolic forms. For example, in English textbooks used in Taiwan, Western cultures, especially Anglo-Saxon cultures from the United States and the United Kingdom, are more frequently represented than the local Taiwanese culture (Su, 2014). Such biases reinforce homogeneous stereotypes about Western culture while marginalizing cultural diversity (Syarif & Mulyono, 2023).

Research by Gheisari and Akbari (2022) and Isnaini et al. (2019) similarly reports that local cultures in textbooks are often depicted through clichés or limited portrayals of traditional celebrations, neglecting contemporary cultural dynamics. These representations produce static and unrealistic views of cultures. Such findings underscore that existing research on textbook visuals is frequently limited in scope, typically focusing only on specific local contexts without broader comparative analysis across different regions or languages.

To address these limitations, this study employs a systematic and comparative approach by reviewing a broad range of cultural contexts and linguistic backgrounds using the PRISMA method. This methodological rigor enables a more holistic understanding of how cultural stereotypes manifest across diverse educational settings.

Key theoretical frameworks underpinning this analysis include multimodal and semiotic approaches. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), visuals in textbooks function as cultural communication tools, conveying cultural meanings through symbols, colors, and layouts. These visuals should ideally provide meaningful pedagogical value relevant to cross-cultural learning.

Important terms used throughout this research require clarification. “Cultural stereotypes” refer to generalized and often oversimplified or inaccurate portrayals of a particular cultural group, reinforcing bias and limiting genuine cultural understanding (Samovar & Porter, 2004). “Visual representations” include visual elements such as images, illustrations, photographs, and infographics, which convey explicit and implicit cultural messages. These visuals are not merely decorative; they are central to constructing cultural meaning and influencing students' perceptions (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

The pedagogical impact of culturally biased visuals is significant. Studies by Lu et al. (2022) and Isnaini et al. (2019) emphasize that textbooks failing to represent cultural diversity accurately limit students' cultural perspectives and hinder their cross-cultural communication skills. Thus, textbooks must incorporate diverse, accurate cultural visuals to serve effectively as instruments for inclusive and critical cross-cultural education.

This study, therefore, contributes to existing literature by systematically addressing previous research gaps and offering comprehensive insights into visual cultural representation across multiple educational and cultural contexts.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic review method as defined by Petticrew and Roberts (2006), designed to synthesize existing literature systematically and transparently to address clearly formulated research questions. Specifically, the selection and analysis of articles follow the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework developed by Moher et al. (2009), comprising four main stages: (1) identification of relevant literature, (2) screening for relevance based on title and abstract, (3) eligibility assessment through full-text review, and (4) inclusion of final studies for analysis. During the identification stage, articles were searched in the Scopus database using the keywords "Textbook AND Culture AND Language" in the titles, keywords, and abstracts. The initial search yielded 924 documents published between 2000 and 2024. Initial inclusion criteria were applied to filter relevant documents, considering only articles published in Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities, in peer-reviewed journals, and written in English. After applying these criteria, 499 documents were excluded for further screening.

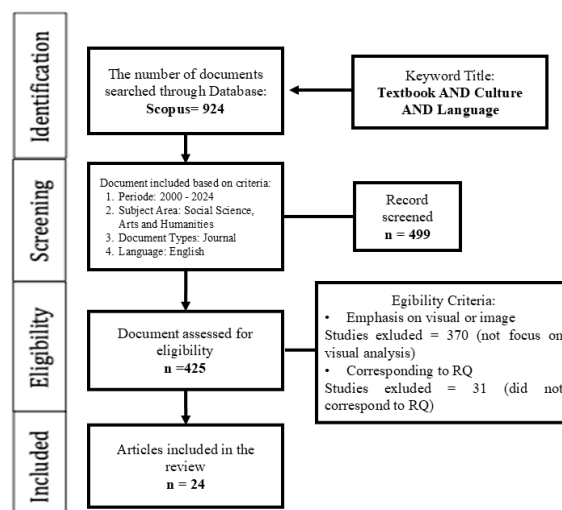


Figure 1. Prisma Flow Diagram

At the screening stage, the abstracts and titles of the articles were evaluated to ensure their relevance to the research focus. From this evaluation, 425 documents were selected for further eligibility assessment. Documents that did not meet the exclusion criteria, such as studies that did not emphasize visual elements or imagery, were excluded. 370 documents were removed because they did not focus on visual elements. After this screening stage, only 55 documents were deemed eligible for in-depth analysis during the final eligibility assessment stage.

The final stage involved an in-depth review of the full-text articles of the remaining documents to ensure their alignment with the research objectives. As a result of this assessment, 31 documents irrelevant to the research questions (RQs) were excluded from the analysis. Ultimately, 24 articles met all inclusion criteria and were included in the systematic review. These selected articles were entirely relevant to the research focus, specifically analyzing cultural representations in the visual elements of foreign language textbooks and their implications for cross-cultural learning. The article selection process is clearly summarized in a PRISMA Flow Diagram (Figure 1), illustrating the selection journey from the initial 924 documents to the final 24 articles included in the review.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Data Sets*

TABLE 1
DATASET OF ARTICLES

No	Author	Title	Geographical Region	Language Textbooks	Relevant to RQ
1	Gheisari & Akbari (2022)	A Comparison of Cultural Representation and Ideologies in the Multimodal Discourses of Textbooks Used in Public and Private Iranian Contexts	Iran	English, Farsi	RQ1, RQ2
2	Choi & Lee (2024)	A Critical Analysis of Korean Culture Represented in the Korean Language Textbooks Developed in Thailand	Thailand	Korean	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
3	Rajabi, Aghaei & Danyali (2024)	A Critical Discourse Analysis of Prospect & Vision Series English Language Textbooks as Framed in Foucauldian Reading on Ageism	Iran	English	RQ1, RQ3
4	Teo & Zhu (2018)	A Multimodal Analysis of Affect and Attitude Education in China's English Textbooks	China	English	RQ1, RQ2
5	Isnaini, Setyono & Ariyanto (2019)	A Visual Semiotic Analysis of Multicultural Values in an Indonesian English Textbook	Indonesia	English	RQ1, RQ2
6	Soliman (2020)	An Analysis of the Cultural Content and Ideological Underpinnings of an English Language Textbook	United Arab Emirates (UAE)	English	RQ1, RQ3
7	Wang & Hemchua (2022)	Can We Learn about Culture by EFL Textbook Images? A Semiotic Approach Perspective	Global (China, Thailand)	English	RQ1, RQ2
8	Sattarpour, Enayat & Poorebrahim (2024)	Culture and Gender Representation in ELT Textbooks: A Comparative Analysis of Iranian and Turkish Series	Iran, Turkey	English	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
9	Weninger & Kiss (2013)	Culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Textbooks: A Semiotic Approach	Hungary	English	RQ1, RQ2
10	Lee (2023)	Exoticism of the Other: (Mis)representations of Culture in English Textbooks in Korea	Korea	English	RQ1, RQ2
11	Wang (2014)	Gender Images in EFL Textbooks: On the Hidden Roles of EFL Teaching Materials with Sexist Ideology	China	English	RQ1, RQ3
12	Muassomah et al. (2023)	Gender Inequality in Arabic Textbook: Misrepresentation of Women in Culture and Society	United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Arabic	RQ1, RQ3
13	Larionova (2021)	Modelling of Teaching Korean as a Second Foreign Language	Korea	Korean	RQ1, RQ2
14	Koster & Litosseliti (2021)	Multidimensional Perspectives on Gender in Dutch Language Education	Netherlands	Dutch	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
15	Motschenbacher (2019)	Non-Nativeness as a Dimension of Inclusion: A Multimodal Representational Analysis of EFL Textbooks	Global (England-USA)	English	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
16	Hao et al. (2023)	Representation and Reconstruction of Hispanic Culture in Localized Spanish Textbooks in China	China-Latin America	Spanish	RQ1, RQ2
17	Xiong & Peng (2020)	Representing Culture in Chinese as a Second Language Textbooks: A Critical Social Semiotic Approach	China	Chinese	RQ1, RQ2
18	Feres (2009)	Representing Latin America through Pre-Columbian Art	Latin America	Spanish	RQ1, RQ2
19	Derakhshan (2024)	Cultural Representations in the Iranian EFL National Textbook	Iran	English	RQ1, RQ3
20	Su (2014)	The International Status of English for Intercultural Understanding in Taiwan's High School EFL Textbooks	Taiwan	English	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
21	Ampera et al. (2021)	The Role of Visuals in Cultural Learning in the EFL Classroom	Indonesia	English	RQ2, RQ3
22	Novita et al. (2020)	Using Local Contents in English Materials: A Manifestation of Maintaining Local Wisdom	Indonesia	English	RQ1, RQ3
23	Dinh & Sharifian (2017)	Vietnamese Cultural Conceptualisations in the Locally Developed English Textbook	Vietnam	English	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
24	Rueda García & Atienza Cerezo (2020)	Who are the Non-Native Speakers of English? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Global ELT Textbooks	Global	English	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3

Table 1 presents the dataset of 24 articles analysed in this study. These articles cover various geographical regions, including Asia (e.g., Korea, China, Indonesia, and Iran), the Middle East (e.g., the United Arab Emirates and Iran), and

global regions with cross-cultural studies. This geographical distribution demonstrates the diversity of cultural and educational contexts analysed in this research, providing comprehensive insights into cultural representations in foreign language textbooks. This diversity is crucial in understanding how different cultures worldwide are represented through educational media, mainly foreign language textbooks.

Most of the textbooks analysed in these articles are English language textbooks, reflecting the dominance of English in foreign language education across the geographical regions listed in the table. The analysis also includes other foreign language textbooks, such as Korean, Farsi, Chinese, Arabic, Dutch, and Spanish. This enriches perspectives on how cultures are represented through different languages. These textbooks serve as tools for teaching language and play a role in shaping understanding of the cultures associated with those languages. Therefore, the diversity of languages analysed highlights that cultural representation in textbooks holds significant relevance not only on a global scale but also at local and national levels.

The textbooks analysed in these articles include not only linguistic and cultural elements but also reflect the dynamics of cultural stereotypes, which are the focus of this study. This aligns with the three main research questions (RQs) that frame the analysis. The first research question (RQ1) focuses on the types of cultural stereotypes represented in textbook visuals, while the second research question (RQ2) explores how these visuals reinforce or challenge existing cultural stereotypes. The third research question (RQ3) seeks to identify the pedagogical implications of these visual stereotypes for students' cross-cultural understanding. Many articles are relevant to multiple research questions, demonstrating the strong interconnection between visual representation, stereotype reinforcement, and its impact on students' learning processes.

This dataset encompasses various analyses, including gender-based studies, exploration of local cultures, and cross-cultural representations. The diverse contexts reflected in these articles provide a robust foundation for understanding how visuals in foreign language textbooks shape cultural perceptions at both local and global levels. Moreover, the titles of the articles in Table 1 also highlight the role of textbooks as learning media that teach language and shape broader cultural understanding.

B. Types of Cultural Stereotypes in Textbook Visuals

From the analysis of 24 reviewed articles, various patterns of cultural stereotypes were identified in the visuals of textbooks. The most dominant pattern is the depiction of target cultures, particularly Anglo-Saxon, as the central focus in English language textbooks. Articles such as Gheisari and Akbari (2022), Teo and Zhu (2018), Weninger and Kiss (2013), Sattarpour et al. (2024), and Su (2014) demonstrate how textbook visuals often feature Anglo-Saxon cultural symbols, such as iconic landmarks (e.g., Big Ben, the Statue of Liberty), Western lifestyles, and the values of the target culture. These representations reinforce the perception of Anglo-Saxon culture as a global standard, while local or cross-cultural representations are often overlooked.

Additionally, the exoticization of local cultures is another frequently observed pattern. Articles such as Choi and Lee (2024), Dinh and Sharifian (2017), Larionova et al. (2021), Lee (2018), and Xiong and Peng (2021) reveal how local cultures are represented in an essentialist manner through static traditional symbols, such as the Tet festival in Vietnam or pre-Columbian artifacts in Latin America. These representations tend to portray local cultures as exotic or distant from modernity, failing to acknowledge contemporary dynamics or the internal diversity of these cultures.

Gender stereotypes are also a prominent issue in textbook visuals, as highlighted by Koster and Litosseliti (2021), Muassomah et al. (2023), Rajabi et al. (2024), and W. Wang (2014). Women are often depicted in domestic or passive roles, while men are shown in dominant and professional roles. This pattern reinforces gender bias and reflects an imbalance that can influence students' perceptions of gender roles in society. Moreover, cultural homogenization is a significant issue, as noted in articles by Motschenbacher (2019) and Rueda García and Atienza Cerezo (2020). Textbook visuals often portray non-native speakers as static users of the language or as migrants, ignoring the social and cultural diversity among them.

Another emerging pattern is the limited representation of local cultures in English textbooks. Articles such as Isnaini et al. (2019) and Novita et al. (2020) reveal that local cultures are often represented narrowly, for instance, through traditional clothing or specific customs, without a deeper exploration of the diversity within these cultures.

These patterns highlight representational biases reinforcing certain cultural stereotypes while neglecting global and local cultural diversity. This finding aligns with previous studies such as Su (2014), who also identified a dominance of Anglo-Saxon cultures in textbooks used in Asia, and Gheisari and Akbari (2022), who reported a similar marginalization of local cultures in Iranian textbooks. However, the current study further extends these insights by systematically comparing multiple contexts, confirming that stereotypical visual representation is indeed a widespread issue across diverse geographical regions and languages. In contrast to earlier studies which largely focused on single cultural contexts (e.g., Dinh & Sharifian, 2017; Choi & Lee, 2024), this analysis underscores a broader pattern, reinforcing the urgent call from scholars such as Lu et al. (2022) and Isnaini et al. (2019) for more inclusive, dynamic, and culturally authentic visuals in foreign language textbooks.

C. How Visuals Reinforce or Challenge Stereotypes

From the analysis of the reviewed articles, findings indicate that visuals in textbooks more frequently reinforce rather than challenge cultural stereotypes. Many articles reveal that visuals in textbooks tend to present static, homogeneous,

and biased representations, thereby perpetuating existing stereotypes. For example, articles such as Gheisari and Akbari (2022), Weninger and Kiss (2013), and Su (2014) illustrate how Anglo-Saxon cultures are often depicted as the global standard through visuals emphasizing symbols of Western cultural dominance, such as iconic landmarks or typical Anglo-Saxon lifestyles. These representations overlook global cultural diversity and reinforce the perception that target cultures are superior to others.

In addition, visuals often reinforce local cultural stereotypes as essentialist and exotic. Articles such as Choi and Lee (2024) and Feres (2009) demonstrate how local cultures are frequently represented through rigid traditional symbols, such as the Tet festival in Vietnam or pre-Columbian artifacts in Latin America, without reflecting the dynamics of modernity or the internal diversity of these cultures. Such representations create a distance between students and the studied culture, framing it as something foreign or different without fostering deeper cross-cultural reflection.

Gender stereotypes are also reinforced through biased visuals, as highlighted in articles such as Rajabi et al. (2024) and Koster and Litosseliti (2021). Women are often portrayed in domestic or passive roles, while men dominate public or professional roles. This pattern not only disregards gender equality but also reinforces traditional norms that limit the social roles of both genders in students' perspectives. Additionally, the homogenization of non-native cultures, as noted by Motschenbacher (2019) and Rueda García and Atienza Cerezo (2020), portrays non-native speakers as passive and static, neglecting their diversity and active roles in global communication.

However, despite visuals more frequently reinforcing stereotypes, some articles highlight efforts to challenge cultural stereotypes. Articles such as Wang and Hemchua (2022) and Isnaini et al. (2019) reveal that visuals that inclusively integrate local cultures can provide opportunities for students to understand cultural diversity. Textbooks with balanced cross-cultural visuals can also encourage students' critical reflection on local and global cultures. Nevertheless, efforts to challenge stereotypes remain relatively limited compared to representations that reinforce them.

These findings indicate that visuals in textbooks are more likely to reinforce cultural stereotypes than challenge them, consistent with previous studies such as Weninger and Kiss (2013) and Su (2014), which similarly concluded that textbook visuals predominantly perpetuate cultural biases rather than promoting inclusivity. However, the present study also confirms the observations of Wang and Hemchua (2022) and Isnaini et al. (2019), who found that some textbooks successfully challenge stereotypes through balanced and diverse visuals. Thus, while reinforcing stereotypes remains prevalent, the limited but promising attempts identified in this analysis underline an emerging awareness and shift toward inclusive representations. These insights extend the existing literature by emphasizing the critical need, advocated by researchers such as Lu et al. (2022) and Rajabi et al. (2024), for textbook designers to consciously integrate visuals that authentically reflect cultural diversity and support intercultural competence.

D. Pedagogical Implications of Visual Representations

The analysis of articles reveals that cultural stereotypes represented in textbook visuals significantly impact cross-cultural learning. These stereotypes often limit students' understanding of cultural diversity at local and global levels. For instance, the dominance of target cultures, such as Anglo-Saxon cultures, as highlighted in articles by Gheisari and Akbari (2022), Teo and Zhu (2018), and Su (2014), reinforces the perception that certain cultures are superior or represent a global standard. This can hinder students from developing more inclusive and critical cross-cultural perspectives. When visuals homogenously depict the target culture without considering its diversity, students lose the opportunity to grasp the complexities of global cultures.

Moreover, as discussed in articles by Choi and Lee (2024) and Feres (2009), limited or essentialist representations of local cultures create an emotional distance between students and the studied culture. Visuals that portray local cultures as static or exotic lead students to perceive these cultures as foreign rather than relevant globally. As a result, cross-cultural learning becomes less effective, as students are not allowed to build meaningful connections between their own culture and others.

Gender stereotypes also have significant pedagogical implications, as highlighted in articles by Rajabi et al. (2024) and Wang (2014). Visuals depicting women in passive or domestic roles while portraying men in dominant roles not only reinforce gender bias but also limit students' understanding of gender equality across cultures. This perpetuates restrictive social norms instead of encouraging students to explore more diverse and inclusive gender roles.

However, several articles demonstrate the potential of visual representations to support cross-cultural learning if designed inclusively and equitably. This aligns with previous research by Isnaini et al. (2019) and Wang and Hemchua (2022), which also emphasized that inclusive and diverse visual representations significantly enhance students' appreciation of local and global cultures. Moreover, similar findings were reported by McConachy (2018), who argued that inclusive textbook visuals facilitate deeper cultural empathy and critical intercultural reflection among students. Unlike studies that predominantly highlight stereotypical or biased visuals (e.g., Gheisari & Akbari, 2022; Su, 2014), the current analysis underscores the importance and positive impact of adopting visual inclusivity. These comparisons highlight how intentional visual design can effectively support cross-cultural competencies, extending previous literature by providing stronger empirical support for inclusive visual practices in foreign language education.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. First, textbooks should be designed with more inclusive and dynamic visual representations that authentically reflect cultural diversity. The dominance of target cultures should be minimized by providing more space for local and non-dominant cultures. Second, visuals should be designed to encourage critical reflection, inviting students to compare their own culture with others and making cross-

cultural learning more interactive and meaningful. Third, gender representation in visuals should be carefully considered to ensure that gender roles depicted reflect equality and do not reinforce biased social norms.

By adopting these measures, textbooks can become practical pedagogical tools for fostering inclusive and critical cross-cultural understanding among students.

E. Theoretical and Practical Implications in Language Education

These findings have significant theoretical implications, particularly in studies on cultural representation and critical discourse analysis. Visual representations in textbooks reflect certain cultures and serve as tools for reproducing cultural and social hierarchies. In the context of target culture dominance, for instance, the findings support Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which posits that visuals often act as a medium for reproducing the power of particular cultures, creating hegemonic narratives that reinforce the superiority of Anglo-Saxon cultures. Furthermore, this analysis aligns with Fairclough's critical discourse approach, highlighting how educational media, such as textbooks, shape students' worldviews. The exoticization of local cultures and gender bias in visuals illustrate that textbooks are often not neutral; instead, they are influenced by underlying social and cultural ideologies.

Practically, these findings provide important guidance for designing more inclusive and effective textbooks, which are textbooks that accurately represent diverse cultural groups and perspectives (inclusive), and successfully foster students' intercultural competence and critical cultural awareness (effective), thus supporting deeper and more meaningful cross-cultural learning. The dominance of target cultures should be minimized by giving more significant space to dynamic and non-static local cultures. Visual representations should be designed to encourage students' critical reflection, enabling them to view cultural similarities and differences more equitably. For example, visuals could be designed to depict target cultures' internal diversity while offering insights into the contemporary dynamics of local cultures. Additionally, gender bias in visuals should be addressed by presenting equal and diverse gender roles, allowing students to explore a range of social roles beyond traditional stereotypes.

As a concrete step, textbooks should utilize visuals as pedagogical tools to foster more critical cross-cultural understanding. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) theory of multimodality, visuals in textbooks are powerful communicative modes that convey complex cultural meanings beyond mere linguistic content. Well-designed visuals, therefore, not only enhance language teaching but also build students' awareness of global social, cultural, and gender diversity, as emphasized by Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence model. Thus, textbooks informed by these theories can serve as educational tools for both linguistic knowledge transfer and cultivating inclusive, critical cultural understanding.

V. CONCLUSION

This systematic review identifies and analyses cultural stereotypes represented in the visual elements of foreign language textbooks. The findings reveal that cultural stereotypes are often reinforced rather than challenged, with visuals predominantly dominated by target cultures, particularly Anglo-Saxon. Local cultures are frequently depicted in static and exotic ways, failing to reflect their contemporary dynamics or internal diversity adequately. Additionally, widespread gender biases are observed, with women commonly portrayed in passive or domestic roles and men depicted in dominant or professional positions. Such representations carry significant pedagogical implications, as they restrict students' understanding of cultural diversity and reinforce stereotypes, potentially hindering the development of cross-cultural competence.

Despite these challenges, some textbooks demonstrate positive potential for promoting cultural inclusivity through more diverse and balanced visual representations. This review highlights several critical gaps, including limited exploration of teachers' and students' perceptions of visual content, insufficient representation of internal diversity within cultures, and a lack of research on visuals in digital and interactive textbooks.

However, this study has some limitations. Due to its focus on published academic articles, relevant studies in other forms, such as unpublished theses or educational reports, might have been overlooked. Additionally, the analysis was constrained by the geographical scope and languages covered in the available literature.

The significance of this study lies in its systematic and comparative approach, providing empirical evidence of prevalent biases and their educational impacts across different cultural and linguistic contexts. These findings underscore the urgency for educators and textbook developers to create visually inclusive, dynamic, and culturally responsive educational materials. Practically, this review calls for critical reflection on textbook content design, advocating for visuals that authentically represent cultural diversity, encourage cross-cultural empathy, and actively support intercultural learning. Further research addressing the identified gaps can significantly enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of language education resources.

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