

Teaching Culture through Textbooks: A Systematic Content Analysis of Primary School Materials

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the textbook curriculum of formal education designed for primary school children in Bangladesh. It focuses on the development, preservation, and transmission of cultural identity, cultural diversity, and social cohesion through educational materials, including textbooks. The study seeks to explore how cultural discourses, ideologies, and inclusive ideals are constructed and communicated to young learners. We employed a descriptive textual analysis method to examine the content in two official textbooks: Amar Bangla Boi (My Bengali Book) and Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS), designed for Classes IV and V. Our analysis assessed the suitability of these textbooks in preserving and transmitting cultural identity and social cohesion, as well as their alignment with the values and ethics of the diverse cultures represented. Through our textual analysis, we found that both textbooks adopt a structured and multifaceted approach to cultural education. Rather than treating culture as a standalone subject, they integrate cultural elements throughout their content, employing a range of pedagogical strategies. The curriculum weaves together literature, history, geography, and social studies to cultivate cultural awareness, ultimately nurturing informed citizens with a strong sense of identity and an appreciation for Bangladesh's rich and diverse heritage

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Introduction

Cultural identity is a significant component of a society's structure and can be defined as the overall way of life of that society. Culture includes every moment of an individual's life as a member of society. However, defining culture is challenging because it encompasses meanings.

Anthropologists have proposed and debated 160 distinct definitions of culture (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Education plays an influential role in equipping individuals to adapt to changing cultural patterns. At the same time, culture paves the way for education to include cultural values in learners' lives. Culture and education are interrelated in various ways. Students at school learn about cultural heritage, national identity, and the values and ethics of their communities, which are essential to know as members of a society. An educated population can create cultural artefacts that convey a country's beliefs and ideas, fostering a generation that understands and values its culture. This is a long-term process that requires not only national policies and programs but also multilayered implementation and monitoring.

Cultural transmission through education is a dynamic process through which societies pass on their values, beliefs, norms, and heritage to new generations (Durkheim, 1956). Education serves as the primary institutional mechanism for this transfer, integrating both tangible and intangible cultural elements into structured learning experiences (Cole, 1996). Formal schooling exposes young learners to their community's history, language, and traditions, providing a sense of identity and belonging (Banks & Banks, 2019). According to UNESCO (2021), linking culture with education not only preserves heritage but also nurtures empathy, critical thinking, and civic responsibility, supporting sustainable social development.

This research paper presents findings from a study examining the role of formal education in the development, preservation, and transmission of cultural identity, cultural diversity, and social cohesion through primary school textbooks in Bangladesh. While cultural identity encompasses a broad spectrum of phenomena, this study primarily examines the inclusiveness and cohesiveness of diverse cultural identities within the formal education system. The narratives surrounding the historical formation of Bangladesh as a secular nation-state, along with the country's evolution characterized by cultural diversity and tolerance, are crucial for fostering an individual's national identity. These elements significantly contribute to national development and play a vital role in shaping identity. Young learners engage with these themes through their textbooks. Using an exploratory qualitative research approach, this study analysed textbooks to examine how cultural diversity and heritage are represented and how the cultural narratives within these resources guide young learners in preserving and transmitting their cultural and national identity as citizens of Bangladesh.

Rationale

This research critically examined textbook content in relation to the government's vision for the 21st century, which emphasises fostering a culturally aware young generation through revised curricula. The study aimed to explore the construction and communication of cultural discourses, ideologies, and inclusive ideals to learners. From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the necessity for ongoing curriculum revisions that prioritize cultural inclusivity and representation. Policymakers should consider integrating diverse cultural narratives that reflect Bangladesh's multifaceted identity, thereby reinforcing a sense of belonging among all students. In terms of research, this study opens avenues for further exploration into how educational materials influence students' perceptions of cultural identity and cohesion. Future research could investigate the long-term impacts of these curricula on societal attitudes and intercultural interactions within and beyond the classroom. In practice, educators are encouraged to use these insights to facilitate discussions on identity and cultural awareness in their classrooms. By promoting critical engagement with the curriculum, teachers can help learners develop a nuanced understanding of their own cultural identities and the diverse society in which they live. Overall, this research underscores the importance of aligning educational practices with an inclusive vision, fostering a cohesive national identity while respecting the rich tapestry of individual cultures within Bangladesh.

The Education System as Context: Policy Evolution and Textbook Roles

This section reviews the context of Bangladesh's education system, focusing on policy evolution, textbook roles, and administration.

This section reviews the literature on Bangladesh's education system, focusing on policy evolution, textbook roles, and administration. From colonial roots to NEP (2010), progress in access and gender equity is noted despite implementation gaps. Textbooks serve as tools for knowledge and identity formation, now reflecting cultural diversity. Administration remains centralized, with implementation delegated to local levels.

Historical Development of National Education Policy

Modern education in Bangladesh has its roots in British colonial rule and was later shaped by political developments during the Pakistan era and in the post-independence period.

Several commissions and policies during British rule helped shape future educational discourse. These include the Charles Grant Education Commission (1792), Lord Macaulay's Committee (1835), and the Sadler Commission (1919), among others, which collectively introduced secular education and formal institutions but also contributed to the erosion of indigenous education.

After the 1947 partition, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) faced language-based and ideological impositions. The Pakistani government prioritized Urdu over Bengali and emphasized Islamic education. Education commissions during this period—such as those led by Maulana Akram Khan (1949) and Ataur Rahman Khan (1957)—proposed reforms, including free primary education and the inclusion of technical education.

Following independence, the government sought to rebuild the education system aligned with national aspirations. The Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission (1972) introduced a secular, science-oriented education model, but political turmoil halted its implementation. Subsequent governments alternated between secular and religious influences in education. The 2010 National Education Policy stands out for its comprehensive vision, rooted in the spirit of the liberation war, that promotes scientific learning and inclusive development.

Textbooks: A Medium of Preserving and Transmitting Cultural Identity

This section does not present a conventional literature review, as no prior study has systematically examined the role of textbooks in Bangladesh's cultural representation; rather, it offers a scholarly background by drawing on diverse academic arguments that illuminate how textbooks function as vehicles of cultural transmission, identity construction, and nation-building.

According to Kaviraj (2010), textbooks operate within a "conceptual grid" (p 85) that determines "what can be said inside a discourse and what cannot" (*Ibid.*, 86). This review examines how textbooks contribute to preserving and transmitting cultural identity, with a particular focus on the Bangladesh context.

The relationships among education, cultural identity, and learning are deeply intertwined. As Altugan (2015) observed, researchers and educational theorists have sought to understand the relationship between learning and the social world. In multicultural societies, textbooks become sites where dominant narratives about the nation, its history, and its relationship with 'others' are constructed and reinforced.

Cultural identity encompasses the complex amalgamation of an individual's experiences, talents, skills, beliefs, values, and knowledge systems. It represents "who they are, what their status is in their family, school, work, environment and country and, beyond that, in the world" (Altugan, 2015, p. 1160). The relationship between cultural identity and learning operates at multiple levels. At the cognitive level, cultural background shapes how information is processed, interpreted, and integrated into existing knowledge structures. At the social level, it influences patterns of interaction, communication styles, and participation in classroom activities (Dörnyei, 1994).

Educational systems, particularly through textbooks, can either validate or marginalize students' cultural identities. When textbooks acknowledge and

incorporate diverse cultural perspectives, they create inclusive learning environments that enhance students' motivation and engagement. Conversely, when textbooks privilege dominant cultural narratives while excluding or misrepresenting minority perspectives, they can alienate students from marginalized communities and impede their learning (Fuchs et al., 2020).

Bangladesh Context

In Bangladesh, textbooks have played a crucial role in constructing and reinforcing national identity since the country's independence in 1971. The process of textbook development in Bangladesh reflects broader political and ideological shifts in the country, with successive governments influencing content to align with their particular vision of national identity. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh, established in 1983, is responsible for curriculum development and textbook production for primary and secondary education (Li et al., 2019).

As Islam, Hussain, and Orthy (2020) noted, all school textbooks in Bangladesh designed for use in primary and secondary public schools, except those used by schools that subscribe to international examination systems and curriculum, are published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's journey from colonial rule to independence has significantly shaped the narratives in its school textbooks. These materials have served as key instruments in constructing a national identity rooted in a struggle for cultural and political autonomy. Ghosh (2014) outlines three phases in textbook evolution: the 1973 editions emphasized oppression under Pakistani rule and glorified the Liberation War; the 1984 versions, produced during military rule, adjusted the tone while retaining nationalist themes; and the 1996 editions highlighted Bengal's unique cultural and geographical heritage (Qazi & Shah, 2019). This progression reflects shifting political ideologies, as successive governments revised historical narratives to align with their visions of national identity. Textbooks became tools for legitimizing political authority and cultivating a shared sense of belonging. As Ghosh (2014) noted, these texts exemplify how intersubjective identities are constructed through education, revealing the interplay between politics, pedagogy, and cultural memory in shaping collective consciousness.

Authors such as Islam, Hussain, and Orthy (2020) argue that accepting cultural diversity is a prerequisite for maintaining peace and ensuring peaceful coexistence among communities living in multi-ethnic/religious societies.

In the Bangladesh context, textbooks increasingly acknowledge the country's cultural diversity while emphasizing shared national values. As Islam, Hussain, and Orthy (2020) note, "There has been plenty of textbook content described and

touched on the aspects of cultural diversity in various ways to enlighten students about pluralism and values of social cohesion". The BGS textbook, in particular, addresses Bangladesh's cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, acknowledging the presence of various communities while emphasizing national unity. It presents diversity as a source of cultural richness rather than division, promoting values of tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

However, Islam, Hussain, and Orthy (2020) also identify areas for improvement, suggesting that "a more delicate and detailed presentation of some issues could help students' socialization process and of learning about respecting and accepting the diversity of all kinds better" (p. 59). They recommend incorporating "more visual representations of diverse cultures and practices, and more practical tasks on valuing rights, dignity, tolerance, and empathy" to further enhance students' understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Textbooks serve as powerful vehicles for preserving and transmitting cultural identity, particularly in contexts where national identity construction is a priority. In Bangladesh, textbooks like "*Amar Bangla Boi*" and "Bangladesh and Global Studies" play crucial roles in fostering a sense of national identity rooted in language, culture, and shared historical experiences while increasingly acknowledging the country's cultural diversity.

The analysis of these textbooks reveals how educational materials contribute to the construction of collective identities and the promotion of cultural values. It also highlights the complex interplay between education, cultural identity, and nation-building processes. As Bangladesh continues to evolve as a pluralistic society, textbooks will likely play an increasingly important role in fostering an inclusive national identity that embraces cultural diversity while promoting social cohesion. Future developments in textbook content and pedagogy will need to balance the construction of national identity with the recognition and validation of diverse cultural perspectives (Qazi & Shah, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

This research is grounded in Andrew Littlejohn's (2011) theoretical framework, which provides a comprehensive approach to analysing textbook content. Although Parlevliet (2012) and Nawani (2010) contend that no single framework can fully encompass the intricacies of textbook analysis, Littlejohn's model stands out for its flexibility and multi-dimensional perspective. Originally designed for English-language textbooks, this framework has proven valuable for our study, enabling a nuanced exploration of the content and activities in the selected texts. Littlejohn's framework comprises three analytical layers, each designed to provide insights into distinct aspects of the textbook. The first layer involves a thorough description of the text, examining its themes, representations of cultural contexts, and the techniques employed in its construction. This foundational analysis sets the stage for understanding the text's intent and

context. Moving to the second layer, we analyse the learner activities presented in the textbooks. This step focuses on what is asked of students—whether it be tasks like “read and answer” or “write from experience” (Littlejohn, 2011, p. 189). By scrutinizing these activities, we assess how they promote student engagement with the content, ultimately revealing the extent of their interaction and understanding. The third layer connects the text and the activities, identifying the overarching objectives of the material, its focal points, and the roles assigned to both teachers and students. This conclusive step is essential for gauging students' cognitive engagement and interest in the material. By utilizing Littlejohn's framework, this study systematically delineates the criteria for examining how cultural elements are selected, organized, and presented within the textbook materials. This structured approach not only deepens our understanding of the textbooks but also provides critical insights into their potential impact on learners' cultural awareness and engagement.

Methodology

Since the objective of this research is to examine the content of the official textbook, this study employs a descriptive textual analysis method to map the textual representation in two official textbooks: *Amar Bangla Boi* (My Bengali Book) and Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS), designed for Classes IV and V. These textbooks were analysed to assess the appropriateness of their content in preserving and transmitting cultural identity and social cohesion, and how well these contents align with the values and ethics of the diverse cultures.

The rationale behind choosing the books from Classes IV and V is that students at this level are in their crucial developmental stage. They start thinking more, understanding things better, and learning more complicated stuff. These books were selected because these books lay the foundation for understanding the cultural roots. At this age, children are like little sponges, absorbing a wide range of information about their culture.

Findings from Textual/Content Analysis

The textual analysis of four primary school textbooks from Bangladesh, *Amar Bangla Boi* and Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS) for Classes IV and V, reveals a structured and multifaceted approach to cultural education. Rather than treating culture as a separate subject, these textbooks integrate cultural elements throughout their content, using various pedagogical approaches.

The textbooks integrate literature, history, geography, and social studies to foster cultural awareness. Textbooks demonstrate progression, with Class V building upon the content of Class IV. *Amar Bangla Boi* uses literary texts to convey values and heritage, while BGS offers factual insights into cultural practices, history, and diversity. Together, they provide a cohesive cultural education,

aiming to nurture informed citizens with a strong sense of identity and appreciation for Bangladesh's diverse heritage

In Class IV *Amar Bangla Boi*, cultural content spans stories, poems, dramas, biographies, essays, and travelogues. National identity is conveyed through texts like "*Banglar Khoka*" on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, "*Birsreshthoder Birgatha*" on liberation war heroes, and "*Muktir Chora*," which uses metaphors of "sonar Bangla" to evoke patriotism and the natural beauty of Bangladesh.

Cultural heritage in the Class IV *Bangladesh and Global Studies* textbook is highlighted through descriptions of sites such as the Sundarbans—home to the Royal Bengal Tiger—and Paharpur Buddhist Bihar, renowned for its architecture and terracotta art. Material culture includes palanquins, pottery, and folk arts alongside mobile phones. Although Chapter 16 focuses on "Our Culture," values such as cooperation, respect, and equality are present throughout. Chapter 3 documents ethnic groups like the Chakma, Marma, Saontal, and Monipuri, covering their traditions, dress, festivals, and languages. Material culture is presented through discussions of clothing traditions (sarees, salwar-kameez, lungi) and food practices, represented by the expression "*mache vate Bangali*" (fish and rice make a Bengali). The textbook documents special-occasion foods across different religious communities and describes cultural ceremonies and musical traditions. The conclusion notes concern about cultural preservation in the face of modern media influence.

Class V *Amar Bangla Boi* builds on earlier themes with more advanced content, explicitly recognizing language as "the principal element of a culture" and using a Whole Language Approach to promote Bengali language and literature. Stories like "Hati ar Sialer Golpo" highlight moral values, while biographies of figures like Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Vasani and Shaheed Titumir promote civic responsibility. The Liberation War is portrayed through essays and poems that highlight sacrifice, while cultural heritage is showcased in descriptions of the Sundarbans, Wari-Bateshwar, and traditional crafts.

The Class V *Bangladesh and Global Studies* textbook integrate "values, knowledge, and skills" across 12 chapters on society, behaviour, history, and culture. Chapters 7–10 focus on values such as human rights, gender equality, civic responsibility, and democracy, and include practical tasks such as role-playing. Chapter 3 explores six archaeological sites, detailing locations, history, and artefacts. Chapter 11 covers five ethnic groups—Garo, Khasi, Mro, Tripura, and Oraon—highlighting their traditions and practices while prompting students to reflect on the preservation of their heritage.

Across all four textbooks, cultural education blends visuals and activities to balance national identity with diversity, presenting culture as inherited and actively evolving. The content analysis of these four textbooks follows below.

Class IV *Amar Bangla Boi*

"*Amar Bangla Boi*" for Class IV presents a thoughtfully curated collection of Bengali literature designed to foster cultural awareness, patriotism, and moral values among young learners. This comprehensive textbook encompasses a range of genres, including stories, poems, dramas, biographical essays, and travelogues, offering students a window into Bangladesh's rich cultural heritage.

The content is organized to introduce students to significant historical figures, such as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Hazrat Umar (R.), national heroes of the liberation war, and notable cultural landmarks, including Sonargaon and Paharpur Buddhist Bihar. Through carefully selected texts, students explore traditional elements of Bengali culture, from the now-obsolete palanquins to the vibrant folk art preserved in museums.

The textbook effectively balances educational objectives with cultural enrichment, highlighting Bangladesh's linguistic identity, diverse professional communities, and natural resources. By presenting these materials in accessible yet meaningful ways, "*Amar Bangla Boi*" serves as a vital foundation for young students to understand and appreciate their national identity, while developing important values that will guide their growth as responsible citizens of Bangladesh.

Class IV- Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS)

Bangladesh and Global Studies for Class IV offer a well-rounded educational framework that balances local cultural understanding with global awareness. The textbook includes sixteen chapters covering topics such as environmental issues, social cooperation, geography, history, and cultural heritage.

The curriculum promotes holistic development by fostering an appreciation of national identity and cultural diversity. While Chapter 16 explicitly discusses "Our Culture" through themes like language, dress, food, customs, and music, cultural references are integrated throughout the book. Students learn values such as cooperation, tolerance, and respect for diversity, with an emphasis on gender equality and the inclusion of children with disabilities.

A unique strength of the textbook is its focus on ethnic diversity. One chapter is dedicated to communities such as the Chakma, Marma, Saontal, and Monipuri, highlighting their clothing, housing, festivals, and traditions, and encouraging respect for Bangladesh's cultural richness.

Beyond culture, the book covers topics such as citizen rights, disaster management, population, and the Liberation War of 1971. This integrated approach connects cultural heritage with national history and civic duty, helping students grow into informed citizens who respect their roots while engaging with the wider world.

Class IV Bangladesh and Global Studies have 16 chapters; Chapter 16 titled “Our Culture” (pp. 80-85), explicitly covers language, dress, food, customs, and music, while other chapters include implicit cultural elements. However, apart from this chapter, cultural aspects were represented implicitly throughout the other chapters.

Class V *Amar Bangla Boi*

Amar Bangla Boi for Class V is more than a language textbook—it helps students connect with their cultural roots. It combines stories, poems, plays, biographies, essays, and travelogues to teach language through meaningful content. Folk tales promote values like humility and friendship, while stories of national heroes like Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and Shaheed Titumir inspire patriotism and courage. Poems on freedom celebrate Bangladesh’s identity and struggles.

The textbook explores natural and historical treasures such as the Sundarbans and Wari-Boteshwar, and highlights traditional crafts like pottery, terracotta, and bamboo work. These lessons help students engage with their heritage in creative ways.

Bangladesh’s diverse culture—across ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines—is presented as a source of unity. Through vibrant visuals and interactive activities, the book fosters pride in national identity while encouraging students to preserve their cultural traditions and values for the future.

Class V - Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS)

The Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS) textbook for Class V offers a well-rounded blend of knowledge, values, and skills to help students understand their role in both national and global contexts. Divided into twelve chapters, it explores themes such as national history, human rights, cultural heritage, and civic responsibilities. The book balances lessons on Bangladesh’s liberation war and colonial past with democratic values, gender equality, and respect for diversity. Notably, it highlights cultural education through chapters on archaeological sites such as Mahasthangarh and Wari-Bateshwar, and introduces the traditions of ethnic groups, including the Garo, Khasi, Mro, Tripura, and Oraon. With colourful illustrations and interactive activities, the textbook makes learning engaging and accessible. More than just delivering factual content, it promotes social values and active citizenship by encouraging empathy and critical thinking. This holistic approach aims to develop responsible, culturally aware, and empathetic learners prepared to contribute meaningfully to society.

The following tables provide a comparative overview of the textbooks' contents, highlighting topics related to cultural themes that contribute to the development of a sense of national cultural identity.

On the next page, we present two comparative tables: Table 1, which compares the Amar Bangla Boi for Classes IV and V, and Table 2, which compares the *Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS)* book for Classes IV and V.

— Table 1: A Comparative Table of the *Amar Bangla Boi* of Classes IV and V

Theme	Class IV Textbook	Class V Textbook	Analytical Insight
National Identity	<i>Banglar Khoka, Birsreshthoder Birgatha, Muktir Chora</i>	<i>Birer rokte shadhin ai des, Soronio jara chirodin, Februaryr gan, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Vasani, Shaheed Titumir</i>	Representation of heroic figures, nationalist responsibility
Cultural Heritage	<i>Ghure Asi Sonargaon, Paharpur</i>	<i>Sundarbans, Matir niche j sohor</i>	Deepens heritage awareness with archaeological detail
Material Culture	<i>Palkir Gaan, Mobile Phone, fNemontonno</i>	<i>Sokher Mritshilpo, Sundorboner Prani</i>	Highlights traditional and modern material
Values & Norms	<i>Birpurush, Khalifa Hazrat Umar (R.), Ma,</i>	<i>Bidae Hajj, Kanchonmala ar Kakonmala</i>	Values broaden from family/community to civic/global
Cultural and ethnic Diversity	<i>Bawalider Golpo, Palkir Gaan, Bangladesher Prokriti</i>	<i>Ai Desh Ai Manush, Swadesh</i>	Expands ethnic representation, stressing preservation
Cultural Identity	<i>Moder Bangla Vasa, Lipir Golpo, ajla Didi,</i>	<i>Songkolpo</i>	Highlights linguistic and cultural unity

Table 2: A Comparative Table of the *BGS* book of Classes IV and V

Theme	Class IV Textbook	Class V Textbook	Analytical Insight
National Identity	<i>Our Liberation War, Our History</i>	<i>Our Liberation War</i>	Representing the nationalist spirit
Cultural Heritage	-----	<i>Historical Places and Artefacts in Bangladesh</i>	Deepens heritage awareness with archaeological detail

Theme	Class IV Textbook	Class V Textbook	Analytical Insight
Material Culture	-----	Historical Places and Artefacts in Bangladesh	Introduce historical sites and cultural artefacts
Values & Norms	Developing Our Locality, Tolerance, The Rights of the Citizen	Our Duties and Responsibilities, Democratic Human Rights Attitude,	Underscore civic values, mentioning the role of family and society
Ethnic Diversity	Ethnic Groups of Bangladesh	Gender Equality, Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh	Expands ethnic representation, stressing preservation
Cultural Identity	Social and National Assets, Our Culture, Our History	Population, Our Liberation War	Emphasize the social and cultural bond

Discussion

In Bangladesh's socio-economic context, which has recently entered the middle-income category, it is still facing a shortage of educational resources. Against the backdrop of such scarcity, textbooks have become the most important source of knowledge for young learners. Hence, an attempt to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of textbooks is an important and time-worthy step. In this research, we have studied two school textbooks, namely Bangladesh and Global Studies, and *Amar Bangla Boi*, scheduled for classes IV (2012, reprint 2021) and V (2012, reprint 2021). The main objective of this research was to determine whether culture-related texts were present in the selected books. Another objective was to examine how textbooks play a role in the process of cultural transmission to primary school-going learners.

We have organized the culture-oriented contents given in the textbooks into four categories that are:

Representation of cultural identity·

Representation of cultural heritage and diversity ·

Representing underlying values and norms

Representation of cultural material and perspective

Representation of cultural identity

Amar Bangla boi and Bangladesh and Global Studies highlight Bangladeshi identity; hence, they convey varied messages that represent Bangladeshi nationalism alongside the cultural unity of Bengali heritage. They offer the deep connection between the Bengali language, identity, and culture. In *Moder Bangla Vasa* (pp. 53–55), Sufia Kamal emphasises the beauty of Bangla as the foundation of Bengali identity, recalling the 1952 Language Movement where students sacrificed their lives to establish Bangla as the state language. The text underscores that the mother tongue is central to self-expression and collective identity.

While presenting a homogenous Bengali identity, the book also acknowledges Bangladesh's ethnic, professional, and gender diversity. Communities such as the Sundarbans 'Bawali and Mowal are depicted through stories and images, showing their close relationship with nature. Annada Shankar Ray's humorous poem *Nemontonno* reflects Bengali hospitality and social customs around food. Cultural practices like *mukhevatt*, *gaye holud*, and birthdays are vividly illustrated, alongside musical traditions including folk genres (jari, shari, bhatiali, gambhira), baul songs, and stage performances like *jatra pala* and *kirtan*.

The text warns against the erosion of local culture by modern media, urging preservation of traditions. The essay "*Ai Desh Ai Manush*" portrays Bangladesh as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual country, celebrating harmony among diverse communities and festivals. Similarly, Ahsan Habib's poem "*Swadesh*" celebrates the scenic beauty and cultural diversity. Overall, the textbook blends literature, visuals, and activities to enrich young learners' understanding of Bangladesh's heritage.

Representation of cultural heritage and diversity

The textbooks emphasize introducing Bangladesh's cultural heritage. For instance, the books represented six major archaeological sites of Bangladesh, including Mahasthangarh, Wari-Bateshwar, and Paharpur. These architectural sites are presented in detail, including their locations, historical backgrounds, recovered artefacts, and current conditions. Colourful images of monuments, terracotta plaques, and sculptures enrich the narrative, helping students visualize Bangladesh's ancient civilizations and connect with their cultural heritage. Here, the aim is to inspire reflection on the country's artistic and historical richness. To encourage active engagement, the activities section poses critical questions, such as whether archaeological sites should be preserved even at high restoration costs, and prompts students to advocate for site visits—for instance, by writing to the head teacher to request a visit to Sonargaon. These tasks foster awareness of heritage preservation and cultivate a sense of responsibility toward cultural conservation.

The books also introduce Bangladesh's ethnic diversity, highlighting five groups: Garo, Khasi, Mro, Tripura, and Oraon. Each section explores distinctive cultural traits, including language, food, clothing, housing, festivals, religion, and social structures, with a map showing their geographical distribution. Activities encourage students to reflect on these traditions, such as listing features of Garo culture or summarizing Khasi lifestyle. Visuals and illustrations enhance engagement, while contextual images—like a Khasi public meeting against logging—extend learning beyond culture to broader social issues. Questions linked to such images, for example, on the environmental impacts of logging, stimulate creative thinking and problem-solving, encouraging students to connect cultural knowledge with contemporary challenges.

Together, these chapters aim to broaden students' understanding of Bangladesh's heritage and diversity. By combining archaeological exploration with ethnographic study, the textbook nurtures cultural appreciation, critical reflection, and civic responsibility, ensuring learners see themselves as custodians of both history and social harmony.

Representing underlying values and norms

The textbooks collectively emphasize values, norms, and civic responsibility, weaving together lessons on human rights, gender equality, patriotism, empathy, and justice. They aim to shape

students into responsible citizens with strong moral consciousness and cultural identity.

For instance, *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)* emphasizes children's rights to education, security, and protection from violence, and highlights the inclusion of autistic children. Activities encourage students to resist passivity in the face of rights violations, asking them to role-play deprivation of rights or consider how to respond to mistreatment. Gender equality is addressed through Begum Rokeya's contributions, International Women's Day, and discussions of the exploitation of domestic helpers, urging empathy and support for disadvantaged groups. The Liberation War narratives broaden historical memory by including women guerrilla fighters, ethnic minorities, and figures such as Selina Hossain and Pritilata Waddedar, thereby promoting inclusivity and gender equity. Civic duties and democratic attitudes emphasize respect, law-abiding behaviour, voting, dialogue, and collective decision-making, guiding students toward cooperative and responsible citizenship.

Stories, essays, and poems in *Amar Bangla Boi* reinforce Bengali values such as patriotism, humility, honesty, generosity, and respect. Tales like *Hati ar Sialer Golpo* warn against arrogance, while *Sikhagurur Morjada* honors teachers' role in nation-building. *Bidayatul Hijjat* imparts lessons on kindness and compassion. Biographies of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Vasani and Shaheed Titumir

highlight patriotic struggles, encouraging reflection on historical legacies. Liberation War essays and poems such as *Birer Rokte Shadhin Ai Desh* and *February Gan* celebrate sacrifice and independence, while the fairy tale *Kanchonmala ar Kakonmala* teaches loyalty and friendship. These texts nurture moral consciousness and civic responsibility rooted in cultural identity.

Cooperation in society is emphasized through respect for elders, care for children, kindness toward neighbours, and gender equality. The inclusion of differently abled children is encouraged through reflective activities. Lessons on honesty, justice, discipline, tolerance, and dignity of work highlight the importance of listening to others, respecting differing opinions, and valuing all forms of labour. These chapters cultivate responsibility and civic awareness, linking personal behaviour to collective well-being.

Complementing this, *Amar Bangla Boi* for Class IV highlights patriotism, justice, and empathy. *Banglar Khoka* portrays Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's compassion, inspiring service to others. *Birsreshthoder Birgatha* recounts the bravery of national heroes, while *Muktir Chora* celebrates Bangladesh's natural and economic richness through metaphor. The essay on Khalifa Hazrat Umar (R.) teaches justice, humility, and empathy, presenting his actions as moral guidance.

Together, these textbooks integrate historical narratives, moral lessons, and civic values, guiding students to develop empathy, resilience, patriotism, and ethical responsibility while fostering inclusive and democratic social attitudes.

Representation of cultural material and perspective

Examining the findings on cultural elements shows that all the reviewed textbooks emphasize introducing traditional cultural products to the young learners. For instance, Palanquins (palkis), once used in weddings and for elite transport, symbolize tradition, though they are no longer in practice. Satyendranath Dutta's poem *Palkir Gaan* introduces this object to younger generations, evoking rural Bengal and the struggles of palki carriers while referencing traditional professions now unfamiliar to students. In contrast, the essay "*Mobile Phone*" reflects modern technological culture, tracing its invention and its indispensable role in daily life.

Cultural preservation is emphasized in *Ghure Asi Sonargaon*, which describes the Folk Art and Craft Museum founded by Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin. Students encounter crafts such as wooden items, earthen pots, bamboo products, ornaments, masks, nakshi kantha, and jamdani saree, reinforcing the value of folk traditions. The "Our Culture" chapter highlights dress and food as material elements: saree and salwar-kameez for women; trousers and lungi for men; pyjama-Panjabi for Muslims; dhuti for Hindus; and diverse attire for children. Food traditions include staples such as fish and rice, festive dishes like polao,

biryani, and khichuri, and sweets linked to religious occasions, showcasing cultural diversity.

Sokher Mritshilpo explores pottery and terracotta art, noting sites such as Mahasthangarh and Paharpur. Bamboo crafts and rural foods like muri and jilapi further illustrate material culture. Textbook images reinforce dominant dress styles, depicting generational and community variations.

Conclusion

The research shows that the textbooks are a conscious compilation designed to uphold Bangladesh's identity as a rich, diverse, and inclusive nation. They organize content by combining traditional cultural practices with modern transformations of everyday life, reflecting both continuity and change in Bangladeshi society. Therefore, in general, textbooks can be argued to take culture as an integral part of their content. The books offer a variety of cultural facets, including tangible and intangible cultures. Tangible cultures are explicit, physically available, easily recognizable, and perceivable. Such material objects, festivals, archaeological sites, places, etc., are tangible cultures. On the contrary, traditional and contemporary practices, customs, and societal values—norms, lifestyles, expressions, literary works, perspectives, etc.—are examples of intangible cultures that cannot be physically observed or touched but can be experienced and transmitted from one generation to the next.

The analysed textbooks incorporate discussions of tangible and intangible cultures, representing them through visual images such as pictures, photographs, maps, and charts. Visualization, along with description, has made the complex text understandable and engaging, making it less strenuous for young learners. Students in classes IV and V are young learners whose cognitive abilities do not allow them to grasp complex jargon. Visualization grabs their attention and keeps them focused and engaged with the reading material.

Selected textbooks offer a multicultural approach to representing Bangladeshi culture and heritage. Broadly, a multicultural approach refers to texts that embrace cultural aspects from diverse ethnic groups, religious communities, and genders. Bangladesh and Global Studies in classes IV and V discuss the cultures of different ethnic groups. Further, in the segment on cultural identity, activities, and material objects, *Amar Bangla Boi* of both classes includes examples based on gender, different religious communities, and different professional activities, such as teacher, farmer, driver, doctor, fisherman, and blacksmith. Such multicultural narratives reveal that the textbooks convey a message about the value of diversity and inclusion, as well as the importance of all professions.

Following the three layers in Littlejohn's framework, we find the activity layer at the end of every chapter. The tasks mentioned in the activity segment aim to stimulate learners' critical thinking, motivate them to visit a heritage site,

enhance their cognitive skills, and foster their interest in broadening their area of study beyond textbooks.

In terms of disseminating knowledge about culture, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of Bangladesh's cultural aspects, regardless of ethnicity, religion, caste, or class. What is missing is a global collection of cultural diversity, although a global political perspective is given by describing international organizations.

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