

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the background of this study. It consists of seven sections: the background, the research question, the aims, the importance, the scope, the clarification of terms, and the thesis organization.

1.1. Background

Evaluating English textbooks is essential due to their significant impact on the teaching and learning of English. Textbook evaluation helps identify the strengths and weaknesses of a book, with the purpose of selecting, adapting, or improving teaching materials to better meet learners' needs and achieve learning objectives (Cunningsworth, 1995). The importance of evaluating textbooks corresponds to their role, particularly where English is taught as a foreign language. Research shows that textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping both the curriculum and students' language acquisition opportunities in EFL contexts, influencing motivation, exposure to authentic language, and the development of communicative competence (Richards J. C., 2001; Tomlinson B. , 2013; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Therefore, careful evaluation ensures that materials are suitable for the specific linguistic, cultural, and educational contexts of learners (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In the EFL context, textbooks serve as primary instructional tools, providing students with considerable opportunities to communicate effectively in the target language (Tok, 2015; Gultom, 2024). Textbooks also act as learning media and communication tools to deliver messages and information from teachers to students, aiming to motivate them to engage in learning (Purba, 2024). Additionally, textbooks function as teaching materials that teaching progress and provide guidance on how to achieve learning objectives (Syahroni, 2022). They also serve as references for teachers in managing instructional progress.

Various methods are used to evaluate textbooks, including impressionistic and close evaluation approaches (McGrath, 2002). Impressionistic evaluation involves a quick assessment based on initial impressions by skimming the structure and topics covered, while close evaluation requires a more detailed examination of representative features such as unit layout or embedded values. One of the most

systematic approaches for conducting these evaluations is through the use of checklists (Cunningsworth, 1995; McGrath, 2002; Nurhamsih & Syahrial, 2018; Ulfa & Trisno, 2022), which allow for a structured assessment of various textbook aspects.

Since the early 21st century, the Indonesian education system has undergone various curriculum transformations to address contemporary challenges and needs. Before the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) served as the primary framework for learning. K-13 focused on a scientific approach and authentic assessment, aiming to develop students' holistic competencies, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Although K-13 was widely implemented, continuous evaluations revealed several challenges, such as an overly dense curriculum load, lack of flexibility for teachers to innovate, and uniformity that sometimes did not align with diverse regional characteristics or student needs.

In response to these challenges and to meet the demand for education more relevant to current developments, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) began to encourage the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as an alternative, which was later established as Nasional Curriculum. This curriculum was designed as a response to the learning crisis (learning loss) exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and aims to create a simpler, deeper, and more independent education system. Unlike K-13, which emphasized uniformity, the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility for educational units to develop their own operational curricula in accordance with their context and student characteristics. As part of this transition, the government also launched textbooks claimed to align with the principles and goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. Although the curriculum does not mandate the use of specific textbooks, the proliferation of new books released by various publishers, including the government, based on the Merdeka Curriculum makes their evaluation crucial. Choosing textbooks solely based on the author's or publisher's reputation without critical analysis, as highlighted by McGrath (2002), risks overlooking essential pedagogical values. Therefore, this evaluation is crucial to ensure that the books are suitable for the learning process under the Merdeka Curriculum.

In 2024, educational institutions in Indonesia are expected to fully implement the Merdeka Curriculum. One fundamental change in this curriculum is the grouping of learning materials based on developmental phases rather than grade levels (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Each phase covers a specific age range or level, designed to ensure skills and knowledge align with students' developmental stages. Phase E, the focus of this study, includes students in senior high school or equivalent, typically aged 16–18 years. In this phase, English learning outcomes focus on developing complex communicative skills, such as understanding texts within cultural contexts, critically expressing ideas in various formats, and enhancing digital literacy. Emphasis is also placed on project-based learning and collaboration to foster critical and creative thinking skills.

Furthermore, one of the central pedagogical shifts introduced by the Merdeka Curriculum is the promotion of deep learning, which goes beyond surface-level memorization and emphasizes students' ability to understand, connect, and apply knowledge in various contexts. Deep learning encourages learners to engage in higher-order thinking, self-regulation, and the integration of knowledge across disciplines (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018; Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This approach requires learning materials, including textbooks, to provide opportunities for students to explore authentic problems, reflect critically, and construct meaningful knowledge. Therefore, evaluating textbooks through the lens of deep learning principles is essential to ensure that the materials support these transformative learning goals.

Despite the abundance of studies evaluating English textbooks, there is limited research specifically examining *Work in Progress* in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and its alignment with Phase E learning outcomes. For instance, Trisno & Ulfa (2022) evaluated English textbooks used in the previous 2013 Curriculum, focusing on material content, while Sania et al. (2023) analyzed cultural representation in textbooks for general EFL contexts. Similarly, Safira et al. (2024) used a checklist approach to assess language skills in another curriculum context. However, these studies did not address the unique objectives and challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the *Work in*

Progress textbook in relation to the specific communicative and digital literacy skills outlined in Phase E.

Evaluating textbooks such as *Work in Progress* is vital to ensure their compatibility with Merdeka Curriculum's goals, particularly for Phase E. This study seeks to assess whether *Work in Progress* meets the criteria for a high-quality textbook in terms of material alignment with learning outcomes, topic relevance, and support for targeted skills. Using a systematic checklist-based evaluation, as proposed by Cunningsworth (1995) and McGrath (2002), the research aims to provide recommendations for improving textbook quality and ensuring its optimal use in the learning process.

1.2. Research Questions

The study's problem is formulated as follows.

- 1) How does the *Work in Progress* for grade 10th SMA/SMK/MA English Textbook comply with the criteria for a good textbook?
- 2) To what extent and in what ways does the *Work in Progress* for grade 10th SMA/SMK/MA English Textbook align with the essential competencies specified in Phase E of the Merdeka Curriculum, including oral, written, and visual communication skills, mastery of various text types, and development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills appropriate to students' age and real-life contexts?

1.3. Aims of the Key Terms

The aims of the study are:

- 1) To evaluate whether the *Work in Progress* for grade 10th SMA/SMK/MA English Textbook meets the criteria for a good English textbook, as outlined by experts in the field of textbook evaluation
- 2) To assess whether the *Work in Progress* for grade 10th SMA/SMK/MA English Textbook aligns with the essential competencies required for Phase E in the Merdeka Curriculum, including the ability to use English orally, in writing, and visually for various situational and communicative purposes; mastery of different text types such as narration, descriptive, procedure, exposition, recount, and report; development of listening, speaking, reading,

and writing skills appropriate for real-life contexts and students' age level; the capacity to infer implicit information from texts; and awareness of writing purposes and audience in text production..

1.4. Research Significance

The research yields both theoretical and practical benefits for English teachers, students, curriculum developers, and educational institutions, as detailed below:

1) Benefits for English Teachers and Curriculum Planners

This study provides important insights for teachers and curriculum planners about how well the *Work in Progress* textbook matches the competencies required in Phase E of the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings can help in improving teaching effectiveness. Also, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook gives practical guidance to teachers when selecting learning materials that meet the diverse need of their students.

2) Benefits for Textbook Developers and Policymakers

The results of this study contribute to policy by supporting the development and selection of better learning resources in the future. By thoroughly analysing both student and teacher books, this research can serve as a reference for the governments, publishers, and education policymakers to ensure that teaching guidelines and learning materials are well aligned. This is important to improve the quality of learning and support the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools.

3) Benefits for Research and Educational Theory

This study enriches the methodology framework for textbook evaluation by adapting criteria from experts like Cunningsworth (1995), McGrath (2002) and Harmer (2007) to the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. Theoretically, it fills a gap in the literature on EFL textbook evaluation under the new curriculum, especially for Phase E, and adds understanding about how align learning materials with the curriculum goals.

1.5. Clarification of The Key Terms

This study focuses on evaluation the *Work in Progress* English Textbook and its accompanying teacher's book based on a comprehensive evaluation framework. The framework is a collaboration of established evaluation criteria developed by Cunningsworth (1995), McGrath (2002), dan Harmer (2007), covering key aspects of a good textbook such as aims and approaches, language content, skill development, topic and cultural content, methodology, design and organization, teacher support, practical considerations, and instructional clarity.

In addition to these textbook evaluation criteria, this research analyses the alignment of the textbook content with the essential competencies of Phase E in Merdeka Curriculum. These competencies encompass:

- The ability to use English orally, in writing, and visually according to various situational and communicative purposes.
- Mastery if various text types such as narration, descriptive, procedure, exposition, recount, and report.
- Development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills appropriate to real-life contexts and the students' age level.
- The capacity to infer implicit information from text.
- Awareness of writing purposes and audiences in production text.

By clearly defining these key terms and concepts, this study aims to ensure a thorough and focused evaluation of the textbook's quality and relevance, as well as specified in the Merdeka Curriculum Phase E.

1.6. The Thesis Organization

The thesis titled Content Evaluation of "*Work in Progress* for Grade 10th SMA/SMK/MA English Textbook" Written for Merdeka Curriculum consists of five chapters, each addressing the following topics:

- **Chapter I: Introduction**, this chapter presents the background of the study, including an overview of the textbook, the Merdeka Curriculum, and the checklist analysis. It also states the research problems, objectives, significance, and clarification of key terms.

- **Chapter II: Literature Review**, this chapter reviews previous studies and theoretical perspectives related to the research topic. It provides the theoretical foundation used in this study.
- **Chapter III: Research Methodology**, this chapter explains the research design and methods used to collect and analysed data relevant to the study.
- **Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion**, this chapter presents the research findings and discusses them in relation to the research questions.
- **Chapter V: Conclusion, Implication and Recommendations**, this chapter provides the conclusions drawn from the study, discusses its implications, and offers recommendations for the future research.