



Assessing English Language Textbooks: Analysing Task/Learning Activities In Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1

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Abstract

The utilization of an English textbook serves a dual purpose, acting not only as a guiding tool for educators during lesson delivery but also as a conduit for essential input through diverse explanations and interactive exercises. This dynamic also exerts an influence on learners' dispositions and performance towards the instructional materials. This intricate scenario has motivated the author to embark on a research-oriented endeavour, focusing on the evaluation of textbooks. The aim is to scrutinize the tasks within the English textbook context, particularly in senior high school settings, encompassing their complexity progression. The outcomes of this study underscore that the English textbook titled "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" exhibits captivating tasks aligned with the objectives of the 2013 curriculum. Furthermore, it demonstrates a commendable distribution of tasks across chapters, spanning the entire book.

Keywords: *English course material, task distribution, exercises, textbook assessment.*

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INTRODUCTION

English is known as a foreign language in Indonesia. It holds a distinct and significant position within the educational framework. Correspondingly, Indonesia has undertaken the instruction of English as a foreign language in its schools, spanning from primary to senior high school levels. To support educators in facilitating instruction and accomplishing instructional goals, they can utilize instructional materials as resources for teaching and learning activities in the classroom. These materials can be classified into two categories: printed resources, including textbooks, modules, handouts, brochures, and pamphlets, among others; and non-printed resources, such as videos, cassettes, CDs, internet-based materials, and computer-based tools. Among these, textbooks are widely employed. The usage of English textbooks holds notable significance for both teachers and learners. They not only serve as guides for teachers during content delivery but also offer essential input through diverse explanations and interactive tasks. Furthermore, these textbooks influence learners' attitudes and performance towards the subject matter, as their affinity for the textbook often correlates with active engagement in the classroom. Harmer (2007) highlights that a pivotal aspect of textbook usage is to foster learner engagement with the content they are studying. Additionally, textbooks provide learners with valuable opportunities to engage with the English language within the classroom setting. Cunningsworth (1995) identifies textbooks as resources for presenting materials and sources for learners to practice various language skills, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening, reading,

speaking, and writing. In essence, textbooks play a pivotal role in assisting teachers in aligning with the curriculum, as they are tailored to curriculum requirements and provide guidance while affording learners the chance to learn.

In contemporary times, a variety of English textbooks are available to meet the demands of the teaching and learning process. They are widely integrated into educational settings. An example is the "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1", an EFL textbook designed for ninth-grade middle school students and published by Media Pressindo. This textbook aligns with the national curriculum, also known as Kurikulum Nasional (K13) in Indonesia. The activities within this textbook encompass the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These activities encourage learners to enhance their English proficiency and extend their discourse and cultural understanding. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that there is no textbook that is flawless and universally suitable for all students' needs. Grant (1987) contends that the concept of a perfect textbook is non-existent, implying that even textbooks published by reputable publishers might have shortcomings. Consequently, textbooks employed in the classroom should undergo thorough evaluation, considering factors such as alignment with curriculum objectives, relevance to learners' contexts, and other pertinent aspects.

As English teachers incorporate textbooks into their teaching, they must carefully choose pertinent materials that suit their learners. Before adopting a textbook, teachers must assess its utility and effectiveness to ensure its absolute appropriateness and alignment with students' requirements. As articulated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 97) and cited by Sheldon (1988: 237), textbook evaluation essentially involves a logical and analytical 'matching process: aligning needs with available solutions.' Textbook evaluation involves a methodical approach to selecting the most suitable teaching material, considering the instructional needs and value. This process is vital for educators, as it furnishes valuable insights for organizing and overseeing learning activities within the classroom setting.

In essence, textbook evaluation seeks to identify the optimal material as a resource for EFL instruction, finely tailored to learners' needs. Cunningsworth (1995) contends that textbooks serve as effective tools for self-directed learning, furnish presentational materials, stimulate ideas and activities, serve as reference materials for students, encapsulate pre-determined learning objectives within their syllabi, and offer support to less-experienced teachers seeking to build confidence. Furthermore, Hycroft (1998) highlights a primary advantage of textbooks, emphasizing their psychological significance to students, as they provide tangible measures of progress and achievement. Textbooks inherently establish the instructional standards and play a pivotal role in the teaching and learning process.

Moreover, the incorporation of textbooks in classrooms ensures that learners at various proficiency levels encounter uniform content, thereby enabling standardized assessment. Sheldon (1988) underscores the pivotal role of textbooks as the visible core of any ELT program, extending substantial benefits to both students and educators in ESL/EFL classrooms. The field boasts several experts, as previously mentioned, including Grant (1987), Sheldon (1988), Cunningsworth (1995), and Mukundan (2011), each presenting criteria for evaluating EFL textbooks. While their specific criteria vary, a consensus exists that evaluation

checklists should encompass physical attributes like layout, design, size, and visuals. Equally important are criteria that assess the methodology, alignment with curriculum-based materials, language skills, topics, linguistic appropriateness, and cultural aspects. Cunningsworth (1995) recommends that a textbook evaluator establish personal priorities, crafting a customized checklist by combining mentioned criteria and adding others as necessary.

In alignment with Cunningsworth's approach, the researcher opts for Mukundan's (2011) textbook evaluation checklist. This research-based article aims to contribute to fellow scholars interested in assessing English textbooks in accordance with the National Curriculum. Furthermore, it offers insights for material design and development within EFL instruction, equipping educators with information to select appropriate textbooks that effectively support teaching and learning. Consequently, teachers gain enhanced selectivity when choosing textbooks, enabling them to provide students with optimal materials that align with curriculum objectives and various considerations. In summary, this research-based article delves into the analysis of tasks and their progression (from simple to complex) as presented in the "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" textbook.

METHODS

This research article, rooted in qualitative methodology, employs a content analysis approach. As outlined by Anderson (2007), content analysis proves versatile across diverse studies, including language-based inquiries that involve dissecting the substance of specific subjects through classification, tabulation, and evaluation. Focusing on textbook analysis, this investigation adopts a descriptive qualitative research design. In line with the assertion by Bodgan and Biklen (2003), the descriptive nature of data in qualitative research emanates from sources such as documents, audio-visual recordings, transcripts, text, images, and the like. In this instance, the qualitative research design is employed to dissect the tasks found within the textbook.

In summary, the research design implemented to assess the English textbook titled " Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" can be categorized as a descriptive qualitative content analysis. The data is drawn from the content of the aforementioned English textbook, which is intended for use by ninth-grade middle school learners in Indonesia. Published by Media Pressindo. The study's focal point centers on the tasks embedded within this educational resource. The gathered data is subjected to qualitative analysis through the utilization of a tool known as the tentative checklist for textbook evaluation, which was previously developed by the researchers (Mukundan et al, 2011). The data is assessed on 5 point scale, which represent 0=very poor, 1= poor, 2= average, 3=good and 4=very good.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In accordance with the 2013 curriculum, ninth students are expected to master ten key subjects: Expression of Congratulations, Expression of Agree and Disagree, Imperative Sentence, Labels, Procedure Text, Food and Drink, Present Continuous Tense, Past Continuous Tense, Present Perfect Tense, and Conjunction. Remarkably, the analysed textbook comprises nine key subjects that seamlessly

align with the 2013 curriculum and meticulously adhere to syllabus specifications, lacking material of conjunction in the textbook. This textbook effectively covers nine out of the ten designated subjects. Grant (1987) asserts the imperative of textbooks aligning with the official teaching syllabus, signifying that classroom materials should encompass the subjects delineated by the 2013 Curriculum Standard, serving as the national teaching syllabus. Nonetheless, a subject outlined within the 2013 Curriculum Standard is conspicuously absent from the "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" textbook. This underscores the necessity for a revision to ensure comprehensive coverage aligned with the 2013 Curriculum.

The "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" textbook impeccably embodies the attributes of a student-centered learning approach. It profoundly prioritizes students' needs, abilities, interests, styles, and active participation. Moreover, the textbook is replete with practical group and paired activities that distinctly manifest the hallmarks of the student-centered methodology. As delineated by Jones (2007), the role of a textbook in a student-centered approach encompasses guiding, overseeing activities, and directing students' learning paths. Impressively, the methodology employed in the "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" textbook seamlessly aligns with this role, affording educators the opportunity to harness tasks to their fullest potential.

For example, specific instances on pages 6 and 7 involve reading tasks in the form of a jigsaw, a technique that proves remarkably beneficial for aiding students in comprehending textual content and stimulating dialogue about the principal concepts embedded within paragraphs. This innovative approach infuses classroom tasks with depth and significance. Notably, the tasks incorporated in this English textbook avoid monotony by presenting students with opportunities for both independent and collaborative work. Collaborative pair-based tasks and independent assignments contribute to sustaining student interest and engagement. For instance, students are encouraged to collaboratively craft descriptions with their peers, thereby enhancing the meaningfulness of the learning experience.

In succinct terms, the tasks span a spectrum of methodologies in English Language Teaching (ELT). To pique students' curiosity and tap into their prior knowledge, the textbook features an array of task types. For instance, a speaking activity on page 15 prompts students to generate short dialogues within specific scenarios. Evidently, tasks within this textbook foster active student involvement in the learning process. This resonates with Harmer's (2007) assertion, emphasizing that an integral facet of textbook usage is to engross learners with the content they are to tackle.

In summary, the tasks are effectively integrated using various methodologies in ELT, each calibrated to kindle student interest and participation. Moreover, these tasks are aligned with the context, stimulating meaningful communication. The textbook thoughtfully includes captivating topics that resonate with students' daily experiences, motivating them to read, converse, and write. The inclusion of varied tasks mirrors the principles of a process-oriented writing approach, emphasizing the iterative stages of brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Notably, the tasks are sequenced cohesively, rendering them useful for underachieving and high-achieving students alike. To put it succinctly,

the distribution of tasks, ranging from simple to complex, is well-balanced across chapters and throughout the entire textbook.

CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned findings, the English textbook titled "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" presents captivating tasks that effectively align with the objectives outlined in the 2013 curriculum. Moreover, there is a commendable allocation of tasks across chapters and the entirety of the book, transitioning progressively from simpler to more intricate exercises. In conclusion, it can be inferred that "Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs Kelas IX Semester 1" serves as a fitting English textbook for ninth-grade students within the EFL learning context of SMP/MTs.

Drawing from the outcomes, deliberations, and conclusions derived from this textbook evaluation study, the author would like to proffer several recommendations tailored to those engaged in textbook assessment and the educational field. The foremost counsel is directed towards teachers. Given the evolving role of teachers as facilitators rather than mere instructors, it is incumbent upon them to furnish their students with high-quality learning materials. To address the identified weakness, particularly in listening tasks, teachers should bridge the gap by supplying supplementary resources, aligning with the materials specified in the 2013 Curriculum Standards proposed by the government. Hence, teachers should cultivate a sense of criticality and creativity in mitigating the limitations of the prescribed textbook. Developing tailor-made handouts replete with supplementary content and exercises not only caters to learners' needs but also enhances teachers' skills.

The final recommendation is extended to future researchers. It is hoped that forthcoming investigations in the field of textbook evaluation will refine and build upon the groundwork laid by prior studies. The landscape offers an array of criteria for evaluating EFL textbooks from diverse experts, readily accessible for reference. Therefore, an avenue for improvement lies in meticulously adapting and synthesizing these multifaceted criteria into a coherent framework that resonates with the Indonesian context, thereby enhancing the efficacy of textbook evaluation in the local educational sphere

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