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Co-Designing English Teaching Materials through Dialogue: Lessons from a Research–Practice Partnership

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Abstract: English language teaching (ELT) materials are not neutral pedagogical tools but cultural and ideological artifacts that shape which forms of knowledge, values, identities, and cultural practices are legitimized in language education. ELT materials research is broadly categorized into studies of content, consumption, and production and argues that more research is needed on researcher–practitioner collaboration in materials writing. Building on this gap, this study examined how English teaching materials were co-designed through sustained dialogue among collaborators in a multilingual Islamic elementary school setting in Maluku, Indonesia. Drawing on frameworks of culturally sustaining pedagogy, social justice perspectives, and community-engaged approaches, we examined an ongoing collaborative project in Maluku, Indonesia, involving an ELT teacher educator, a pre-service English teacher, and an elementary school English teacher. Our data were drawn from online meetings, WhatsApp-mediated interactions, as well as multiple drafts of teaching materials and lesson plans. Through collaborative planning and iterative design, we adapted materials from global ELT textbooks, Indonesian government-sponsored resources, teacher-generated materials, and AI-assisted resources in response to the school's linguistic, cultural, religious, and pedagogical context. We analyzed the data using reflexive thematic analysis. To contextualize our interpretations, we invited the practitioner collaborators to review selected excerpts and preliminary interpretations and provide clarification. Our analysis identified the negotiation of design authority as a cross-cutting process operating across two domains. These domains concerned cultural recontextualization and the balancing of linguistic accessibility, pedagogical purpose, and classroom feasibility. Collaborators negotiated decisions about local, national, global, and Islamic content, while the phase-end materials relied primarily on English and Indonesian and did not explicitly incorporate Sou Puan. The study shows how collaborative materials development can connect research knowledge, classroom experience, and contextual knowledge while also revealing the tensions involved in producing culturally meaningful and practically usable resources.

Keywords: research–practice partnership; ELT materials development; teaching English to young learners; culturally sustaining pedagogy

1. Introduction

In recent years, scholarship has renewed attention to a longstanding concern that English language teaching (ELT) materials are not neutral collections of texts and activities but cultural and ideological artifacts that represent particular understandings of language, identity, knowledge, and legitimate ways of learning (De Costa, 2026; Gray, 2010; Harwood, 2026; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Through decisions about whose variety of English

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is represented, which cultural experiences are included, and what forms of knowledge are excluded, ELT materials can reproduce unequal linguistic and cultural relations and contribute to epistemic injustice (De Costa, 2026; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Because global ELT textbooks, in particular, are designed for diverse international markets, their standardized content may avoid locally specific or potentially controversial topics, and thus limit their responsiveness to learners' immediate cultural, linguistic, and educational environments (Harwood, 2026). Within ELT materials research, recent studies (e.g., Shu et al., 2023; Shu et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024) have further shown that collaborative materials writing can bring together researchers' theoretical knowledge and practitioners' classroom-based expertise, while also supporting professional learning and knowledge exchange. Crucially, these perspectives indicate that understanding ELT materials requires attention not only to their content and classroom use but also to the processes, relationships, and contextual conditions through which they are produced (Harwood, 2026).

Despite this growing scholarly interest, relatively little attention has been paid to how researchers and practitioners collaboratively identify pedagogical problems, negotiate design priorities, develop materials, and revise them through sustained dialogue and feedback (Harwood, 2026; Shu et al., 2024). This process gap is especially consequential in primary English education in Indonesia, where ELT materials development intersects with children's learning needs, multilingual practices, Indigenous knowledge, community priorities, teacher preparation, and national language policy (Paris & Alim, 2017; Zein, 2026). Research–practice partnerships (RPPs) offer a promising response to this instructional reality because they involve sustained, mutually beneficial collaboration in which researchers and practitioners jointly determine research problems, processes, and intended outcomes (Chong et al., 2026). They may also support more equitable knowledge production by recognizing practitioners and community members as knowledge contributors, rather than constructing them merely as participants or implementers (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2026). Nevertheless, accounts of researcher–practitioner collaboration in materials writing remain limited (Harwood, 2026; Shu et al., 2024), with Hiver and Al-Hoorie (2026) identifying the co-design of language materials with Indigenous communities as an area requiring further empirical attention.

To address the aforementioned gap, we examine how an Indonesian ELT teacher educator, a pre-service English teacher, and an elementary-school English teacher collaborated to develop English teaching materials for young learners from local Indigenous communities in Indonesia. By documenting materials development as a collaborative and contextually situated process, we seek to extend research on ELT materials production, and demonstrate how RPPs, as mediated by us, can support culturally sustaining, pedagogically appropriate, and locally accountable resources for young learners. Against this background, our study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) How did members of the co-design team negotiate expertise, authority, and decision-making during the collaborative development of English teaching materials?
(2) How did these negotiations shape the translation of linguistic, cultural, pedagogical, and contextual considerations into materials-design decisions?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Materials Production as a Social and Cultural Practice

ELT materials encompass textbooks, worksheets, digital resources, and classroom activities used to facilitate language learning. It is worth noting that although materials organize language content and activities, they also convey views of language, culture, identity, and legitimate knowledge (Gray, 2010). As observed by Gray, Global ELT coursebooks function as curriculum and cultural artifacts, constructing selective representations of English and its users. Thus, he adds, materials are not neutral but arise from choices with social, cultural, and ideological consequences. Relatedly, decisions about which varieties of English to represent, whose experiences to include, and which cultural practices to omit may influence how learners understand English and their place within language education (Boonsuk et al., 2026). Within the context of Southeast Asia, ELT materials mediate moral and cultural values and require recontextualization to learners' sociocultural settings (Widodo et al., 2018).

More specifically, Harwood (2026) categorizes materials research into content, consumption, and production. Our study focuses on the production aspect of materials research, that is, how materials are shaped, and how design decisions are influenced by cognitive and contextual factors, including institutional policies, publisher requirements, pedagogical beliefs, and team relationships (Harwood, 2026). More than three decades ago, Adaskou et al. (1990) demonstrated that cultural content is selected through design choices and stakeholder consultation. More recent research on global coursebooks, notably, Yıldız & Harwood (2024) revealed that market sensitivities, tight deadlines, publisher control, feedback practices, and restrictions on controversial topics impacted the content and design of such textbooks. Drawing on the findings of these studies, we view materials production as a socially and culturally situated practice, and examine how RPP collaborators' knowledge informed materials design decisions.

2.2. Research–Practice Partnerships (RPPs) and Collaborative Materials Design

According to Chong et al. (2026) (but see also Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2026), RPPs are sustained and mutually beneficial collaborations in which researchers and practitioners work together to investigate problems that are relevant to educational practice. Unlike conventional research relationships, which may position practitioners mainly as participants or implementers, RPPs seek to involve researchers and practitioners as partners whose different forms of expertise contribute to the work (Datnow et al., 2025). As underscored by Sato & Loewen (2022), researchers may bring theoretical and methodological expertise to a collaborative arrangement, whereas practitioners contribute knowledge of learners, classrooms, curricula, and institutional conditions. RPPs therefore emphasize shared problem identification, reciprocal learning, ongoing communication, trust, and collaborative decision-making throughout the research process (Chong et al., 2026; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2026).

In language education, RPPs and related collaborative approaches have been proposed as ways of narrowing the long-standing divide between academic research and classroom practice (De Costa et al., 2022). Materials development, in particular, provides a useful space for such collaboration because it requires theoretical principles to be translated into resources that are relevant and feasible for particular classrooms. Shu et al. (2024), for example, found that collaborative textbook development generated multi-directional knowledge flow and combined researchers' theoretical knowledge with practitioners' judgments about task difficulty, time constraints, and mixed-ability classrooms. Similarly, Xu et al. (2024) examined collaboration among a school teacher, a university researcher, and a professional textbook writer and found that their differing principles, values, and beliefs shaped their design priorities and processes of interaction and negotiation. Their findings suggest that collaborative materials development involves negotiating distinct perspectives on language teaching and materials design. Focusing on the relational dimension of this work, Zhao et al. (2025) examined a textbook-writing community of practice involving four middle school teachers and three university researchers. They found that collaborative relationships and actions reinforced one another through mutual engagement, highlighting the importance of how participants worked together throughout materials development. However, collaboration does not necessarily remove differences in professional status, institutional authority, or responsibility for decision-making. Put simply, the power differential between researchers and practitioners does not magically disappear during the collaboration. For example, Datnow et al. (2025) found that including teachers' voices in RPP meetings did not automatically level the playing field among professionals. Their findings highlight how differences in professional status may shape who speaks, who leads, and whose knowledge influences collaborative decisions.

In our study, we used RPP as a lens for examining relationships and decision-making within materials co-design. Rather than assuming that the partnership was automatically equitable, we examined how RPP collaborators (i.e., us) discussed their roles, contributed different forms of expertise, responded to disagreement, and reached design decisions through sustained dialogue. This perspective allowed us to consider both the possibilities and tensions that emerged when research knowledge, classroom experience, and local cultural knowledge were brought into the same materials-development process.

2.3. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)

Research on CSP (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017) points to a distinction between representing culture in teaching and sustaining students' linguistic and cultural practices through teaching. Foundational CSP scholarship argues that culturally relevant content alone does not ensure that students' linguistic and cultural practices are sustained or that monolingual and monocultural norms are challenged (De Costa et al., 2021). In Indigenous education, culturally sustaining work must also support language and cultural reclamation, confront colonial power relations, and remain accountable to community goals (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Evidence from ELT likewise shows that locally developed materials can strengthen learners' engagement, motivation, and identities when they reflect local linguistic, cultural, and religious experiences (Boonsuk et al., 2026). Together, these studies suggest that cultural representation matters, but its pedagogical value depends on how community knowledge is positioned and used.

Empirical research (e.g., Dunham et al., 2025; Kelly et al., 2021; Michener et al., 2015) has also documented variation in the enactment of CSP across educational settings. For example, Michener et al. (2015) found differences in culturally sustaining practices across two upper-elementary classrooms operating under a monolingual language policy. Reviews of literacy research, however, produced different estimates depending on their analytical scope. Notably, Kelly et al. (2021) found that only five of 56 studies included instruction addressing sociopolitical issues, whereas Dunham et al. (2025), using a more focused and multidimensional definition, identified elements of critical consciousness in 18 of 32 studies. Thus, these findings caution against treating the inclusion of local content alone as evidence of culturally sustaining practice. In our study, we therefore used CSP to examine not only whether local languages and cultural knowledge

appeared in the materials, but also how they shaped learning goals, tasks, representations, and design decisions. The adoption of such a lens also directed our attention to the authority teachers and community members exercised over those representations.

2.4. Social Justice in Language Education

Research on social justice in language education (e.g., Banegas et al., 2026; De Costa et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2026) shows that injustice is reproduced not only through unequal access to English but also through assumptions about whose English, knowledge, and identities are legitimate. De Costa et al. (2021), for example, underscored that Standard English and native-speaker ideologies are intertwined with racial hierarchies that position racialized teachers and learners as linguistically deficient. Crucially, as emphasized by Brown (2023), instructional materials can carry these inequalities. Brown's analysis of 107 ELT materials-evaluation frameworks found limited guidance for identifying social-group bias compared with the attention given to grammar and vocabulary. Materials, he argued, may therefore reproduce a hidden curriculum even when their overt linguistic content appears pedagogically sound. In short, a social justice lens directs attention to representation and the norms and decision-making processes through which learners' languages and experiences are valued (Banegas et al., 2026; Brown, 2023; De Costa et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2026).

Relatedly, empirical research (e.g., Banegas et al., 2026; Ortega, 2026) suggests that justice-oriented language education becomes more meaningful when teachers and learners help shape the curriculum. In an eight-month critical ethnography in Colombia, Ortega (2026) found that a curriculum negotiated with students enabled them to examine violence and community problems while supporting social cohesion and language learning. Similarly, Banegas et al.'s (2026) two-year collaborative action research in Argentinian state secondary schools showed that teachers enacted social justice through engaging in reflexivity, localization, materials adaptation and creation, and capitalizing on the synergy between teachers' and students' agency. These studies move the discussion beyond including social issues in lessons toward examining who can influence pedagogical decisions. In our study, social justice served as a lens for examining whose knowledge was recognized, how authority and resources were negotiated, and whether the co-design process initiated by us enabled teachers and community members to shape materials for their learners.

Drawing on the four bodies of scholarship reviewed above, we use each of them for a different purpose in this study. Materials-production research frames the study by directing attention to how materials emerge through situated processes and decisions. RPP serves as our primary analytical framework for examining how expertise, authority, and knowledge were negotiated among the co-designers and how particular contributions were taken up, modified, or rejected. Meanwhile, culturally sustaining pedagogy and social justice serve as secondary sensitizing concepts that help us interpret the linguistic and cultural consequences of those decisions, particularly which forms of knowledge and language were represented or left out of the completed materials. This hierarchical use of the framework enables us to connect the relational process of co-design with its material outcomes.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

In the present article, we report findings from the first phase of a larger ongoing research project, drawing on data collected from May to August 2026. This phase focused on materials design and ended before classroom implementation. Consequently, accessibility, feasibility, and pedagogical appropriateness refer to the collaborators' design intentions and judgments rather than observed classroom effects. Guided by research–practice partnership (RPP) principles, we adopted a community-engaged qualitative research design centered on collaborative materials development. Through this approach, we sought to bridge the researcher–practitioner divide by recognizing teachers' practical knowledge and aligning research and pedagogical priorities through engaging in sustained dialogue (De Costa et al., 2022). Accordingly, members of the co-design team jointly identified a locally defined pedagogical need and developed contextually relevant materials for teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in a multilingual Indigenous community in Indonesia. This article reports only the materials-design phase of the ongoing project. The completed materials had not been implemented in the classroom during the period examined in this study. Information about the students, curriculum, and classroom conditions was provided by Raka and used to inform design decisions. We did not collect data directly from students, observe classroom implementation, assess students' English proficiency, or evaluate the effects of the materials on learning.

3.2. Context of the Partnership

Our partnership involved two related but distinct forms of participation. The co-design team comprised Hendri, Fariha, and Raka, who participated directly in the routine Zoom meetings and WhatsApp exchanges through which the materials were discussed and revised. Within this arrangement, Hendri (Author 1, teacher educator and researcher), Fariha (pre-service teacher), and Raka (classroom teacher) participated directly in materials co-design. Peter (Author 2, teacher educator and researcher), in turn, contributed at key conceptual and analytical

stages, including the study's framing, methodological discussions, interpretation, and manuscript development. As noted, Hendri is an Indonesian ELT teacher educator and researcher whose work focuses on language teacher education and materials development. Fariha (pseudonym), a pre-service English teacher, contributed perspectives from her teacher education program and emerging experience in lesson planning. Raka (pseudonym), an elementary English teacher with five years of experience, drew on his knowledge of the school, students, and classroom realities to assess what was contextually meaningful and pedagogically feasible. Raka's participation brought a community member's perspective into the co-design process through his knowledge of local language practices and classroom conditions. His contributions are interpreted here as a situated perspective rather than as representative of the Indigenous community as a whole.

The partnership was situated in an elementary school in Maluku, Indonesia (see Figure 1). Maluku, which is located between Sulawesi and Western New Guinea (Papua), is a remote and less developed eastern Indonesian province and belongs to a historical island region known globally as the original "Spice Islands."



Figure 1. Geographical context of the study site in Maluku, Indonesia. Note. Map created by the authors using public-domain data from Natural Earth. The marker indicates the approximate study area rather than the school's precise location.

Raka, who was from the local community and spoke Sou Puan, explained that the language remained an important marker of Indigenous identity and continued to be used in community life. Reflecting this everyday role, Sou Puan was used in everyday communication both outside and inside the classroom. However, its use in classroom conversation did not extend to its adoption as a medium of instruction. In explaining this distinction, Raka explained that he chose not to use Sou Puan for instructional purposes, while Indonesian served as the principal language of formal instruction and English was taught as an additional school language. The school's wider sociolinguistic context was therefore multilingual, although the languages did not have equally visible or institutionally supported roles in the classroom, resulting in a case of unequal and constrained multilingualism (De Costa, 2026). This distinction informed the collaborators' decisions concerning bilingual instruction, cultural representation, and the possible inclusion of Sou Puan in the materials. The school operated within an Islamic educational context, making religious appropriateness an important consideration in decisions concerning topics, images, activities, and classroom interaction. Together, these linguistic, cultural, religious, and pedagogical conditions provided the immediate context in which the materials were selected, adapted, and produced. Both practitioner collaborators provided written informed consent for the use of recorded meetings, WhatsApp exchanges, and co-designed materials as research data and for the publication of excerpts under pseudonyms.

3.3. Instructional Context

The materials were intended for a Grade 4 class of 30 students aged approximately 9-10 years old. According to Raka, English was taught four times per week, with each lesson lasting approximately 90 min. He described the students as having emerging English proficiency, particularly in relation to vocabulary, reading, and speaking. This description was based on his teaching experience rather than a standardized proficiency assessment. The design was also informed by the Phase B English learning outcomes in the Kurikulum Merdeka (the Emancipated Curriculum), particularly English in elementary school (Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment, 2024). These teacher-reported and curriculum-based considerations informed decisions about vocabulary, bilingual support, activity length, and the anticipated demands of the tasks.

3.4. Co-Design Process

The co-design process consisted of six connected activities (see Figure 2). It began with identifying students'

needs and the conditions of Raka's classroom. The collaborators then shared possible resources, including Indonesian government-sponsored materials (e.g., English for Nusantara), teacher-generated resources, and AI-assisted materials (e.g., ChatGPT-generated learning activities). These resources were discussed in relation to language level, cultural relevance, pedagogical purpose, religious appropriateness, and classroom feasibility.

Materials considered potentially useful were adapted and recontextualized rather than adopted without modification. Feedback generally focused on specific features, such as vocabulary, image, classroom instruction, or activity sequence selection. In addition, discussions raised broader questions about whose knowledge was represented, whether an activity reflected students' experiences, and whether it could be implemented with the available resources. Design decisions were therefore developed through dialogue rather than transferred unidirectionally from researchers to practitioners (see Table 1).

The materials presented in the Findings represent the version produced at the end of the design phase. We refer to them as phase-end materials rather than classroom-validated final materials because they had not yet been implemented. Figures 3–5 reproduce excerpts from the phase-end materials, with the original wording retained, including the English-language errors discussed in the Findings. These excerpts document the materials produced during the design phase and should not be understood as proofread resources ready for classroom use. Although the collaborators reviewed content, cultural relevance, task design, and layout during the finalization activity, the project did not include a separate line-by-line English-language proofreading stage or assign one collaborator primary responsibility for language accuracy.

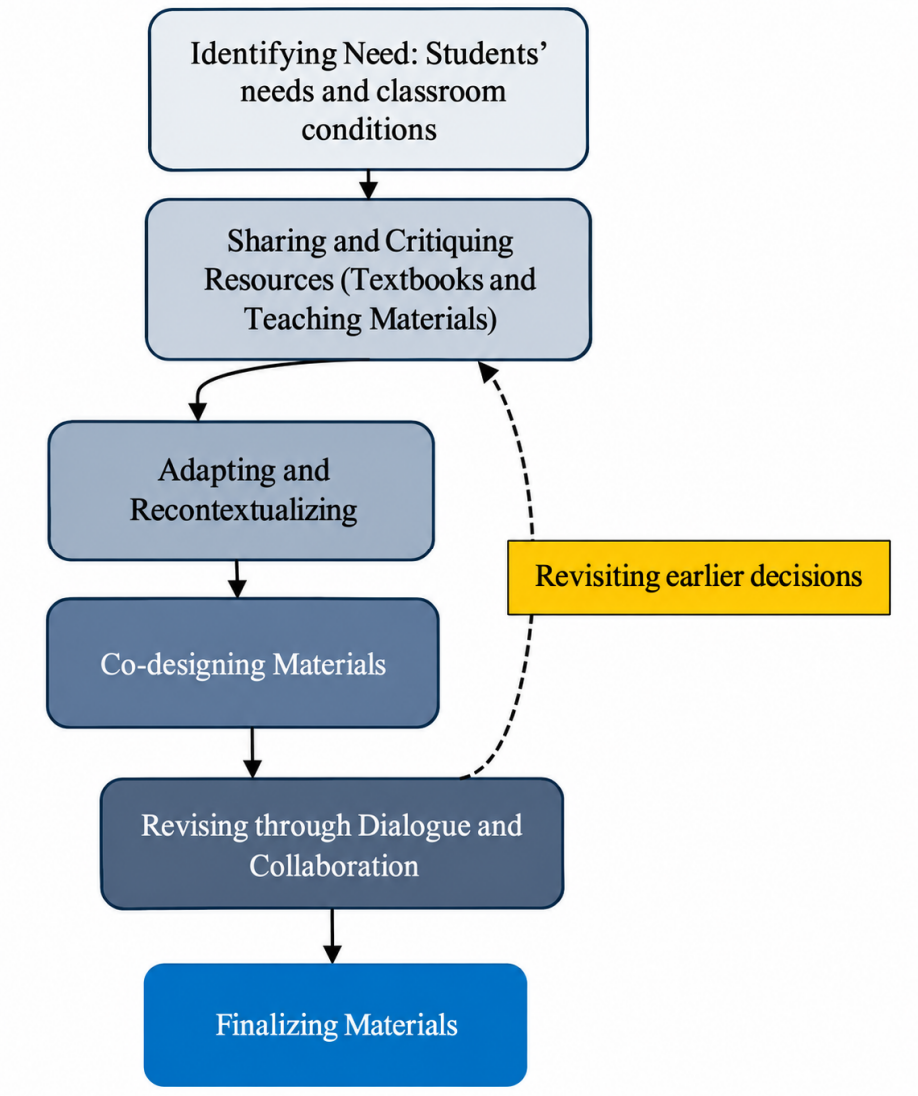


Figure 2. The iterative process of collaborative materials co-design.

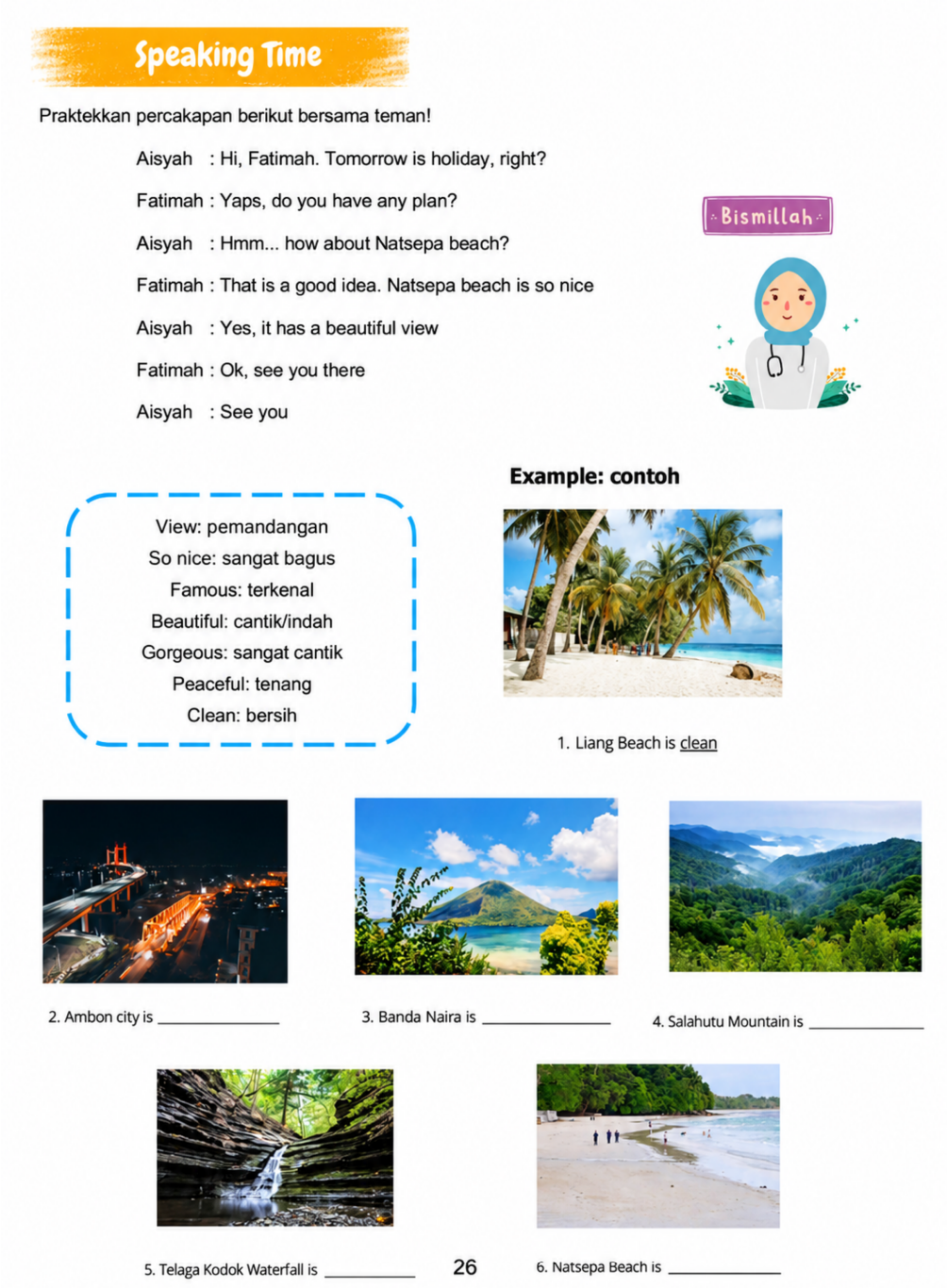


Figure 3. Examples of local content in the co-designed materials.

Table 1. Activities in the co-design process.

Meeting	Purpose	Output
29 May 2026	Identifying students' needs, curriculum requirements, and classroom conditions	Initial design priorities
12 June 2026	Reviewing textbooks, government materials, teacher-generated resources, and AI-assisted resources	Selected resources and adaptation criteria
26 June 2026	Examining language level, cultural relevance, religious appropriateness, and feasibility	Adapted content and activities
3 July 2026	Organizing selected resources into lessons and activities	Draft 1
17 July 2026	Responding to linguistic, cultural, pedagogical, and practical concerns	Drafts 2 and 3
7 August 2026	Reviewing language, organization, images, and activities	Revised Grade 4 materials

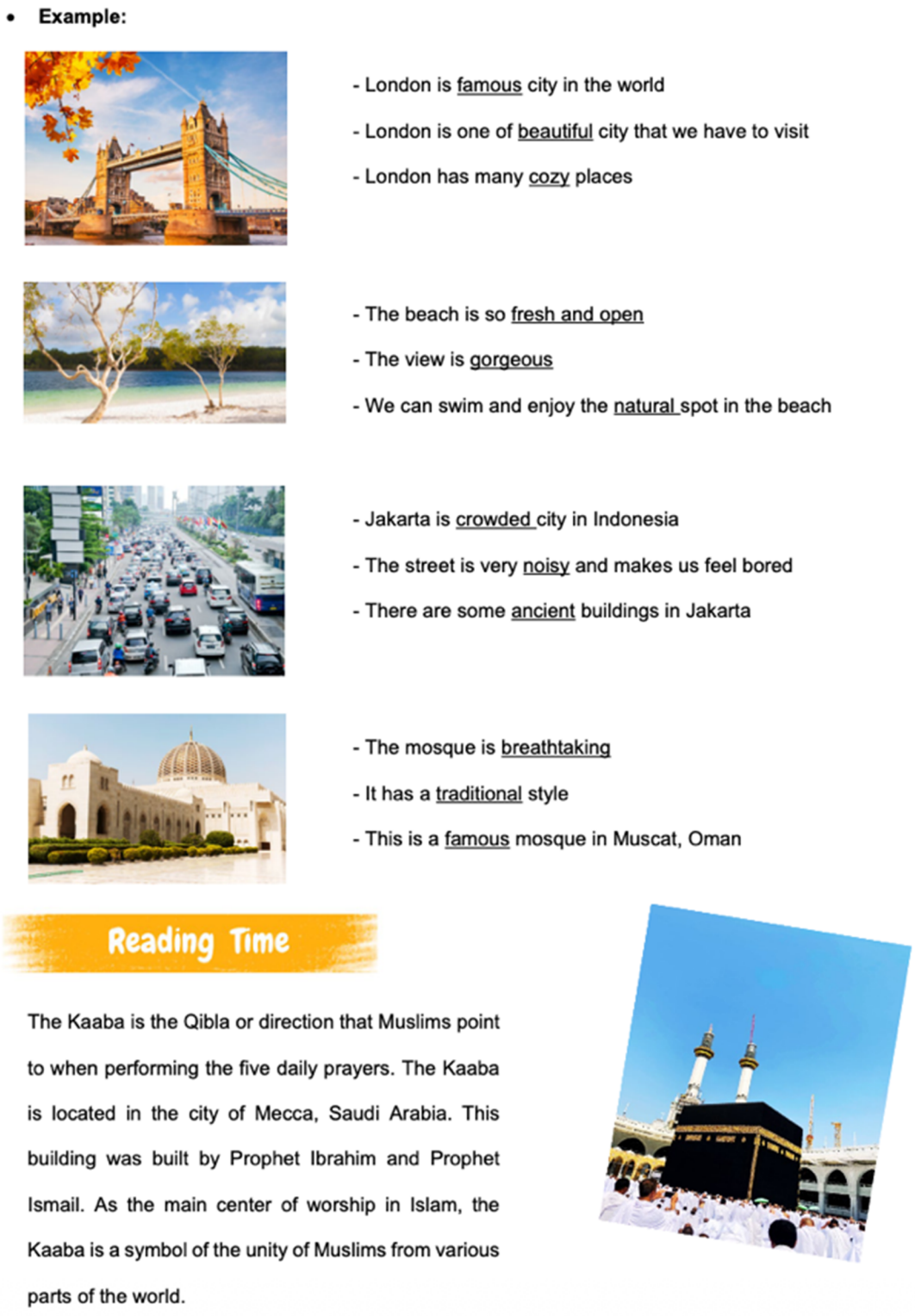
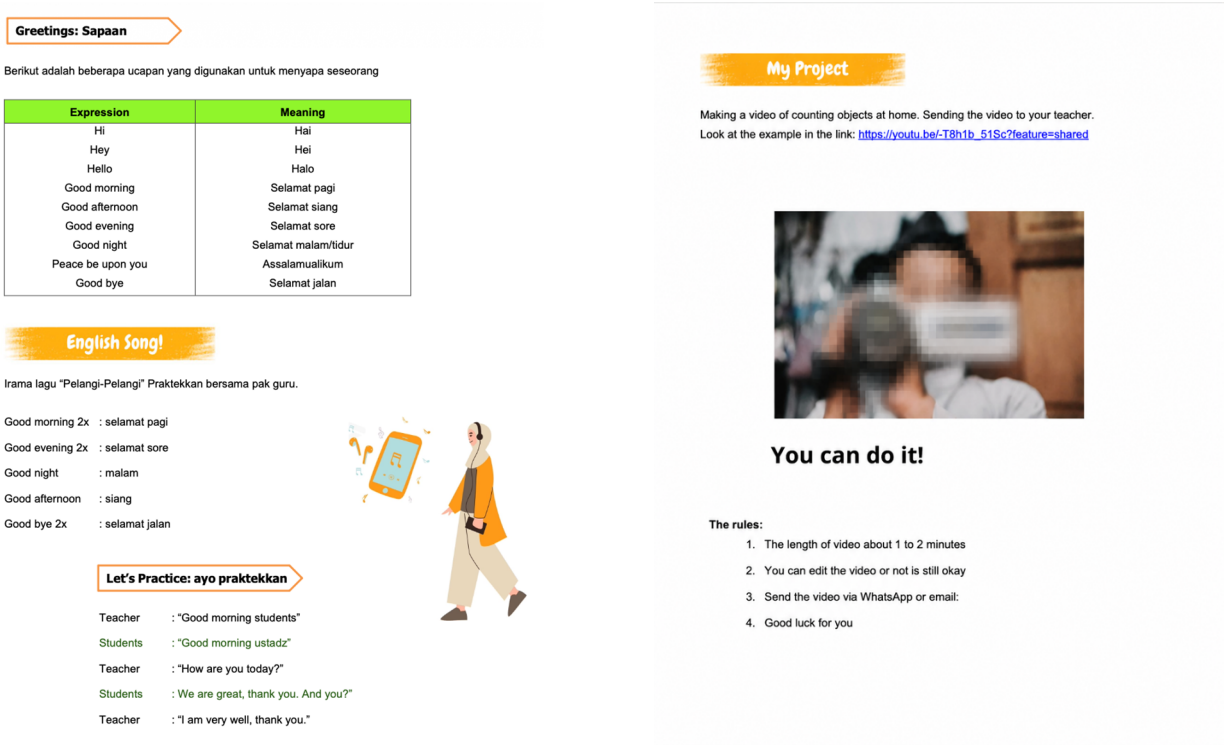


Figure 4. Examples of Islamic and Global content in the co-designed materials.

The six activities did not occur as separate linear stages. Between May and August 2026, the collaborators sometimes returned to an earlier need or resource after reviewing a draft. Six Zoom meetings were held during this period and lasted approximately five hours in total. The meetings were conducted mainly in Bahasa Indonesia, while English was used when the collaborators discussed vocabulary, instructions, dialogues, and other content from the materials.

3.5. Data Sources

The dataset (see Table 2) comprised records of collaborative interaction and the materials produced during the partnership. These sources enabled us to trace not only what the collaborators discussed but also how their discussions became changes in successive versions of the materials.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 5. Examples of (**a**) bilingual scaffolding and (**b**) feasibility-oriented task design.

Table 2. Data sources.

Source	Number	Description
Online collaborative Zoom meetings	6	Zoom meetings totalled approximately five hours
WhatsApp exchanges	1 exported chat archive	Daily questions, feedback, resource sharing, and design discussions
Materials drafts	3 versions	Successive versions of worksheets, activities, images, and supporting resources
Lesson plans	2 versions	Lesson plans produced or revised during the partnership
Final materials	1 document	Materials agreed upon at the end of the co-design process

The Zoom meetings were recorded and transcribed, while the WhatsApp exchanges were exported as a single chat archive. Using the procedures described in the data analysis section, we connected these virtual interaction records with the materials produced during the project to trace how design issues were raised, negotiated, and reflected in later revisions.

AI-assisted resources in this project were produced using the free version of ChatGPT. Raka and Fariha used the tool to generate activity ideas, translations, and vocabulary examples while drafting the material drafts. The outputs were treated as possible resources rather than inserted directly into the materials. The collaborators reviewed them for linguistic accuracy, suitability for Grade 4 learners, cultural and religious appropriateness, relevance to the learning objectives, and feasibility in Raka's classroom.

3.6. Data Analysis

We analyzed the dataset using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021). In this approach, themes are understood as interpretations developed through researchers' engagement with the data rather than categories waiting to be discovered. The analysis was recursive, allowing us to move between the interactional records, materials drafts, codes, and developing themes. Hendri began familiarization by reviewing the Zoom transcripts, WhatsApp exchanges, lesson plans, and materials drafts several times. He examined the records chronologically and wrote analytical notes about design issues, collaborators' responses, and corresponding changes in the materials. The data were then organized into design episodes, each concerning an identifiable proposal or problem such as image selection, language support, or task feasibility.

Coding combined deductive and inductive elements. The research questions and RPP framework directed attention to expertise, authority, decision-making, and the uptake of collaborators' contributions. At the same time, Hendri developed additional codes from issues arising in the data, including local and international representation, religious appropriateness, bilingual scaffolding, learner proficiency, and technological demands. Culturally sustaining pedagogy and social justice informed the later

interpretation of linguistic and cultural representation but were not used as fixed coding categories. Hendri grouped related codes into candidate patterns and compared them across design episodes and materials versions. From this process, we developed one cross-cutting collaborative process and two domains of materials design. Peter did not conduct separate coding. Instead, he reviewed the analytical notes, selected extracts, and developing themes, questioned interpretations, considered alternative explanations, and helped refine the boundaries between the sections. Differences in interpretation were discussed and examined against the dataset. These discussions supported critical reflection rather than inter-coder reliability or the removal of researcher subjectivity.

After developing the preliminary interpretations, Hendri shared the relevant excerpts and interpretations with Fariha and Raka through WhatsApp. They were invited to comment on the factual accounts, provide missing context, and question our interpretations. Their comments were treated as additional perspectives rather than confirmation that the analysis was objectively correct. Fariha and Raka clarified that Sou Puan was used for everyday communication both outside and inside the classroom, but was not used as a medium of instruction. Raka explained that he chose not to use it for instructional purposes. We therefore refined our interpretation to distinguish the language's presence in everyday classroom interaction from its exclusion from formal instruction and the written materials.

4. Findings

Our analysis identified one cross-cutting collaborative process and two principal domains of materials design. The cross-cutting process concerned how design authority was negotiated through different forms of expertise. This process operated within two decision domains: (1) the selection and recontextualization of local, religious, and global resources and (2) the balancing of linguistic accessibility, pedagogical purpose, and classroom feasibility. We first explain how authority shifted among the co-designers and then examine how these negotiations shaped decisions within the two domains.

4.1. Negotiating Design Authority Through Complementary Expertise

The analysis showed that authority was unevenly distributed and took different forms during the co-design process. Hendri retained considerable agenda-setting authority because he initiated many of the issues discussed in the Zoom meetings and WhatsApp exchanges. However, introducing an issue did not necessarily determine its outcome. Raka's knowledge of the learners, school practices, and classroom conditions influenced whether particular proposals were considered workable, while Fariha's pedagogical and materials-design knowledge shaped how concerns were translated into revisions. We therefore describe the process as researcher-led but open to practitioner influence rather than as an equal transfer of authority among all collaborators.

Across the co-design process, expertise became influential through the ways collaborators proposed, questioned, and revised materials decisions. Hendri, Fariha, and Raka contributed different forms of knowledge, and the influence of each contribution depended on the issue being discussed and whether it was incorporated into the materials. Hendri commonly introduced design questions and invited Raka and Fariha to consider alternatives, while Raka—A midcareer teacher—contributed knowledge of the learners, classroom conditions, and local language practices. Fariha, a pre-service teacher, brought pedagogical considerations from her teacher education program and developing experience in materials design. Authority was therefore not attached permanently to one collaborator but shifted among the team across the design process.

Excerpt 1. Negotiating local and international representation (Note: Translated from Indonesian and shortened for clarity; see Table S1 for the complete Indonesian version.).

> Hendri: *The materials tend to use local images, particularly images from Indonesia. Why is that? Could we also use images from outside Indonesia?*
>
> Raka: *Local images are more closely related to students' lives, which makes the activities easier to understand [….]. Images from other countries are acceptable when they show places or cities, but I would not recommend them for people because students may not see themselves represented in the materials.*
>
> Fariha: *Local images can make the materials more relevant to students' lives, but we should not limit them to Indonesia. They should also be introduced to other places and cultures. We could use more local images while retaining some international examples*.
>
> (WhatsApp exchange, July 2026)

In Excerpt 1, Hendri opened the discussion by asking why the materials relied primarily on local images and whether international images could also be included. Rather than rejecting international content, Raka distinguished between images of places and images of people. He considered international places appropriate for introducing countries or cities, and argued that images of people should represent the learners more closely. Fariha agreed that local Indonesian images could make the materials more relevant, while also cautioning that an exclusively local focus might limit learners' exposure to

other places and cultures. She therefore proposed giving greater prominence to local images while retaining selected international examples. Both local and international examples were already present in the draft before this exchange and were retained in the phase-end materials (see Figures 3 and 4). The discussion clarified the collaborators' reasons for retaining this combination: Raka emphasized learners' identification with the materials, while Fariha emphasized the value of exposure to other places and cultures. Raka's contextual knowledge and Fariha's pedagogical reasoning both influenced the decision, while Hendri facilitated the discussion by opening the initial design question.

Excerpt 2. Negotiating multilingual support (Note: *Translated from Indonesian and shortened for clarity; see Table S1* for the complete Indonesian version.).

> Hendri: *The instructions already use Indonesian and English. Could we also use the local language?*
>
> Fariha: *I support using Indonesian and English, but too much Indonesian may prevent students from becoming accustomed to simple English instructions. Indonesian could be used as support only when the instructions are difficult to understand.*
>
> Raka: *Indonesian–English translation helps because the students' English vocabulary is still limited. The local Indigenous language does not yet have an official dictionary that could be used as a reference [….]. It is not used during classroom instruction, so as a teacher, I prefer to adapt the materials to the school context.*
>
> (WhatsApp exchange, July 2026)

Excerpt 2 shows how authority shifted when the discussion moved to language support. Hendri raised the possibility of incorporating the local Indigenous language into instructions that already used Indonesian and English. Fariha supported giving students instructions in two languages (Indonesian and English), but argued that Indonesian should serve as support rather than replace learners' exposure to simple English. Raka evaluated the proposal in relation to students' English proficiency and the school's language practices. He explained that Indonesian–English translation helped learners with limited English vocabulary, and made a distinction between the community use of the Indigenous language and its limited role in formal classroom instruction. He also noted the absence of an established written reference that Fariha and Raka could use when developing ELT materials. The version produced during this phase therefore retained Indonesian–English instructions without incorporating the Indigenous language.

Thus, the two WhatsApp episodes illustrate how practitioners contributed to the reasoning behind materials-design decisions within a researcher-led discussion. Raka articulated considerations concerning learner representation, language support, and school practices, while Fariha proposed balancing local and international content and using Indonesian to support English learning. Hendri introduced questions that invited the collaborators to explain and reconsider these choices. The exchanges therefore provide evidence of practitioner influence on the discussion, although they do not establish that decision-making authority was equally shared or consistently transferred among team members.

4.2. Negotiating Cultural Representation Across Local, Religious, and Global Resources

The next section examines how the collaborators recontextualized existing resources through decisions about local, religious, and global content. In this section, we examined how cultural and contextual considerations were translated into decisions about the representation of local, religious, and global content. Rather than examining only what appeared in the completed materials, we traced selected features back to the Zoom meetings, WhatsApp exchanges, and changes across the drafts. This enabled us to examine who raised a concern, how the other collaborators responded, and how the resulting decision was represented in the completed materials. Drawing on culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) as a heuristic, we examined which linguistic and cultural resources were made visible, and how they supported learners' participation. The selected materials showed consistent efforts to make English accessible through Indonesian explanations, familiar activity routines, and tasks that could be completed using available resources.

Guided by scholarship (e.g., Gray, 2010; Harwood, 2026) that views ELT materials as socially and culturally situated artifacts and noting that making local culture visible does not necessarily amount to sustaining community knowledge and practices (Paris & Alim, 2017), we examined not only which cultural contexts appeared but also how they were positioned and used within the activities. Our analysis revealed a selective and layered form of recontextualization. The completed materials retained familiar ELT pedagogical formats, including model dialogues, vocabulary lists, sentence-completion exercises, descriptive examples, and reading passages, but modified the cultural and geographical content mediated by those formats. Notably, local, global, and Islamic content did not perform identical functions: local places became objects of learner practice, international locations expanded the range of examples, and Islamic representation moved between visual identity markers and substantive reading content. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate both the possibilities and the unevenness of this recontextualization.

As shown in Figure 3, the materials situated the familiar language functions of making plans and describing places within a recognizable local landscape.

Natsepa Beach appeared in the model dialogue, while Liang Beach, Ambon City, Banda Naira, Salahutu Mountain, Telaga Kodok Waterfall, and Natsepa Beach became prompts for the sentence completion exercise. These locations were not merely decorative illustrations: learners were asked to recognize and evaluate them in English. However, local knowledge was represented mainly through geographical landmarks and was expressed through a predetermined set of adjectives such as beautiful, peaceful, and clean. The activity therefore made the local environment visible while providing limited space for learners to contribute more extended knowledge about these places. Islamic identity was also present through the names Aisyah and Fatimah, the hijab-wearing character, and the word Bismillah (an Arabic phrase that means "In the name of Allah"), although these elements framed the activity rather than becoming its main learning content. The distinction between religion as visual framing and religion as substantive curricular content became more apparent in Figure 4. The global dimension was constructed through both a familiar Western landmark and transnational Islamic sites, extending the materials' geographical frame beyond Indonesia.

Figure 4 broadened the geographical and cultural range of the ELT materials by placing London, a beach setting, Jakarta, and a mosque in Muscat within the same sequence of descriptive examples. The page then shifted from short descriptions of places to an extended reading passage about the Kaaba (a stone building at the center of Islam's most important mosque and holiest site, the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Islamic representation consequently moved beyond the names, clothing, and visual markers shown in Figure 3 and became the substantive content through which learners encountered English. Nevertheless, the representation remained selective: locality appeared primarily through landscapes and place names, while local Indigenous language and community knowledge were not incorporated into these activities. In other words, while recontextualization expanded the range of places and identities that were represented in the ELT materials, it did not afford equal space to all aspects of learners' cultural and linguistic lives. In response to RQ2, these findings showed that cultural and contextual considerations were translated into decisions about which places and identities appeared, where they were positioned, and what roles they performed within familiar ELT activity formats.

4.3. Negotiating Linguistic Accessibility, Pedagogical Purpose, and Classroom Feasibility

The final section examines how learners' English proficiency and classroom conditions shaped decisions about language support and task design. In this section, we examined how considerations concerning English proficiency, bilingual support, and classroom conditions were translated into language and task-design decisions. We connected the collaborators' explanations in the interactional records with changes across the drafts and the features retained in the completed materials.

English vocabulary was frequently accompanied by Indonesian meanings, while grammatical explanations and activity instructions were mainly provided in Indonesian. The "Greetings" section, for instance, combined English expressions with Indonesian translations, used the melody of the Indonesian children's song "Pelangi-Pelangi," and incorporated the terms Assalamualaikum (an Arabic greeting that translates to "Peace be upon you") and ustadz (an honorific title meaning "teacher") into classroom language (see Figure 5a). Similar scaffolding appeared across the seven chapters through instructions such as "repeat after the teacher," "practice with your friend," and "listen and tick." These recurring pedagogical routines were intended to reduce the amount of unfamiliar language learners would need to process before completing an activity.

The materials also moved between controlled exercises and short productive tasks. Learners were asked to practise dialogues, participate in vocabulary games, interview other pupils, describe familiar places, and produce short videos. One project asked learners to record themselves counting objects at home. The video was limited to one or two minutes, editing was optional, and submission was permitted through WhatsApp (see Figure 5b).

We interpreted these instructions as evidence that feasibility was built into the task design. We interpreted the short duration, optional editing, familiar home setting, and WhatsApp submission option as design features intended to make the digital assignment more manageable. Whether these features would reduce demands on learners remained to be examined through classroom implementation. Again, the local Indigenous language was not visibly incorporated into vocabulary, instructions, dialogues, or project activities. Cultural localization was therefore more evident in place, religion, personal names, and familiar classroom practices than in the explicit representation of the community's Indigenous language. This pattern revealed a boundary in the phase-end materials. The design prioritized contextual relevance and pedagogical accessibility, while explicit Indigenous-language inclusion remained absent.

4.4. Language Accuracy and the Limits of Distributed Responsibility

The language-accuracy issues reported below illustrate a limitation of the cross-cutting collaborative process, particularly the distribution of responsibility for reviewing the materials. A review of the phase-end materials revealed several English-language errors and

unnatural formulations. These included "Tomorrow is holiday," "London is famous city in the world," "London is one of beautiful city that we have to visit," "Jakarta is crowded city in Indonesia," and "The length of video about 1 to 2 min." These examples constituted a negative case within the broader pattern of collaborative expertise. The co-design records contained extensive discussion of cultural representation, learner accessibility, religious appropriateness, visual design, and classroom feasibility, but considerably less attention to systematic language editing.

The distribution of responsibilities offers one possible explanation for these remaining errors. Raka primarily contributed contextual knowledge of the learners and school, Fariha contributed pedagogical and materials-design perspectives, and Hendri facilitated discussion of design alternatives. However, no collaborator was explicitly assigned responsibility for a final line-by-line language review. This lack of a designated review role may have contributed to the errors remaining in the phase-end materials, although the available data do not establish it as their sole cause. The findings therefore highlight the need to make responsibility for final language review explicit within collaborative materials development.

5. Discussion

This study examined how members of the co-design team negotiated their expertise and translated linguistic, cultural, pedagogical, and contextual considerations into English materials for young learners. Three points merit further discussion. First, collaboration became visible through the ways Fariha and Raka's contributions changed particular design decisions, rather than simply through their passive involvement in meetings. Second, the materials were produced through selective recontextualization, combining familiar ELT formats with local, religious, and global content. Third, efforts to make the materials accessible and feasible also revealed limitations, particularly in relation to the representation of the local Indigenous language. These findings extend research on materials production by showing how the characteristics of a completed material emerged from interactions among the collaborative team members, available resources, and the conditions of a particular educational setting.

5.1. Negotiating Expertise through Design Decisions

Our findings suggest that collaboration in ELT materials development involved more than inviting practitioners to respond to researcher-generated ideas. Fariha and Raka's knowledge, in particular, became consequential when it resulted in the acceptance, rejection, or revision of a proposed activity. This finding is consistent with research–practice partnership scholarship (e.g., Coburn et al., 2013; Coburn & Penuel, 2016) that treats researchers and practitioners as contributors of different but complementary forms of knowledge. It is also consistent with De Costa et al.'s (2022) observation that researcher–practitioner collaboration requires reciprocal knowledge exchange rather than unidirectional (i.e., from researcher to practitioner) transfer of academic knowledge into practice.

However, as our findings demonstrated, reciprocity did not necessarily mean that all collaborators contributed in the same way or exercised equal influence at every stage. Raka's knowledge of learners, classroom routines, and available resources became particularly important when the collaborators assessed whether an activity could be implemented. The teacher educator (Hendri) and pre-service teacher (Fariha), meanwhile contributed linguistic, pedagogical, and materials-related perspectives that helped turn classroom concerns into revised activities. Expertise was therefore situational: its influence depended on the problem being discussed and whether other collaborators took it up in the subsequent design. Crucially, this relational understanding of expertise is consistent with Kim et al. (2026), whose study showed how Indonesian TESOL teacher educators repositioned themselves as learner-collaborators by acknowledging the technological knowledge of their student teachers. In our partnership with Fariha and Raka, the redistribution of expertise was not limited to technological knowledge but became visible through decisions about language, cultural content, pedagogy, and classroom feasibility. In other words, the pre-service teacher (Fariha) and classroom teacher (Raka) were therefore not positioned solely as recipients of the teacher educator's knowledge; rather, their contributions altered the direction and form of the materials being developed. This key development adds a process-oriented dimension to recent calls for closer researcher–practitioner collaboration in materials development (Harwood, 2026; Shu et al., 2024). Although collaboration is often reported through teacher partner roles or project descriptions, our analysis traced how particular contributions became visible in subsequent versions of the materials. Our findings therefore suggest that collaborative authority should be examined through the history of design decisions: who raised a pedagogical concern, how others responded, what content was revised, and whose knowledge became visible in the final product. This approach thus makes it possible to examine research–practice partnerships without assuming that the formal presence of practitioners automatically produces shared decision-making.

5.2. Recontextualization beyond the Global–Local Binary

As demonstrated, the revised ELT materials did not represent a straightforward shift from global Western-based textbooks to purely local Indonesian resources.

Instead, our collaborators, Fariha and Raka, retained familiar ELT topics, activity formats, visual resources, and pedagogical sequences while modifying their content for the school setting. This finding supports Harwood's (2026) argument that materials cannot be fully understood through content analysis alone because their characteristics are also shaped by the conditions and decisions involved in production. It also illustrates how cultural content emerges through selection and negotiation rather than being added after the pedagogical structure has been completed (Adaskou et al., 1990).

Fariha and Raka did not reject globally circulating formats; instead, they used those formats as structures through which locally and religiously meaningful content could be introduced. Recontextualization therefore involved changing what familiar textbook activities allowed learners to talk, read, and think about. At the same time, the inclusion of local places and Islamic content should not automatically be described as culturally sustaining. Culturally sustaining pedagogy involves supporting the continued presence and development of communities' linguistic and cultural practices, rather than merely adding familiar names, images, or locations to an existing curriculum (Paris & Alim, 2017).

The ELT materials in this study clearly increased contextual and religious relevance, but the extent to which they sustained Indigenous knowledge and language was limited. We therefore understand the outcome as constituting selective recontextualization in that some dimensions of learners' identities and experiences became more visible, while others remained under-represented. This distinction is important for ELT materials development in Indigenous and Global South contexts. Localization is not a single design decision or an achieved status. Rather, it involves making ongoing choices about which aspects of learners' lives are included, how they are represented, and whether community knowledge changes the pedagogical organization of the material.

5.3. Pedagogical Feasibility and the Limits of Multilingual Inclusion

The use of Indonesian explanations, familiar songs, repeated classroom routines, pair dialogues, and short projects, as demonstrated in this study, reflected an effort to make the materials manageable for young EFL learners. Similarly, the use of brief video assignments, optional editing, and WhatsApp submission showed how our collaborators, Fariha and Raka, worked within familiar technological practices. These features suggest that classroom feasibility constituted a key part of the design itself, rather than something that was considered only after the materials had been produced. This finding is particularly relevant to teaching English to young learners, where linguistic demands must be considered alongside children's developmental needs, teacher support, time, and available classroom resources (Zein, 2026). These decisions reflected an intention to make English more accessible to learners whom Raka described as having emerging English proficiency. Their effects on learners' comprehension and participation were not assessed in this design phase.

In addition, the linguistic errors found in the phase-end materials further showed that collaborative participation did not automatically ensure language quality. Although responsibilities for cultural relevance, pedagogy, and classroom feasibility became visible during co-design, responsibility for final English-language proofreading remained unclear. Future cycles should therefore include a designated language-review stage and assign explicit responsibility for checking linguistic accuracy before classroom implementation.

Nevertheless, accessibility through Indonesian also created a tension. Although our research–practice partnership was situated within a multilingual Indigenous community, the final materials operated primarily through an English–Indonesian axis, with the local Indigenous language, Sou Puan, being visibly absent from vocabulary explanations, instructions, dialogues, or project options. From a social justice perspective, this absence matters because decisions about classroom language determine whose linguistic knowledge becomes institutionally visible and usable (De Costa et al., 2021). And while Indonesian provided practical pedagogical scaffolding in our study, it also occupied the space in which Sou Puan might otherwise have co-existed alongside Indonesian and English. This finding does not mean that the materials lacked cultural relevance. Rather, it shows that cultural, religious, and linguistic inclusion developed unevenly. Local places and Islamic values were strongly represented, whereas Indigenous-language inclusion remained limited. Looking ahead, future iterations of our research–practice partnership should address this imbalance by involving additional Indigenous community knowledge holders, developing multilingual vocabulary options, and allowing EFL learners to use the Indigenous language in tandem with Indonesian and English in selected activities. Such development will require local community consultation rather than the uncritical insertion of isolated Indigenous words.

6. Conclusions

In response to Harwood's (2026) call for more research on materials production, we showed how content, pedagogical structure, language choice, and classroom feasibility emerged through interactions among collaborators with different forms of expertise. This study connected the collaborative process of materials development with the characteristics of the materials produced in an underrepresented teaching

English to young learners (TEYL) setting in the Global South. Practically, our findings underscore how collaborative participation alone does not guarantee linguistic accuracy, particularly when EFL practitioners are simultaneously addressing cultural relevance, classroom feasibility, visual design, and production deadlines.

As demonstrated, expertise became consequential through pedagogical design decisions and revisions, while the modified ELT materials combined familiar ELT formats with local places, Islamic narratives, and global content. The study therefore extends materials-production research by illustrating how linguistic, cultural, pedagogical, and contextual considerations were negotiated within a research–practice partnership. Pedagogically speaking, our findings underscore the need for collaborative materials projects to document the rationale for design changes, assign a clear language-review stage, and involve community knowledge holders more directly. In this sense, these contributions should be considered alongside several methodological limitations. The study focused on one partnership, a small group of collaborators, and one materials-development project. The study was limited to the design phase and did not include classroom implementation, systematic observations, student interviews, or measures of learning. Accordingly, the reported accessibility, feasibility, and pedagogical appropriateness reflect the collaborators' judgments and design intentions rather than demonstrated effects on learners. The first author's dual role as researcher and collaborator may also have influenced the process and interpretation. Despite these limitations, our study illustrates how research–practice partnerships can create space for locally accountable materials development. Further research could trace the adoption of the ELT materials within the classroom, examine EFL learners' responses, and involve a broader range of community members in subsequent design cycles.

Supplementary Materials

The additional data and information can be downloaded at: https://media.sciltp.com/articles/others/2611091000573611/SALA-26080264-SM.pdf. Table S1. Original Indonesian-Language WhatsApp Exchange on Materials Co-design.

Author Contributions

H.: methodology, data curation, visualization, writing—original draft preparation; P.D.: conceptualization, methodology, writing—review and editing, supervision. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to its minimal risk nature. Participation in all collaborative dialogues and research activities was entirely voluntary, all participants were fully informed of the study's purpose prior to data collection, and no identifiable personal data was collected.

Informed Consent Statement

All participants voluntarily provided written informed consent to participate in this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data of this study are not available for sharing due to privacy considerations.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT to improve clarity and readability of the writing. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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