



UIN IMAM BONJOL
PADANG

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background Of The Study

In the 21st century, the mastery of the English language has shifted from being a mere competitive advantage to a fundamental necessity. As the global lingua franca, English serves as the primary medium for academic, professional, and cross-cultural discourse. In Indonesia, the awareness of this competency is reflected in the central position of the English language within the national education curriculum. English language learning aims to equip learners with four integrated skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Among these four skills, reading holds a crucial role as the main gateway to language acquisition and knowledge. Reading is not merely a mechanical process of translating written symbols into sounds, but a complex cognitive process involving the interaction between the text, the reader's prior knowledge, and the context (Grabe, 2009). Schema Theory, popularized by Carrell & Eisterhold (1983), posits that a reader's comprehension is highly dependent on their ability to activate relevant background knowledge related to the text's content. Furthermore, according to Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, exposure to "comprehensible input" through reading is one of the most effective ways to naturally acquire a second language. Thus, the reading materials presented in the learning process play a vital role in the success of learners.

Within the formal education system in Indonesia, textbooks serve as one of the most dominant pedagogical instruments. Hutchinson and Torres

(1994) refer to textbooks as "agents of change" that can either drive innovation or constrain teaching practices in the classroom. Textbooks not only present the syllabus and teaching materials but also often serve as a methodological guide for teachers (Richards, 2017). With the rollout of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Merdeka Curriculum), a paradigm shift has occurred, demanding more flexible, contextual, and learner-centered teaching materials. To support this transition, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology published the textbook "English for Nusantara" for SMP/MTs Grade VIII. This book, published in 2022, is designed to implement the Phase D Learning Outcomes by adopting a Genre-Based Approach and integrating the development of language skills in a unified manner. Given the strategic role of textbooks, evaluating their quality is a crucial step.

An effective textbook must meet a series of well-tested criteria. Alan Cunningsworth (1995), in his seminal work, provides a comprehensive framework for textbook evaluation. These criteria include the alignment of the book's objectives with students' needs, the design and organization of materials, the quality of linguistic content (including reading texts and tasks), and socio-cultural relevance. In the context of reading skills, these criteria can be expanded to include principles such as text authenticity (the extent to which a text reflects real-world language use), variation in text genres, and the availability of systematic reading stages: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading (Harmer, 2007).

The "English for Nusantara" textbook for Grade VIII demonstrates an effort to apply these principles. For example, the "Say What You Know" section at the beginning of each unit can be seen as a pre-reading activity aimed at activating learners' schemata. Additionally, the book presents various text types, such as narrative and recount, which is in line with the genre-based approach. However, questions arise: To what extent are these principles applied consistently and effectively throughout the book? Do the provided tasks genuinely promote the development of critical reading comprehension, or are they limited to literal understanding? And how does the overall alignment of these reading components hold up when viewed through a holistic evaluative lens like Cunningsworth's guidelines?

Although "English for Nusantara" has been widely distributed and used as the primary textbook, a systematic academic analysis of its reading skill development components, particularly using a proven evaluation framework like Cunningsworth's, remains limited. This gap is what motivates the researcher to conduct an in-depth study. This research is expected to provide an objective overview of the textbook's strengths and weaknesses in facilitating reading skills, so that the results can serve as valuable feedback for teachers, curriculum developers, and textbook authors for future improvements. Therefore, the researcher proposes a study entitled: "**Analysis of Reading Skill Development in the 'English for Nusantara' Textbook for Grade VIII Using Cunningsworth's Guidelines.**"

B. Problem Identification

Based on the background of the study described above, several problems relevant for further investigation can be identified. This problem identification covers the gap between the ideal conditions for providing reading teaching materials and the actual conditions found in the textbook under study. The problems are as follows:

1. The crucial role of reading skills as a foundation for English language acquisition demands teaching materials that are not only aligned with the curriculum but also pedagogically effective. However, the effectiveness and quality of the reading skill development components in the "English for Nusantara" textbook, as a relatively new product, have not been empirically tested through in-depth academic analysis.
2. A good textbook should ideally adopt modern reading teaching principles, such as the use of authentic texts, the application of reading stages (pre-, while-, and post-reading), and the development of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies. It is not yet known to what extent "English for Nusantara" for Grade VIII consistently and systematically implements these principles in each unit.
3. Questions arise regarding the quality of the reading texts used in this book. An analysis is needed to determine whether the texts have an appropriate readability level for Grade VIII learners, present adequate genre variation, and feature topics that are relevant and engaging for adolescents to foster reading interest.

4. The quality of reading teaching material is also determined by its accompanying tasks. There is a need to analyze whether the comprehension tasks in "English for Nusantara" are capable of promoting Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), such as making inferences, analyzing, and evaluating, or if they tend to be dominated by Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) at the literal comprehension level.
5. Although this textbook is an official government publication, a systematic evaluation from independent academics is important. To date, not many studies have been found that specifically use a comprehensive and internationally recognized evaluation framework, such as Cunningsworth's (1995) guidelines, to analyze the reading skill components of the "English for Nusantara" textbook.
6. Teachers, as the primary users of textbooks in the field, require evidence-based guidance on the strengths and potential weaknesses of the materials they use. Without a thorough analysis, teachers may find it difficult to adapt, supplement, or exploit the materials to their fullest potential to meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

The identification of the problems above confirms the urgency of conducting a critical and systematic analysis of the reading skill components in the "English for Nusantara" Grade VIII textbook, which will be the main focus of this research.

C. Focus Of the Study

To maintain the focus and depth of the analysis, and to ensure alignment with the stated objectives, this study is defined by several clear limitations. Understanding these boundaries is crucial for accurately interpreting the scope of the research findings. The limitations of this study are as follows:

1. This analysis focuses only on the student book ("English for Nusantara") and The study does not extend to an analysis of the accompanying Teacher's Guide. This delimitation is established with the awareness that the Teacher's Guide may contain methodological suggestions or alternative activities oriented towards Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), which might not be explicitly written in the student's book.
2. This study is a document analysis that assesses the "potential curriculum" (what is written in the book), not the "enacted curriculum". This research did not observe how teachers and students actually interact with this book in the classroom.
3. The analysis was conducted by a single researcher. Despite using a systematic framework, an element of subjectivity in data interpretation cannot be entirely eliminated. These limitations can serve as starting points for future research.

D. Research Questions

Based on the description above, the research questions in this study are:

1. What are the characteristics of the reading materials presented in the "English for Nusantara" textbook for Grade VIII?
2. How are the various reading activities and tasks designed to develop learners' comprehension in the textbook?
3. How suitable are the reading skill development components in the "English for Nusantara" Grade VIII textbook with the principles of good textbook evaluation according to Cunningsworth's (1995) framework?

By answering these three research questions, this study is expected to produce a comprehensive and critical analysis of the quality of the reading skill components in the "English for Nusantara" textbook for Grade VIII.

E. Purpose of the Research

In line with the formulated research questions, this study is conducted to achieve several specific and measurable objectives. These objectives will guide the data collection and analysis process. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To describe the characteristics of the reading materials presented in the "English for Nusantara" textbook for Grade VIII. This description includes the identification and analysis of:
 - a. The types of text genres used.
 - b. The relevance and appeal of the reading topics for learners.
 - c. The authenticity level of the presented reading texts.

2. To identify and analyze the variety of reading activities and tasks designed in the textbook. This analysis focuses on determining:
 - a. The application of the reading activity stage structure (pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading).
 - b. The cognitive level of the comprehension questions accompanying the texts (whether they are literal, inferential, or evaluative).
 - c. The scope of reading sub-skills trained through the provided tasks.
3. To evaluate the suitability of the reading skill development components (including objectives, materials, and tasks) in the "English for Nusantara" Grade VIII textbook against the criteria for good textbook evaluation as outlined in Cunningsworth's (1995) guidelines.

Through the achievement of these objectives, this research is expected to provide a complete and in-depth picture of the quality and effectiveness of the "English for Nusantara" Grade VIII textbook, particularly in its role of facilitating the development of learners' reading skills.

F. Significance Of The Study

This research on the analysis of reading skill development in the "English for Nusantara" Grade VIII textbook is expected to provide significant contributions, both theoretically to the field of English language teaching and practically to various parties involved in the education process.

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to provide the following benefits:

a. Enriching the Body of Research on Teaching Material Evaluation

This research will add to the scholarly literature in the field of materials evaluation, particularly the analysis of English textbooks in the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation in Indonesia.

b. Providing Empirical Application of a Theoretical Framework

This study presents a case study of the application of Cunningsworth's (1995) evaluation framework to a contemporary government-published textbook. The results can serve as empirical evidence of the framework's relevance and applicability for analyzing modern teaching materials.

c. Serving as an Academic Reference

This analysis can be used as a reference source and a starting point for future researchers interested in conducting similar studies or follow-up research, for instance, by analyzing other skill components (writing, speaking, listening) or comparing this textbook with others.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to be beneficial for several parties, including:

a. For English Teachers:

- 1) Providing a deep and critical understanding of the strengths and potential weaknesses of the reading components in the "English for Nusantara" Grade VIII textbook.

- 2) Serving as a basis for teachers to make appropriate pedagogical decisions, such as when to adapt, supplement, or even omit material to suit the needs and ability levels of learners in their classrooms.
- 3) Serving as a model for teachers to be able to conduct self-evaluations of textbooks or other teaching materials they use.

b. For Textbook Authors and Publishers:

- 1) The research findings can function as constructive, research-based input that can be used by the author team and publisher (in this case, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology) for the revision and improvement of future editions of the "English for Nusantara" textbook.

c. For Learners:

- 1) Indirectly, learners will be the primary beneficiaries of this research. Teachers who have a better understanding of the materials they teach will be able to design more effective, engaging, and relevant learning processes, which will ultimately have a positive impact on improving learners' reading skills.

d. For Curriculum Developers:

- 1) Providing feedback on the extent to which an officially designed textbook has successfully translated the vision and goals of the curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) into practical teaching materials at the classroom level.

G. Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misinterpretation and to provide a uniform understanding of the key terms used in this study, the following operational definitions are presented:

1. Analysis

In this study, analysis refers to a series of systematic activities that include the identification, description, and evaluation of components related to the development of reading skills. This process not only describes what is in the textbook but also provides a critical assessment of the quality and suitability of these components based on a predetermined evaluation framework, namely Cunningsworth's (1995) guidelines.

2. Reading Skill Development

In the context of this research, (Grabe, 2009) reading skill is defined as the learners' ability to understand, interpret, and evaluate the meaning of written text in English. This skill encompasses various sub-skills such as identifying the main idea, finding specific information through skimming and scanning techniques, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary and sentence structures within the context presented in the "English for Nusantara" textbook.

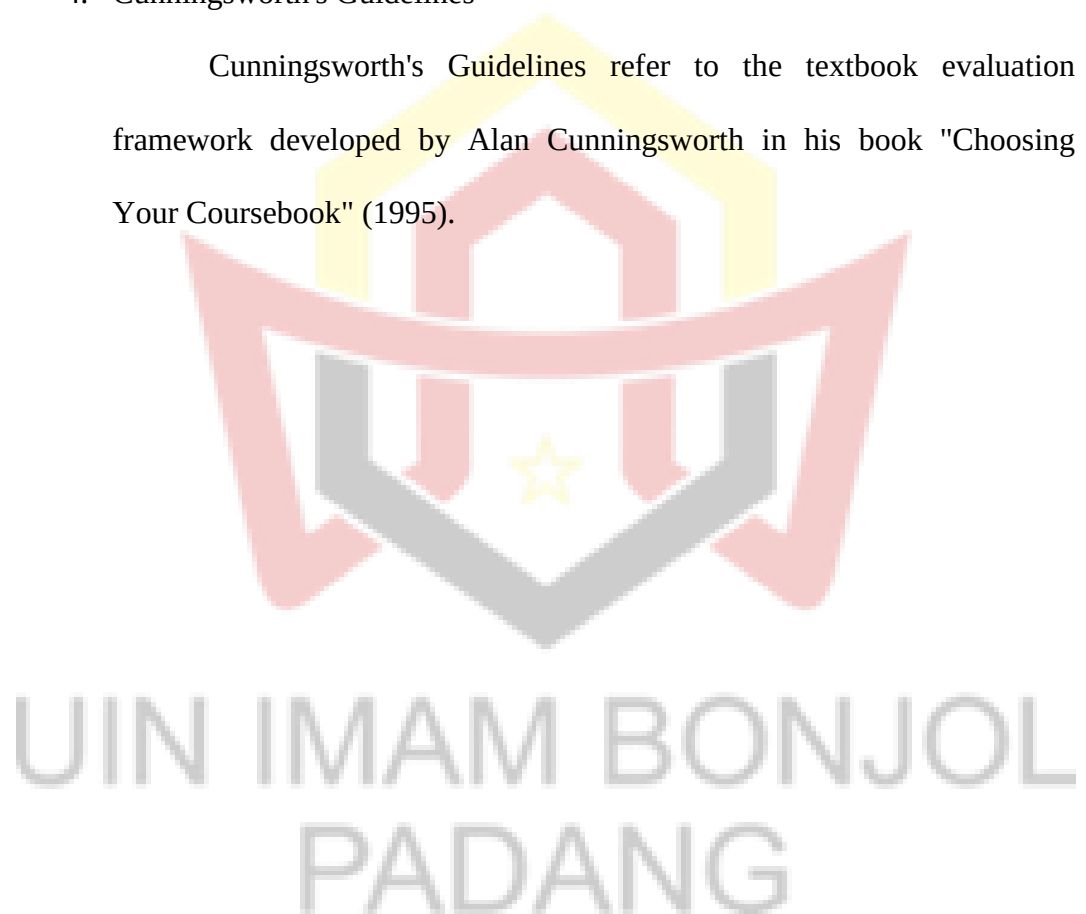
3. "English for Nusantara" Textbook.

The "English for Nusantara" textbook, which is the object of this study, is the main English language textbook for Grade VIII SMP/MTs students, compiled by Ika Lestari Damayanti, et al., and published by the

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022. This book is specifically designed to support the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at Phase D and serves as the primary source of learning materials and activities in the classroom.

4. Cunningsworth's Guidelines

Cunningsworth's Guidelines refer to the textbook evaluation framework developed by Alan Cunningsworth in his book "Choosing Your Coursebook" (1995).





UIN IMAM BONJOL
PADANG