

Evaluating an Indonesian ELT Textbook for Senior High School: A Qualitative Analysis Using Cunninghamsworth's Framework

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the suitability of an Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbook for senior high school students in relation to their needs and curriculum objectives. The study analyzes English for Change for Grade XI using Cunninghamsworth's (1995) textbook evaluation framework as the primary analytical lens. Data were collected through systematic document analysis of all units, learning objectives, and instructional activities in both the student material book and the accompanying teacher's guide. The study was structured around five evaluative categories: aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills development, topics and methodology, supported by Bloom's revised taxonomy as a means of investigating the cognitive demands of textbook-based tasks. The findings indicate that the textbook demonstrates alignment with the Emancipated Curriculum at the level of stated learning objectives and coverage of language skills. However, the practical implementation of these objectives is limited, as most learning activities primarily focus on lower-order thinking skills and provide minimal opportunities for integrated-skills training and the development of critical thinking. The study highlights the importance of teacher mediation and task modification in enhancing pedagogical effectiveness. By integrating textbook content analysis with considerations of

classroom use, this study contributes to the evaluation of ELT materials in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, English Language Teaching (ELT), Cummingsworth's framework, critical thinking, EFL context

INTRODUCTION

A textbook is a tool that supports the growth of English proficiency and complements the learning experience (Vitta, 2023). Textbooks play a central role in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms as they function not only as primary learning resources but also as guides for teachers and representations of the syllabus. In many educational contexts, textbooks serve as the foundation for course organization and assessment, making them indispensable in language instruction (Gholampour & Mehrabi, 2023).

Despite their widespread use, ELT textbooks are frequently implemented without systematic and critical evaluation. Many teachers rely heavily on textbooks as fixed instructional guides, which may limit pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness to learners' needs. Recent studies suggest that such reliance can lead to a mismatch between textbook content and learners' linguistic levels, learning goals, and sociocultural contexts, particularly in EFL classrooms (Tomlinson, 2023). Furthermore, globally produced textbooks often prioritize standardized content, which may reduce their relevance to local curriculum and classroom realities (Gray, 2010). Without careful evaluation, textbooks may fail to promote meaningful communication and learner-centered practices, underscoring the need for textbook evaluation as an essential component of effective ELT (Gholampour & Mehrabi, 2023).

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of evaluating EFL textbooks based on surface-level content, particularly in relation to higher-order thinking skills and meaningful language use. Research analyzing critical thinking in English textbooks reveals that many learning tasks still prioritize lower-level cognitive processes, such as

memorization and comprehension, over analysis, evaluation, and creation. As a result, students may have limited opportunities to develop critical engagement with language material (Nainggolan & Wirza, 2021). Additionally, another study emphasizes that the effectiveness of textbooks in developing essential thinking depends heavily on teachers' ability to adapt and supplement the material to meet pedagogical objectives. These findings suggest that textbooks alone are insufficient to support meaningful learning without the reflective and critical use of teachers in classroom learning practices (Soe, 2024). These studies collectively show the need for a more comprehensive evaluation of textbooks that integrates cognitive, pedagogical, and contextual considerations.

Although previous studies have explored the evaluation of ELT textbooks and analyzed the inclusion of critical thinking skills in textbook materials, several gaps remain. Most existing studies tend to focus on theoretical evaluation frameworks or separate textbook content analysis, without sufficiently linking textbook evaluation to actual classroom implementation. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how teachers interpret, adapt, and utilize textbook tasks to promote higher-order thinking skills in specific EFL contexts. Particularly in local educational settings, there is still a lack of empirical evidence that integrates textbook evaluation with pedagogical practices aimed at developing critical thinking. This gap points to the need for further research that examines ELT textbooks not only as teaching materials, but also as dynamic tools shaped by teachers' instructional decisions and classroom realities.

Based on the identified gaps, this chapter aims to systematically evaluate ELT textbooks to determine whether they meet students' learning needs and curriculum objectives. This evaluation examines how the content of books and their tasks are designed to support meaningful learning and develop critical thinking skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. The guiding research question of this study is: How can ELT textbooks be systematically evaluated to ensure their suitability for learners' needs and curriculum objectives?

This study contributes to ELT textbook evaluation by positioning Cunningham's (1995) framework not merely as

a checklist, but as an analytical lens for examining how textbook tasks are pedagogically realized in classrooms. Unlike previous studies that primarily describe textbook content or classify functions at the cognitive level, this study explicitly links task design to curriculum objectives and teacher mediation within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, thereby offering a more contextual and practice-oriented understanding of ELT textbook use in EFL settings.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive, and evaluative design, which is appropriate for examining educational materials in depth without statistical manipulation. Qualitative descriptive research enables a systematic and transparent examination of how learning materials are designed, structured, and intended to function pedagogically in authentic classroom contexts (Sandelowski, 2000). In ELT materials research, this approach is widely used to evaluate textbooks by analyzing their content, task design, and underlying pedagogical assumptions (McGrath, 2016).

Document analysis served as the primary data collection technique. This method involves the systematic review and interpretation of written materials to elicit meaning, identify patterns, and generate analytical insights relevant to the research focus (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is particularly suitable for evaluating textbooks, as they represent official curricular artifacts that embody instructional goals, pedagogical priorities, and learning expectations.

1. Object of the Study

The object of this study is the Indonesian ELT textbook *Bahasa Inggris: English untuk SMA/MA Kelas XI*, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022. The textbook is designed for Grade XI students (Phase F) under the Merdeka Curriculum and targets learners at the CEFR B1 (intermediate) level. It consists of five thematic units addressing topics such as digital literacy, environmental awareness, health, national identity, and financial literacy. Each unit systematically includes six language-skill lessons: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Viewing,

Writing, and Presenting.

This textbook was selected because it is a nationally prescribed material currently implemented in Indonesian senior high schools, making it a relevant case for examining the pedagogical implications of centralized ELT materials in an EFL context.

2. Evaluation Framework

The primary analytical framework guiding this study is Cunninghamsworth's (1995) textbook evaluation framework. This framework was selected because it offers comprehensive and pedagogically grounded criteria for evaluating ELT textbooks in relation to learners' needs, curriculum objectives, language content, skills development, and methodological suitability. Importantly, Cunninghamsworth conceptualizes textbooks as pedagogical resources rather than prescriptive instructional scripts, emphasizing their role in supporting teachers' professional judgment.

Cunninghamsworth's criteria were operationalized into an evaluation checklist encompassing five dimensions:

- 1) aims and approaches,
- 2) design and organization,
- 3) language content,
- 4) skills development, and
- 5) topics and methodology.

The complete checklist is provided in Appendix A.

To support a more nuanced interpretation of task quality, Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) was employed as a complementary analytical tool to classify the cognitive demands of textbook tasks into lower-order and higher-order thinking skills. In addition, Tomlinson's (2013, 2023) principles of meaningful learning were used to interpret learner engagement, authenticity, and pedagogical flexibility. While these perspectives inform the analysis, Cunninghamsworth's framework remains the primary evaluative structure.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through systematic examination of all units, lessons, learning objectives, and instructional tasks presented in both the student book and the accompanying

teacher guide. Each task was coded according to the five dimensions of Cummingsworth's framework and subsequently classified based on its cognitive demand using Bloom's taxonomy.

The analysis followed an iterative thematic coding process to identify recurring patterns related to curriculum alignment, task design, skill integration, and pedagogical implications. To enhance analytical transparency and credibility, all interpretations were grounded in explicit textual evidence drawn from task instructions, learning objectives, and sample activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Curriculum Alignment and Learning Objectives

This section presents the results of the textbook evaluation based on Cummingsworth's (1995) framework. The analysis focuses on the alignment between textbook aims and curriculum objectives, task design, language content, skills development, and the extent to which learning activities support meaningful learning and critical thinking. Table 1 summarizes the evaluation results and provides representative textual evidence from *English for Change*.

Evaluation Criteria	Indicators	Textual Evidence from English for Change	Evaluation
Aims and Approaches	Alignment with curriculum objectives	Unit learning objectives explicitly state communicative goals, e.g., <i>"Students are able to express opinions and give reasons in spoken and written forms"</i> (Unit 1, Speaking Lesson).	Strong
	Communicative orientation	Tasks emphasize functional language use, such as role-play and short presentations (<i>"Work in pairs and practice the dialogue"</i> – Unit 1).	Adequate
Design and Organization	Logical sequencing of lessons	Each unit follows a consistent sequence: Listening → Speaking → Reading → Viewing → Writing → Presenting.	Well-organized

	Task progression	<p>Writing lessons typically move from guided practice to independent production, e.g., <i>“Complete the outline before writing your own text”</i> (Unit 3, Writing).</p>	Adequate
Language Content	Level appropriateness (B1)	<p>Grammar focus includes intermediate structures such as adjective phrases and procedural verbs (<i>“Use appropriate action verbs in procedural texts”</i> – Unit 5).</p>	Appropriate
	Contextualized language use	<p>Grammar and vocabulary are embedded in thematic texts, e.g., procedure texts on personal money management (Unit 5, Reading).</p>	Contextualized
Skills Development	Coverage of four/six skills	<p>All units include explicit sections for Listening, Speaking, Reading, Viewing, Writing, and Presenting.</p>	Balanced

	Skill integration	Skills are taught sequentially rather than integratively; most tasks focus on a single skill per lesson.	Limited
Topics and Methodology	Relevance to learners' lives	Topics address real-life issues such as digital identity, environment, and health (<i>"Digital Literacies and My Identities"</i> – Unit 1).	Highly relevant
	Learner engagement	Reflection tasks encourage personal response, e.g., <i>"What have you learned so far?"</i> sections in each unit.	Engaging
Critical Thinking	Cognitive challenge in tasks	Most comprehension tasks use prompts such as <i>"Answer the questions based on the text"</i> or <i>"Choose the correct answer"</i> , indicating LOTS dominance.	Limited
	Opportunities for HOTS	A small number of tasks require creation, e.g., <i>"Create your own</i>	Partially achieved

		<i>dialogue and present it to the class" (Unit 2, Presenting).</i>	
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Table 1 presents the results of the textbook evaluation based on Cummingsworth's (1995) criteria, supported by representative textual evidence from English for Change.

The findings indicate that *English for Change* demonstrates strong alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum at the level of stated learning objectives. Each unit clearly articulates learning goals derived from the national *Capaian Pembelajaran* for Phase F, with an emphasis on communicative competence and functional language use at the B1 level. This alignment reflects Cummingsworth's (1995) assertion that effective textbooks should explicitly represent syllabus aims.

However, alignment at the level of stated objectives does not consistently translate into pedagogical realization. While communicative goals are frequently articulated, not all instructional tasks fully operationalize these objectives. This suggests that the textbook is curriculum-aligned in design but partially constrained in implementation, a pattern also reported in previous ELT textbook evaluations (Richards, 2014; Tomlinson, 2013).

2. Task Design and Cognitive Demand

Analysis of task design reveals a clear predominance of lower-order thinking skills. The majority of tasks require learners to recall information, identify textual details, or apply grammatical structures in controlled contexts. Tasks that require learners to analyze data, evaluate perspectives, or create original texts occur less frequently and are unevenly distributed across units.

From the perspective of Cummingsworth's framework, this imbalance suggests that the textbook does not fully capitalize on learners' cognitive potential at the B1 level. While gradual scaffolding is pedagogically appropriate, an overreliance on lower-order tasks may restrict opportunities for deeper cognitive engagement. This finding is consistent

with international research indicating that ELT textbooks often underrepresent higher-order thinking processes despite curriculum expectations (Littlejohn, 2011; Nation & Macalister, 2010).

3. Skills Coverage and Pedagogical Organization

English for Change provides systematic and balanced coverage of listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting skills. The consistent lesson structure across units enhances instructional clarity and supports classroom organization. This coherence aligns well with Cummingsworth's criteria for effective design and organization.

Nevertheless, skills are generally presented in isolation, with limited opportunities for explicit integration across lessons. Although reflective sections aim to consolidate learning, integrated-skills tasks remain relatively scarce. According to Tomlinson (2013), meaningful language learning is more likely to occur when learners engage in tasks that reflect authentic communication, which typically involves the simultaneous use of multiple language skills.

4. Critical Thinking and Meaningful Learning

Although *English for Change* explicitly promotes critical thinking as part of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, the realization of this goal remains limited at the task level. Reflective activities encourage learner engagement; however, most tasks do not consistently require learners to justify their opinions, evaluate information, or generate alternative perspectives. Consequently, critical thinking is positioned more as an intended outcome than as a systematically practiced competence.

This finding highlights the importance of integrating critical thinking directly into task design, rather than treating it as an implicit learning outcome. In Tomlinson's (2023) terms, the textbook supports learner engagement but does not consistently ensure cognitive depth.

5. Teacher Mediation and Pedagogical Flexibility

The analysis further indicates that the pedagogical effectiveness of *English for Change* depends significantly on teacher mediation. While the textbook provides a structured and curriculum-aligned foundation, its limitations in task

complexity and skill integration necessitate active adaptation by teachers. This supports Cunningham's (1995) view that textbooks should function as flexible pedagogical resources rather than rigid instructional scripts.

In practice, teachers can enhance the textbook's pedagogical value by extending lower-order tasks into higher-order ones, integrating skills across lessons, and contextualizing activities based on learners' needs. These adaptations position teachers as curriculum interpreters, highlighting the central role of professional judgment in effective textbook use.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that systematic evaluation of ELT textbooks requires more than surface-level description of content. Using Cunningham's (1995) framework as the primary analytical lens, supported by Bloom's revised taxonomy and principles of meaningful learning, the study shows that *English for Change* is strongly aligned with curriculum objectives but only partially effective in realizing its pedagogical intentions.

While the textbook offers coherent organization, relevant themes, and comprehensive skills coverage, its task design is dominated by lower-order cognitive demands and limited skill integration. As a result, the development of critical thinking relies heavily on teacher mediation rather than being consistently embedded in textbook tasks.

These findings suggest that ELT textbook evaluation should consider not only curriculum alignment but also how instructional tasks function pedagogically in classroom practice. By foregrounding teacher mediation and task realization, this study makes a significant contribution to the research on ELT materials. It offers practical insights for teachers, material developers, and policymakers seeking to enhance the quality and pedagogical effectiveness of ELT textbooks in EFL contexts.

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