

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background**

The Merdeka Curriculum is one of the Indonesian government's efforts to reform the national education system by focusing on more flexible and student-centered learning. One key component of this curriculum is the textbook used as a teaching aid. In English language teaching, textbooks play a crucial role in providing linguistic input and facilitating students' language skill acquisition. High-quality textbooks should align with the curriculum's objectives and assist students in developing the necessary language competencies to compete globally. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the content of the English textbooks used in the Merdeka Curriculum to ensure that the material presented is in line with the curriculum's goals in terms of content, the skills taught, and the values instilled. However, there are concerns about the extent to which the English textbooks used in the Merdeka Curriculum truly support the achievement of the expected competencies.

Education is always related to the curriculum. The curriculum is a tool used to achieve educational goals, so it can be said that the curriculum serves as a reference for the implementation of education in Indonesia (Angga et al., 2022). This statement indicates that the curriculum should not be viewed merely as a document but as a tool and reference for educators to carry out the best teaching and learning processes to achieve educational goals. The foundation or philosophy of education is reflected in the curriculum, which illustrates the educational objectives to be achieved. The curriculum is designed to facilitate the educational process. However, in reality, the curriculum often changes, leading to confusion and hindering the educational process.

The term "curriculum" originates from the Latin word *currere*, which means "to run or to seek." The word *curriculum* later came to mean a race track, journey, or path traveled by horse-drawn carriages. In practice, the curriculum is understood as

a pathway or track leading to a final goal. In line with this, Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021 on National Education Standards states the obligation to develop a diverse curriculum based on regional characteristics, educational institutions, and students. The development of a school-based curriculum reflects the autonomy of educational institutions, providing them with the widest possible opportunity to design and implement their operational curriculum according to their specific needs and characteristics.

Textbooks play a crucial role in the teaching and learning process. They are commonly used as key resources for teachers to instruct and for students to learn. Teachers often rely on textbooks as the primary instructional material to ensure effective teaching. Additionally, textbooks help students comprehend the material provided by the teacher. In some cases, textbooks serve as a foundation for language input and language practice within the classroom. In other situations, they offer a clear framework that helps both teachers and students understand the direction of the lesson and what will be covered next. Moreover, textbooks provide ready-made texts and tasks appropriate to students' levels, saving teachers valuable preparation time. For these reasons, it is not surprising that most teachers utilize textbooks in their classes.

Various publishers provide textbooks in different styles and formats, developed based on the curriculum implemented in Indonesia. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia also offers an English textbook titled "Interactive English." Given the diversity of available textbooks, it is essential for teachers to choose ones that are appropriate for their students. Despite the many textbooks on the market, teachers must select the most suitable one for their classroom. As Cunningsworth (1995, p. 5) points out, "no course book designed for a general market will be absolutely ideal for a particular group of students." Therefore, conducting a textbook analysis is necessary to ensure that the chosen textbook is appropriate for the students.

Additionally, for students to grasp the material effectively, they need a textbook of good quality. In selecting a quality textbook, teachers should consider several factors. The National Education Standards Agency (BSNP) has also established qualifications for textbook evaluation. First, the language used should be natural, engaging, and suitable for the students. The textbook should also provide vocabulary, sentences, paragraphs, and discourse that are appropriate for the students' level. Byrd (2001) states that a textbook must align with the curriculum, the teacher, and the students. In other words, the textbook should reflect the needs of the curriculum, teacher, and students to ensure that the learning objectives are achieved. Therefore, it is essential to confirm that the textbook fits with the curriculum, teacher, and students.

Several experts have proposed various criteria that can be used for textbook analysis. These criteria have been introduced by numerous experts in EFL textbook evaluation, such as Sheldon, Grant, Cunningsworth, and Harmer. Each expert has their own perspective on what constitutes appropriate criteria for textbook evaluation. Cunningsworth (1995) suggests that it is best for a textbook evaluator to determine their own priorities and create a checklist based on certain criteria mentioned in existing literature, while also adding other criteria based on personal priorities. In line with Cunningsworth's statement, textbook evaluation criteria from experts such as Cunningsworth, Byrd, and BSNP were adapted to analyse "Interactive English." These criteria focus on four main aspects: (1) Objectives, (2) Content, (3) Language Skills, and (4) Design.

In this research, the researcher uses a descriptive qualitative research. Boglar and Taylor (1975) in Moleong (2002:3) states that qualitative research is a research that produce descriptive data as the result in the form of written and oral word from observed people and behavior.

Philosophy plays an important role in providing direction for English language learning (Pérez-Escobar & Sarikaya, 2024). One of the main contributions of philosophy in the context of education is establishing guidelines for the process and

objectives of learning. Therefore, the planning of language learning activities needs to be carefully designed and aligned with the applicable curriculum. There is a strong correlation between planning and implementation, which must be in harmony with the intended goals. Philosophy serves as a discipline that systematically analyzes knowledge, from the planning stage to the achievement of objectives. Thus, both teachers in designing English learning activities and students in carrying out learning activities continuously integrate philosophical aspects. In the process of communication using English, both teachers and students also implement principles derived from philosophical thought.

The learning of English can be understood as an aspect of ontology in philosophy. Zengeya & Vincent Fonou-Dombeu (2024) explain that ontology is the study that examines the nature of the existence of a field of knowledge. In the context of English language learning, it is essential for educators to understand the essence of teaching English materials to students so that they can effectively relate the material to students' future needs. Moreover, a deep understanding of the essence of a subject will facilitate students in completing assigned tasks, as they can imagine relevant examples from everyday life.

Humans can learn anything, and language is one of many subjects that can be learned. There are many ways on how to learn a language. It can be done through a direct life experience or it could be learned from materials such as books, videos, or even videogames (Deris & Shukor, 2019; Nigar, 2020). However, in the context of formal education where there is a role of student and teacher, there would be a structured education system that runs from an early age students such as primary school to university, or specialized programs for vocational, technical, and professional training. Formal education frequently includes an evaluation of the students' acquired knowledge or skills and is built around a program or curriculum that can be more or less easily customized to fit each student's needs and preferences. Recognition and certification are typically the results of formal education such as in the school system of classroom learning.

In this formal education context, where a student must attend school in order to get a degree, textbooks are mostly used to teach as aids. A textbook is one of the most prevalent tools in the classroom. A teacher usually uses it because of its benefits for the lesson as well as an additional resource in learning material, includes advice on how to complement the textbook with extra exercise, use it as a guide for organizing the teaching frameworks, and more (Huang, 2019; Syafiqah Yaccob & Md Yunus, 2019). The value of textbook's resources will be especially great for teachers.

A textbook is a compilation of facts, ideas, and rules related to a particular subject or course (Georgievna, 2020). It's typically prepared by one or more professors, teachers, or education specialists who are experts in their respective fields. The majority of textbooks come with teacher guides that provide more resources, suggestions, and activities to be used all academic year long. Textbooks have widely different effects on students' academic performance, which appear to be cumulative over time (Van Den Ham, & Heinze, 2018). Richards (2019) agrees that textbooks are an important part of language programs that serve as the main source of language information (language input) for language acquisition as well as for English practice in the classroom.

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) found that a textbook has a significant and advantageous role to play in the daily task of teaching and learning English, and its significance increases during times of transition. Viewing textbook development and teacher education as complementary and mutually helpful is essential as a part of language education analysis. Therefore there is always an adjustment in a textbook either from its contents, lesson, or learning materials. Nowadays, there are many varieties of textbooks for one very specific learning lesson such as English textbooks for specific grades in formal education.

Considering many varieties of English textbooks, in formal education, there is a collection of lessons and assessments that will be taught in an educational institution by a teacher as well as the totality of experiences a student will have when taught in an institution by a teacher which refers as curriculum (Toombs &

Tierney, 1993). A curriculum is crucial because it imposes some structure on the material that is taught in a school. The ability to transfer between institutions and advance to earn further qualifications is made possible by the existence of a curriculum, such as when students want to upgrade their education between the primary and secondary levels. It implies that educational institutions are standardized and that students will not suffer or miss out on instruction just because they transfer between institutions. In other words, educational textbooks should be equally standardized according to each nation's goal (Matters, 2014).

In this current situation, The Merdeka Curriculum is the latest Indonesian curriculum which is still optional in the formal education school system. Nadiem, Indonesia Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, admitted that the Merdeka curriculum would be implemented in the new 2022/2023 school year (Qomariyah & Maghfiroh, 2022). One of the foundations of this curriculum is the implementation of spaces allocated for regional authorities to include local content based on local characteristics and wisdom in the region. This curriculum education must rooted in the nation's culture. Local wisdom depicted here is related to one of the characteristics in the profile of Pancasila, namely global diversity. The goal is to elevate Indonesian locality into an international-scale competitiveness. This means that all cultural conditions and regional characteristics have quite a large scoop in the curriculum. Therefore the textbook based on this curriculum should be accompanied by Indonesia's local culture.

The English textbook *Bahasa Inggris "When English Rings a Bell"* is an English textbook published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It consists of two kinds of book, Students Book and Teacher Boook. Both of them are compiled using scientific approach by one team. It is published by Bookkeeping and Curriculum Center of Minidtry Education and Culture of Indonesia.

In the Teacher Book, there are procedures of using the Student Book completely from how to use up to how to asses the students` ability. The Student Book is provided based on themes and it is begun by showing the aims of studying

each chapter based on the basic competences. Each material is compiled based on scientific approach that consists some steps, observing and questioning, collecting information, associating, and communicating. Textbooks are one of the factors in the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum in schools (Dewi & Alam, 2022). The government of Indonesia has emphasized the importance of textbooks in the Regulation of Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Republic of Indonesia number 25 of 2022, about educational book assessment. Stipulates that (a) Textbooks are books that are prepared for textbooks are books prepared for learning based on the National Education Standards; and (b) The applicable curriculum and main textbooks are textbooks that must be used in learning based on the applicable curriculum and provided by the central government free of charge. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment, Center for Bookkeeping publishes English textbooks to support learning in the *Merdeka* curriculum.

After obtaining the data, the researcher processes it by classifying and comparing it with existing theories. The results of this data processing are presented as research findings in a narrative form. From these findings, the researcher can draw several conclusions, which can then be used as recommendations for relevant parties.

The participants or data sources in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The determination of data sources through purposive sampling was carried out by selecting interviewees based on specific considerations and objectives (Sugiyono, 2012). Based on the research problem regarding the implementation of differentiated learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English subjects, the participants or data sources in this study are the principal, the vice principal, and teachers.

The data collection techniques used in this study were interviews and document studies. According to Arikunto (2013), an interview is a method used to obtain responses from respondents through question-and-answer interactions. The key

emphasis in this interview technique is that the researcher can explore deeper information relevant to the required data. In this study, the interview method was used to obtain data by exploring information, seeking explanations, or clarifications from informants regarding the implementation of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum for English subjects. The type of interview used in this study was a structured interview, using an interview guide consisting of pre-prepared questions by the researcher.

Meanwhile, document studies were conducted to complement the research data by collecting documents from reliable sources. The types of documents used may include written materials, images, or monumental works of an individual (Sugiyono, 2016). In this study, the supporting documents obtained by the researcher included teachers' teaching administration records.

Additionally, the researcher used triangulation techniques, which involve combining various data collection techniques and sources (Sugiyono, 2016). In this study, the researcher employed source triangulation by gathering data from one informant to another who was also involved in the implementation of differentiated learning.

After collecting field data, data analysis was conducted to identify significant aspects, study them, and understand them to answer the research questions and formulate research conclusions. The data analysis technique used in this study was the Miles & Huberman model (Sugiyono, 2016), which includes: Data Reduction, which involves summarizing data and selecting key and important aspects; Data Display, which presents the data in a brief narrative description; and Conclusion Drawing, which synthesizes the research findings to answer the research questions, providing implications and recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as both the instrument and the primary data collector, which is one of its characteristics. Besides individuals, other instruments (such as questionnaires, interview guides, observation guidelines, etc.)

can also be used, but their role is limited to assisting the researcher in their work as the main research instrument.

### **1.1 Research Problem(s)**

1. How well do the English textbooks used in the Merdeka Curriculum align with the curriculum's objectives, particularly in terms of language skill development and critical thinking?
2. To what extent do the textbooks represent cultural diversity and promote intercultural understanding as emphasized by the Merdeka Curriculum?

### **1.2 Aim(s) of Study**

1. **To evaluate how well the English textbooks used in the Merdeka Curriculum align with the curriculum's objectives, particularly in terms of language skill development and critical thinking.**
2. To assess the extent to which the textbooks represent cultural diversity and promote intercultural understanding as emphasized by the Merdeka Curriculum.

### **1.3 Significance of Study**

#### **1.3.1 Implication**

The findings of this study have substantial implications for the evaluation and development of English textbooks within the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly when considered through the lens of established educational theories. For instance, referring to **Bloom's Taxonomy**, which emphasizes the development of higher-order thinking skills, the study's assessment of how well textbooks support critical thinking provides insights into whether these educational materials effectively promote cognitive skills beyond basic knowledge recall. If the textbooks fall short in fostering critical analysis and evaluation, this highlights a need for revisions to better align with Bloom's higher-order levels of cognitive objectives. Additionally,

drawing from **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**, which highlights the importance of understanding students' cultural contexts, the study's evaluation of cultural representation within textbooks can inform efforts to ensure that educational materials reflect diverse cultural backgrounds and contribute to a more inclusive learning environment. This approach underscores the necessity for textbooks to not only meet academic objectives but also resonate with the varied cultural experiences of students, thereby enhancing their overall educational experience.

### **1.3.2 Application**

The results of this study can be directly applied to improve the design and implementation of English textbooks within the Merdeka Curriculum. For educators, the study's findings offer practical recommendations for selecting and using textbooks that effectively support language skill development and critical thinking, as well as for integrating cultural diversity and intercultural understanding into classroom instruction. Curriculum developers can use the insights to revise existing textbooks or create new ones that better align with the curriculum's objectives, ensuring that educational materials are both pedagogically sound and culturally relevant. Furthermore, the study's recommendations can serve as a basis for professional development programs for teachers, helping them to better utilize textbooks and design activities that promote an inclusive and comprehensive learning experience for all students