

Politics of Representation in Indonesian Textbooks: The Impacts of Educational Narrative Reforms on the Formation of National Identity in Post-Reform Era

Achmad Fawaid^{1*}, Miftahul Huda², Hasan bin Jali³

¹ Department of Indonesian Linguistics, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur, Indonesia

² School of Linguistics and Literature, University of Antwerp, Belgium

³ Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology (MIIT), University of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: achmad.fawaid.linguistik@upnjatim.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received : 19-10-2025

Revised : 09-01-2026

Accepted : 13-01-2026

Online : 25-01-2026

Keyword:

Curriculum Reform;

National Identity;

Politics of

Representation;

Textbook;

Post-reform Era.



While national identity preservation has long occupied Indonesia's academic and political agenda, existing studies have inadequately explored the representational politics of post-Reform textbook narratives and their concrete implications for national identity formation. One of the key strategies for achieving this goal has been the reform of educational narratives within school textbooks. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the revised textbooks of the Merdeka Curriculum influence the formation of national identity in post-Reform Indonesia. The research employed a mixed-method design combining a questionnaire survey of 80 teachers and parents from Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Probolinggo with a comparative discourse analysis of three major subjects—*Bahasa Indonesia*, *Pendidikan Pancasila*, and *Sejarah Indonesia*. The analysis focused on textual structure, thematic orientation, and ideological content, comparing new textbooks (2021–2023) with those used under the 2013 Curriculum. Supplementary data were drawn from official publications, media reports, and interviews with textbook authors and curriculum experts. The empirical findings confirm that textbook reform under the Merdeka Belajar policy has significantly reshaped ideological and cultural narratives. The new materials strengthen national consciousness by emphasizing Pancasila values, cultural heritage, and civic participation. Texts include a broader representation of regional heroes, gender equality, and environmental ethics, while literary works and project-based tasks foster emotional attachment to the homeland. Survey results show that 67 % of respondents perceive increased student pride in national culture and 59 % note improvement in civic responsibility and legal literacy. Educational reform in Indonesia thus functions not only as pedagogical modernization but also as an ideological rearticulation of nationhood. Textbook revision has become a principal mechanism through which the state reconfigures the politics of representation, balancing pluralism and cohesion, tradition and modernity, local wisdom and global citizenship. The outcomes demonstrate that integrating cultural narratives and civic values into learning materials is vital for cultivating a cohesive yet democratic Indonesian identity in the twenty-first century.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Education systems play a pivotal role in shaping national identity by laying ethnocultural foundations and cultivating collective worldviews. In post-1998 Reformasi Indonesia, accelerating globalization and international mobility have intensified public and policy concerns over the potential dilution of “Indonesianness,” particularly among younger generations (Theo & Leung, 2025). UNESCO-linked estimates indicate that Indonesian outbound students reached approximately 62,800 in 2022—an increase of about 29% since 2017—underscoring the urgency of articulating national identity alongside global engagement (Suyato et al., 2025; Walker, 2025).

In response, the state has reasserted schooling as a strategic arena for identity formation, institutionalized through the establishment of the Badan Pembinaan Ideologi Pancasila (BPIP) under Presidential Regulation No. 7/2018 and reinforced by the Merdeka Belajar reform launched in 2019–2020 (Fauziah et al., 2023; Permatasari et al., 2025). These initiatives reposition curriculum, assessment, and textbooks as key instruments for embedding Pancasila values, civic responsibility, and national belonging across core subjects such as Bahasa Indonesia, Sejarah Indonesia, and Pendidikan Pancasila (Rosidin et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2020).

While prior studies and policy analyses have examined curriculum reform, character education, and learner-centered pedagogy under Merdeka Belajar (Manggalasari et al., 2025; Mayana & Santika, 2023), limited attention has been paid to how textbook narratives themselves operate as sites of ideological production and political representation. Official curriculum documents under Kurikulum Merdeka emphasize revised learning outcomes, reduced content density, and project-based learning to enable deeper, Pancasila-oriented character education (Amini et al., 2023; Wiyono et al., 2025). However, how these reforms reconfigure the narrative architecture of textbooks and normalize particular constructions of national identity remains underexplored.

Accordingly, this study examines the ideologization of school education in Indonesia by analyzing how post-Reformasi textbook reforms shape the formation and consolidation of national identity. Its novelty lies in an integrative analytical framework that combines curriculum policy analysis with close reading of textbook narratives to reveal how national identity is ideologically encoded and institutionalized, offering both analytical insight into identity as a barometer of social stability and practical implications for balancing pluralism and cohesion in a democratic, multiethnic state.

B. METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine the ideologization of school education in Indonesia, positioning textbooks as the primary unit of analysis within broader processes of state regulation of values and national identity formation. Grounded in the methodological assumptions of (Al-Buraiki et al., 2025) that surveys and interpretive analyses are reliable instruments for generating valid sociocultural data, the research integrated questionnaire-based perception analysis with discourse-oriented textual examination. The analytical focus encompassed how educational narratives in Indonesian Language, Pancasila Education, and Indonesian History textbooks function as mechanisms through which the state standardizes, disciplines, and regulates collective memory and the symbolic boundaries of “Indonesianness” (Saefudin & Musadad, 2023; Sihombing & Nguyen, 2025), particularly in the context of the Independent Learning reform movement (2019–2024) and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Dellarosa, 2021; Fawaid, Fawaid, et al., 2024; Haris, 2020).

Data were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data consisted of questionnaire responses from 80 participants—40 junior and senior high school teachers and

40 parents—from public and private schools in Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Probolinggo. The questionnaire, administered in Bahasa Indonesia via Google Forms between March and May 2024, comprised 15 closed and open-ended items addressing nationalism and Pancasila values, cultural and ethnic diversity, and civic responsibility and environmental awareness (Fàbregues et al., 2023). Participation was facilitated through teacher associations and parent networks coordinated by district Education and Culture Offices, with ethical procedures aligned with the Ministry of Education and Culture's Ethical Research Guidelines (2021). Secondary data included printed and digital materials issued by Kemdikdasmen, BPIP, and major Indonesian publishers (Erlangga, Yudhistira, Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan). Comparative and discourse-historical analyses were applied to selected textbooks—Indonesian Language (Grade IX, Kurikulum Merdeka 2022), Pancasila Education (Grade XI, Kurikulum Merdeka 2023), and Indonesian History (Grade X, Kurikulum 2013 Revised 2018)—to identify ideological markers of unity, faith, and diversity within post-Reform sociopolitical contexts.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Politics of Educational Reform in Indonesia

Education in Indonesia has long been positioned as a strategic arena for sustaining national identity and moral order. Within this framework, schooling does not merely transmit knowledge but also articulates ideals of the “good citizen” and the “good society” grounded in Pancasila (Ketut Sudarsana et al., 2020). Textbooks in Indonesian History, Pancasila Education, and Indonesian Language function as key ideological instruments that shape collective memory and moral imagination (Fawaid & Huda, 2024a, 2024b; Firmansyah et al., 2024; Kartiko et al., 2025). This educational model, oriented toward maintaining unity and dominant cultural values, remains distinctive in both local and international perspectives (Hermanto, 2020; Purwaningsih & Ridha, 2024; Ratri et al., 2025; Riani et al., 2025), even as decentralisation after 1998 reconfigured curricular governance (Puspitasari et al., 2021; Sulistiyo et al., 2020).

Moral and civic formation is further reinforced through cultural heritage, local wisdom, and narrative traditions embedded in textbooks, which cultivate harmony, respect, and collective responsibility (Madung & Mere, 2021; Al-Ma'ruf et al., 2024; Al Farisi et al., 2024). Although post-Reform curricula increasingly adopt democratic and multicultural language, moral and religious narratives continue to regulate diversity within a coherent ideological framework (Van Thang et al., 2024; Bjork, 2004; Hildebrandt-Wypych & Wiseman, 2021). Empirical findings show that recent textbook reforms intensify representations of nationalism, civic literacy, inclusivity, and local histories (Fawaid, Udasmoro, et al., 2023; Fawaid, Fawaid, et al., 2024; Kartiko et al., 2025). Yet how Pancasila-based philosophies are narratively constructed and internalized by students remains insufficiently examined (Redjeki et al., 2025; Astuti et al., 2024).

Politics of Indonesian Textbook Reform

Throughout Indonesia's modern history, education has functioned as a central instrument of national survival and social stability. The ideological role of schooling—once dominated by the New Order's indoctrinative model through Penataran P4—has been formally redefined since Reformasi 1998 under the discourses of democratization and human rights. Nevertheless, the state continues to position the classroom as the primary arena for cultivating national unity, civic loyalty, and moral character. The Independent Learning policy launched in 2021 explicitly advances “education that faces modernization, globalization, and the future” (*pendidikan yang berpihak pada kemerdekaan berpikir dan masa depan bangsa*), responding to modernization and globalization while reaffirming national identity. This agenda materialized in the systematic revision of standardized national textbooks (2021–2023) for Indonesian Language, Pancasila Education, and Indonesian History, produced by the Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan

Kemdikdasmen and distributed nationwide (Fawaid, Abdullah, et al., 2023; Fawaid & Malika, 2025).

According to the official Catalogue of Textbooks for Elementary and Secondary Education 2023, these editions constitute the authorized corpus for schools adopting the Merdeka Curriculum, replacing the decentralized multi-publisher model of the 2013 Curriculum. In policy discourse, these reforms operationalize the “soft power of national culture,” a notion reiterated by the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPIP) and scholarly commentaries that frame textbooks as vehicles for cultivating Pancasila spirit and collective memory (Arifin et al., 2024; Wedhatami et al., 2024; Xiao & Shi, 2023). The dominant narrative emphasizes unity in diversity, linking moral-civic values with historical continuity (Abdulkarim et al., 2020; Dahliyana et al., 2021). Indonesian Language Grade IX (2022) features national heroes, customary imagery, and local civic movements as expressions of Pancasila, while Pancasila Education Grade XI (2023) promotes project-based integration of national principles, local customs, and sustainable ethics, aligned with the Profile of Pancasila Students.

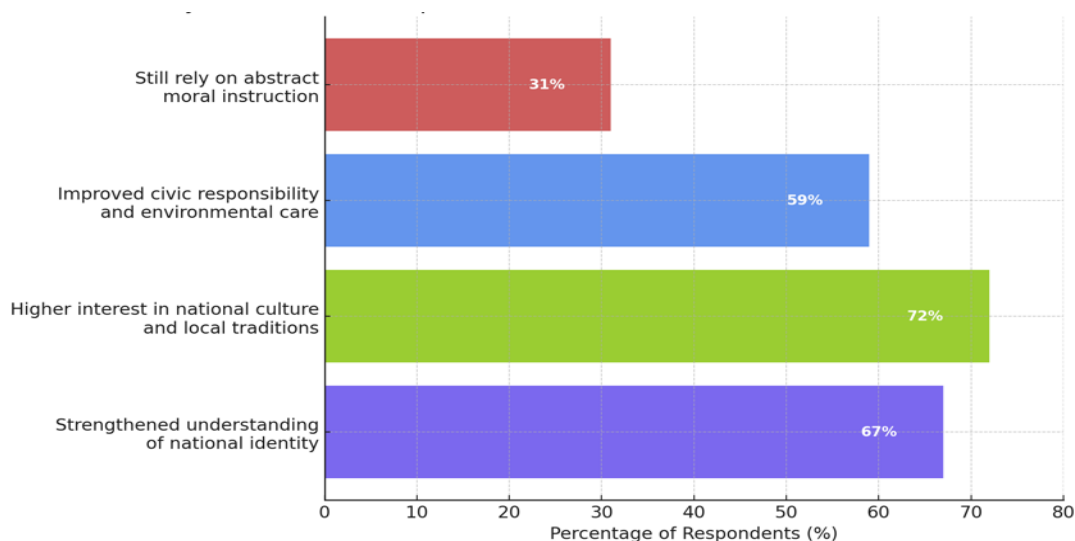


Figure 2. Results of a survey among 80 teachers and parents in Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Probolinggo regarding the perceived impacts of new Indonesian textbooks on national identity, cultural interest, civic responsibility, and critical engagement.

Survey data from 80 teachers and parents in Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Probolinggo corroborate these findings. A total of 67% perceived strengthened national identity, 72% observed increased cultural interest, and 59% reported improved civic and environmental responsibility. Yet 31% noted continued reliance on abstract moral instruction over critical reflection. Linguistically, Indonesian Language textbooks intensify inclusive pronouns (*kita*, *bangsa Indonesia*, “we, Indonesian”) and evaluative adjectives (*beradab*, *toleran*, *berbudi pekerti*, “civilized, tolerant, virtuous”), while diversifying genres to include poetry, folklore, and digital narratives that cultivate *cinta tanah air* (sense of national belonging) (Dellarosa, 2021; Sadiyah et al., 2024) (Fawaid, Handayani, et al., 2024). Pancasila Education textbooks integrate ideological, legal, and moral content spirally across grades, balancing politics, ethics, law, and intercultural relations. Overall, textbook reform under the Independent Curriculum reflects a shift from ideological indoctrination toward participatory civic formation, though sustained teacher development and periodic evaluation remain crucial to strengthening a cohesive yet plural national identity.

Politics of National Identity Formation

Collective memory constitutes a core foundation of Indonesian national identity, as shared narratives of struggle often bind communities more powerfully than memories of success (Ladegaard, 2025). This dynamic is clearly reflected in the Indonesian History for Senior High School Grade X (2022) textbook, which substantially expands coverage of the National Revolution and the 1965 political transition, reframing them as moral lessons in resilience, unity, and renewal. Compared with the 2013 edition, these sections have doubled in textual volume and now incorporate primary sources such as Sukarno's *Lahirnya Pancasila* speech and eyewitness accounts from student movements. Such revisions demonstrate how history education functions as a medium for sustaining collective struggle narratives and reinforcing moral cohesion among post-Reform generations.

Parallel shifts are evident in the Indonesian Language for Junior High School Grade IX (2022) textbooks, which significantly increase the proportion of literary and reflective texts designed to foster emotional attachment to the homeland and social empathy. Canonical works by Chairil Anwar, W.S. Rendra, and Toeti Heraty, alongside contemporary youth literature, now constitute approximately 40% of the reading corpus, up from 22% in 2013. Editorial rationales explicitly link this expansion to strengthening literacy, emotional intelligence, and moral reasoning in alignment with the Profile of Pancasila Student. Prose selections such as Ahmad Tohari's *Pohon Kehidupan* (Tree of Life) and Andrea Hirata's *Sang Pemimpi* (A Dreamer), as well as allegorical narratives like Bung Karno, Guru Bangsa (Bung Karno, Teacher of Nation) and *Matahari untuk Negeri* (Sun for Nation), blend linguistic instruction with ethical reflection, embedding civic virtue within themes of perseverance, humility, and social responsibility. These narratives operationalize Pancasila principles—particularly *kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab* and *gotong royong*—as lived moral practices rather than abstract doctrine.

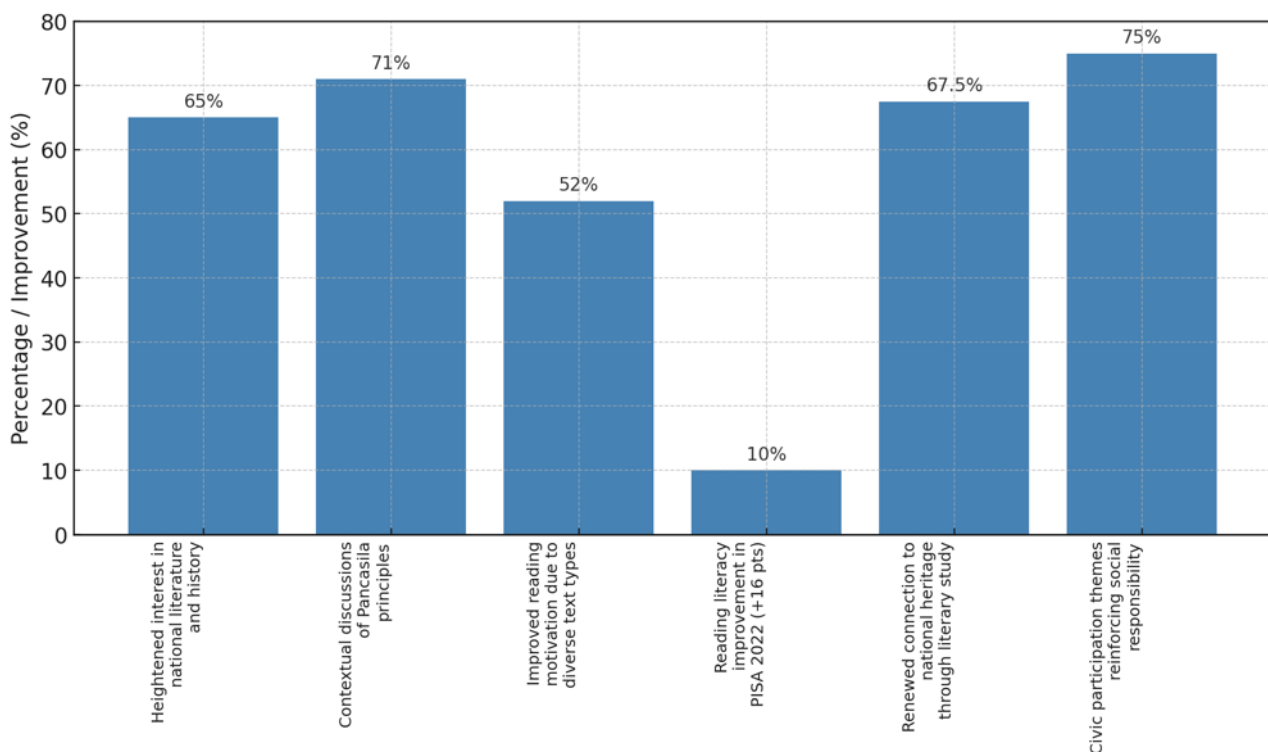


Figure 3. Survey-based indicators of national identity reinforcement through educational narratives. This result illustrates respondents' perceptions of improved civic engagement, cultural appreciation, and literacy outcomes resulting from recent textbook reforms and Pancasila-based curriculum integration ($n = 80$).

Survey data confirm the ideological effects of these narrative strategies. Among respondents, 65% reported increased student interest in national literature and history, while 71% observed that classroom discussions of Pancasila had become more contextual and less doctrinaire. Furthermore, 52% of teachers noted improved reading motivation, attributed to diversified text genres aligned with the curriculum's three-in-one reading strategy (intensive reading, skimming, and independent reading). These findings correspond with the 2023 National Literacy Report and Indonesia's PISA 2022 results, which show a 16-point improvement in reading literacy since 2018 and performance 10% above the OECD mean in interpretive and moral reasoning tasks (Maheshwari & Koria, 2025; Xu & Lu, 2024).

Within Indonesian educational philosophy, linguistic refinement and familiarity with national literary heritage signify cultured citizenship. The Pancasila Education textbooks reinforce this principle by linking language use to moral order through lessons on digital ethics, respect for elders, ecological stewardship, and *unggah-ungguh*, a culturally embedded ethic of mutual respect. Survey results further indicate strengthened affective and participatory identity: 67.5% of respondents reported renewed pride in national heritage, and 75% observed enhanced civic awareness through Pancasila Education materials.

Conceptually, these outcomes reflect the dual nature of Indonesian national identity as both political-legal and cultural-historical. Under Kurikulum Merdeka, textbook reform mediates this duality by integrating democratic participation with cultural rootedness, signaling an evolving politics of representation that balances ideological continuity with interpretive autonomy in national identity formation.

Ideological Implications of Textbook Reform

Through educational reforms, the Indonesian state has sought to realize its strategic objectives of strengthening the cultural and political foundations of national identity (Xiaomei & Shimin, 2014). The survey and textual analysis presented here demonstrate that the revised textbooks—especially under the Independent Curriculum—play an active role in fostering students' appreciation of national culture, history, and civic ethics, as well as their understanding of law and citizenship (Fawaid, Kamal, et al., 2024). The reform of educational narratives in Indonesian Language, Pancasila Education, and Indonesian History has thus functioned not merely as a pedagogical modernization, but as an ideological rearticulation of nationhood in post-Reform Indonesia.



Source: *Indonesian Language for Junior High School* (2022, p. 12)



Source: *Indonesian Language for Junior High School* (2022, p. 105)



Source: *Indonesian Language for Junior High School* (2022, p. 129)

Figure 4. Samples of images in *Bahasa Indonesia* textbook representing cultural identity (Independent Curriculum, 2022).

The visual comparison between the Indonesian Language textbooks for Grade IX under the Independent Curriculum (2022) and Curriculum 2013 (2018) reveals a clear ideological and cultural shift in representation. The first four images—from the 2022 edition—emphasize cultural identity and national diversity, featuring scenes of local traditions, regional art, and maritime heritage that reflect Indonesia's multicultural reality (Figure 4). In contrast, the latter

three images from the 2018 edition show simpler, more generic illustrations, many of which are sourced from foreign websites such as wikihow or weebly, with minimal depiction of local culture (Figure 5). This contrast exemplifies how textbook reform under Independent Curriculum aligns with the politics of ideology in Indonesian education: a move from decontextualized moral instruction toward culturally grounded civic representation. By embedding indigenous imagery and national symbolism, the newer curriculum reasserts education as a site for cultivating civic pride, cultural literacy, and ideological coherence within the framework of Pancasila-based nationhood (Atikurrahman, 2025; Fawaid & Handayani, 2025).



Severn Suzuki
Sumber: <https://dominic.nu>

Source: *Indonesian Language for Junior High School* (2018, p. 46)



sumber: <http://www.howtoblogabook.com>

Source: *Indonesian Language for Junior High School* (2018, p. 148)



Sumber: <http://www.wikihow.com>

Source: *Indonesian Language for Junior High School* (2018, p. 96)

Figure 5. Sample of images in *Indonesian Language* textbook representing globalized imagery (Kurikulum 2013, 2018)

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study highlights the critical role of educational narratives in shaping Indonesia's evolving national identity. The findings underscore that the integration of cultural heritage, civic education, and Pancasila-based ethics within textbooks not only preserves unity in diversity but also cultivates democratic awareness and global citizenship. The research contributes to the understanding of how textbook reforms operate as instruments of ideological negotiation—balancing local wisdom with modernization, tradition with innovation, and state authority with civic participation. By situating textbook reform within the politics of representation, this study enriches the discourse on education as both a mirror and a maker of collective identity, offering valuable insights into how pedagogical policy becomes a tool for cultural and political cohesion in plural societies.

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations. The scope of data, primarily derived from selected curricular materials (Indonesian Language, Indonesian History, and Pancasila Education) and limited teacher responses (only 80 informants), may not fully capture the regional variations and diverse interpretations of textbook narratives across Indonesia. Future research should expand the corpus by incorporating comparative analyses between regions, religious contexts, and curriculum levels to understand how representation operates across educational hierarchies. Longitudinal studies could also explore the long-term effects of textbook reforms on students' civic identity and ideological orientation. Further interdisciplinary collaboration between linguistics, education, and cultural policy studies is recommended to deepen the examination of how educational narratives continuously reshape the Indonesian nation's identity in the post-reform era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author sincerely acknowledges the support of the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM) of UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur, as well as the collaboration of teachers and students from SMP Negeri and Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Probolinggo, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta, whose participation greatly contributed to the completion of this study.

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