



ANALYZING ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 2013 CURRICULUM WITH MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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Received: 2025/05/09

Accepted: 2025/09/07

Available Online: 2025/12/30

Abstract

This study compares English learning approach in the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum in Vocational High Schools (SMK). The purpose of this study is to identify the differences in the learning themes and teaching approaches used by the two curricula. The results of the analysis show that the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes more on real experience-based learning and contextual relevance, with themes that integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. This is in line with the theory of constructivist learning and inquiry-based learning. In contrast, the 2013 curriculum focuses more on developing basic language skills through structured exercises, such as introducing oneself, understanding descriptions of tourist attractions, and telling history and folklore, which reflects more behaviouristic learning theories. This study concludes that the Merdeka Curriculum is more appropriate for teaching English in vocational schools because it supports the development of 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Meanwhile, the 2013 Curriculum still has an advantage in building the basics of language skills needed by students. Therefore, it is recommended that elements of practical and collaborative experience be integrated into the 2013 curriculum to create learning that is more holistic and relevant to global challenges.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, 2013 Curriculum, English Learning, Experiential Learning

Introduction

Education in Indonesia continues to undergo updates and developments, which is reflected in curriculum changes as an effort to improve the quality of education. The 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum are two curriculum frameworks that have different characteristics in the preparation of learning materials,

approaches, and learning focuses. The 2013 curriculum emphasizes a competency-based approach and integration between knowledge, attitudes, and skills, with the aim of shaping students who have 21st century abilities (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 2013). Meanwhile, the latest Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility to teachers in managing learning, prioritizing learning that is more adaptive and in accordance with the individual needs of students, and supports the optimal development of their potential (*Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset*, 2022).

Senior High School (SMA) and Vocational High School (SMK) are two types of secondary education in Indonesia that have different characteristics and learning objectives. The main difference between high school and vocational school lies in the curriculum orientation, learning approach, and graduation prospects. The high school curriculum is more academic with the main goal of preparing students to continue their education to the university level. The focus of learning in high school is on mastering general knowledge and developing critical thinking skills. The subjects taught cover various fields of science such as mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, languages, and art. This approach allows students to have a strong academic foundation, so that they are ready to take part in the college entrance selection and pursue further education. In contrast, the vocational curriculum is more oriented towards practical and vocational skills, with the main goal of preparing students to immediately enter the workforce after graduation. The curriculum at vocational schools includes 60-70% practical materials and special skills, as well as 30-40% theory. The skills taught are diverse, such as mechanical engineering, gastronomy, accounting, and others, designed to meet the needs of industry (Nunan, 2004). These differences have an impact on the characteristics of the textbooks used, so they require comparative analysis to understand the extent to which the textbooks are in accordance with learning needs.

One of the main gaps that can be identified is the difference between the demands of the curriculum and the real conditions in the field. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide more flexibility to educators in developing teaching materials and learning methods that suit the needs of student (*Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset*, 2022). However, in the field, the implementation of this flexibility often does not work as it should due to limited infrastructure, teacher skills, and the availability of resources. For example, curriculum demands for project-based learning and an emphasis on practical skills are often not supported by adequate tools and facilities in vocational schools. This creates a gap between what is expected of students based on the curriculum and the school's ability to provide an appropriate learning environment. In addition, significant differences in teaching structure and approach between Curriculum 13 and Merdeka Curriculum also pose challenges in the effective use of textbooks. Textbooks compiled based on Curriculum 13 tend to be more theoretical and less flexible, while the Merdeka Curriculum demands a more interactive and contextual approach (*Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset*, 2022). This causes teachers to have difficulty in integrating the available teaching materials with the new demands of the Merdeka



Curriculum. Thus, the gap between the ideal curriculum design and the conditions of implementation in the field is the main challenge that needs to be overcome so that the curriculum goals, especially in vocational schools, can be optimally achieved.

From the results of initial observations, the two books English Class X (2014, Curriculum 2013) and English Class X (2022, Merdeka Curriculum) are worthy of being used as objects of comparative research because of one of the relevant and significant reasons in the context of education and curriculum development of Different Learning Approaches and Materials. The 2013 curriculum English books use a text-based approach with different types of texts such as narratives, descriptions, and procedures, which are designed to develop comprehensive language skills. Learning activities are often focused on the comprehension and production of texts, with an emphasis on the use of English as a means of communication in more traditional contexts. In contrast, Merdeka curriculum English books include more project-based activities and interactive activities, designed to foster creativity and critical thinking skills through contemporary topics such as health, sports, and the arts. This approach aims to make learning more relevant and connected to students' real lives, which is a hallmark of the Merdeka Curriculum.

As for several researchers who have researched or analyzed books, the first one is titled The Content of Mathematics Knowledge in the Junior High School Curriculum: A Comparative Study of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum (Pusporini et al., 2023) The background research of the paper focuses on the historical development and development of the nature of the curriculum in Indonesia, especially the transition from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka curriculum in the context of junior high school mathematics, The research problems are (1) to identify mathematics materials in the Merdeka curriculum and (2) to find out the difference between mathematics materials in the Merdeka curriculum and the 2013 curriculum. This research is qualitative research with a literature study approach. The data used in this study were obtained from Merdeka curriculum regulations, 2013 curriculum regulations, and identify articles from journals. Data analysis techniques refer to data reduction, data display, and data verification. The results of the study show that the mathematics material learned by students in the Merdeka curriculum is mostly the same as the 2013 curriculum, but there are differences in some materials that are not accommodated in the book. This study gives the author the idea to do the same thing but with the researcher using a different object, namely reviewing the 10th grade English textbook between the 2013 curriculum and the Merdeka curriculum (Pusporini et al., 2023).

From this study, the researcher intends to conduct the same research analyzing the textbook between the 2013 curriculum and the Merdeka curriculum, the fundamental difference is the textbook, if the above research is a mathematics book, then in this research, the textbook to be analyzed is an English book, then the second



difference is that the target class is researched above, the junior high school textbook in this study is a 10th grade vocational high school (SMK).

The second study analyzes the English textbook Work in Progress for grade 10 under the Merdeka Curriculum (Mukrim Al-Ghozali, 2023). It evaluates the organization, quality, and suitability of the material and learning experiences using McDonough and Shaw's theory, which includes external, internal, and overall evaluations. The study employs a library research design, content analysis, and descriptive qualitative approach. The findings show that the textbook aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum, covering all essential skills and multimodal texts, but the audio materials lack authenticity. Unlike this study, which focuses solely on evaluating one textbook, the research to be conducted will compare the effectiveness and suitability of textbooks from the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, analyzing differences in material quality, presentation, and competency achievement.

Furthermore, the third research entitled "An analysis of the English textbook 'Think' to the curriculum 2013" aims to evaluate the relevance of the material in the "Think" textbook with the basic competencies of the 2013 English curriculum. The study began with the question "What is the degree of suitability of the material contained in the English textbook "Think" in terms of the 2013 curriculum?". method by using qualitative research methods with content analysis design. The instrument of this research is the researcher. The data collection procedure starts from reading and then highlighting, raising, grouping, coding and tabulating. The theories used in this study are The Nature of Textbook), The Characteristics of Textbook, Advantages and Disadvantages of Textbooks, The Role of Textbooks in the Classroom, Evaluating Textbooks and the Nature of Curriculum. The data was analyzed using the procedures of data selection, data display, data interpretation and conclusion drawn. Data were evaluated using the categories of complete, slightly complete, slightly incomplete and zero. The analysis was carried out on the aspects of genre and basic competencies per unit. In the textbook, there are 12 materials that have been checked for relevance to the 2013 English curriculum. The results of the study show that the textbook only meets 10 of the 22 materials recommended in the basic competencies 3 and 4 of the 2013 English curriculum. The results of the study found that the level of suitability of the "Think" textbook was a little incomplete. Otherwise, the textbook contains material that is not recommended by the syllabus. In short, the "think" textbook is better used as an additional book in schools with the context of the 2013 curriculum (Mauliddiyah, 2021).

The research " The Comparative Analysis of English Textbooks for Vocational School: The 2013 Curriculum VS The Merdeka Curriculum" highlights significant differences between the two curricula implemented in Indonesia. The main focus of this study is to compare the quality and suitability of English textbook materials in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, in order to evaluate changes in the approach to English language teaching at the vocational school level.



Meanwhile, the research "Content Analysis of English Textbook Entitled 'Work in Progress'" only focuses on an in-depth analysis of one textbook in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum without comparing it with other curricula. Thus, this comparison includes differences in research methods and scope, where comparative research provides a broader view regarding curriculum comparison, while in-depth content analysis aims to assess the feasibility of a single textbook specifically according to certain criteria.

Although there are various studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of textbooks in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, these studies generally do not focus on the context of vocational education. Comparative analysis between textbooks in vocational schools in these two curricula is still limited, especially in terms of how each textbook supports students' understanding of vocational-specific materials. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in literature by exploring the comparison of the suitability of textbooks in vocational schools in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as their impact on the quality of learning. This study not only provides an overview of the differences in materials and approaches used, but also analyzes the pedagogical implications that may arise from the use of the two types of textbooks.

From the analysis above the researcher has two main questions in this study that will be answered through analysis and study: 1. What is the difference in the content of the Grade 10 English textbook between the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum? 2. How is the material in the Grade 10 English textbook suitable for learning needs-oriented to the mastery of language skills and competencies?

Theoretical Framework

Curriculum

Curriculum is the main reference in the educational process that determines the direction, content, and method of learning. In the context of education in Indonesia, the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum are two main policies that have different approaches and characteristics.

The 2013 curriculum emphasizes a scientific approach with integrated development of attitude, knowledge, and skill competencies. This curriculum is structured and prioritizes the achievement of Core Competencies and Basic Competencies (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Tyler, 1949). Meanwhile, the Independent Curriculum is designed to provide flexibility to educators in arranging learning. This curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, differentiation of learning, and the development of essential competencies that are tailored to the needs of students (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Marsh, 2009).



Learning Theory

The approach used in both curricula is strongly influenced by the underlying learning theory. The Merdeka curriculum tends to be based on constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of hands-on experience and contextual learning. According to Dewey (1997), learning is an active process in which students build their own understanding of real experiences. Kolb (1984) added that experience is the primary source of learning. Vygotsky (1978) also emphasized the importance of social interaction in shaping understanding.

In contrast, the 2013 Curriculum is closer to the theory of behaviorism. Skinner (1954) stated that learning is the result of reinforcement and repetition. In this context, exercises and structured tasks become the main methods for forming language skills. Slavin (2006) and Woolfolk (2010) support this approach by emphasizing the importance of stimulus-response in the learning process.

Evaluation and Analysis of Textbooks

In assessing textbooks, experts suggest that evaluations should consider the suitability of the content with the curriculum, the diversity of skills developed, the learning approach, and the design and visual presentation.

Cunningsworth (1995) emphasizes that a good textbook should be relevant to the needs of students and learning objectives. McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara (2013) introduced external and internal evaluation models for textbook analysis. Tomlinson (2011) added that textbooks should support the development of natural and communicative language.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach aims to gain a deep understanding of the subject's experience and perspective. According to (Creswell, 2014), qualitative research is used when researchers intend to explore complex social or human phenomena, which are often not quantitatively measurable. This method involves the collection of narrative data, such as in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis to uncover the perspectives and meanings that the subjects provide to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). And using the library research method. The library research method involves collecting documentary data, where researchers examine various written sources. (Zed, 2008) states that the purpose of literature research is to obtain relevant information from the existing literature, thus allowing researchers to identify gaps in previous research and develop a strong theoretical foundation for the study being conducted.

The qualitative research was chosen because it aims to analyze and compare the textbook material of English lessons in Vocational High Schools (SMK), which is prepared based on two different curriculums, namely the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. Through this method, the research can identify differences and similarities in the presentation of the material, structure, and learning components of the two curriculums. This approach allows for an in-depth

exploration of the content of textbooks as well as a critical evaluation of their quality and conformity with educational standards (Creswell, 2014).

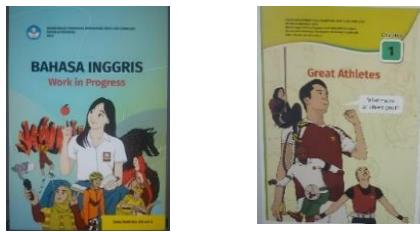
An approach that focuses on deep understanding. This study uses a qualitative approach to deeply understand the phenomena that occur in the comparison of textbooks used in two different curricula. As (Patton, 2002) argues, a qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meaning behind the data and find patterns or themes that emerge from the data. Therefore, this method is in line with the purpose of the study, which emphasizes more on the exploration of the concepts and meanings of the content of textbooks than on quantitative data measurement. By using library research, this research can analyze the material from both textbooks in depth to identify important aspects such as learning content, teaching approaches, and material preparation. This method makes it possible to outline how the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum implement the principles of English teaching in vocational schools. The theory of content analysis expressed by (Krippendorff, 2004) states that this method is effective for identifying patterns, categories, or themes in textual data, which in this context is a textbook.

In comparing, this study uses secondary data, which is in the form of textbooks and relevant curriculum documents, to make a structured comparison between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. According to (Neuman, 2014), (Gary R. Bunt, 2018) qualitative research using secondary data can help to explore and compare various existing perspectives, concepts, or theories. Through the literature study method, researchers can evaluate how the two curricula design English learning at the vocational school level and assess the effectiveness of the material presented.

The research began by collecting English textbooks used in vocational schools for the two curriculums compared, namely the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, curriculum policy documents as well as other supporting literature related to the principles of English teaching and curriculum design will also be explored. After the literature is collected, the researcher will conduct a content analysis to explore and identify the themes, structures, and components in the two textbooks. Each element is evaluated to assess its suitability with the educational objectives set forth in each curriculum.



Picture 1. 2013 Curriculum Textbook



Picture 2. Merdeka Curriculum Textbooks

Findings and Discussion

The difference of the content between the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum textbook

The results of the analysis of table 1 show that the Merdeka Curriculum focuses more on topics that integrate thematic and contextual-based learning. This can be seen from themes related to sports, art, health, and folklore. Each chapter in the Merdeka Curriculum tries to connect learning with real experiences, such as describing sports, giving tips on healthy lifestyles, discussing graffiti, and telling folklore.

Table 1. Chapters from Each Book

Chapter	Merdeka Curriculum Book	2013 Curriculum Book
1	<i>Great Athletes</i>	Talking about self
2	Sport event	Congratulating and complementing other
3	Sports and health	Expressing intonations
4	Healthy Foods	Which one is your best getaway?
5	Graffiti	Let's visit Niagara falls
6	Fractured Stories	Giving announcement
7	-	My idol
8	-	The battel of Surabaya
9	-	B.J Habibi
10	-	Cut Nyak Dien
11	-	Issum-boshi

12	-	Malin Kundang
13	-	The Wright Brother
14	-	Strong Wind
15	-	You've Got a Friend

In contrast, the 2013 Curriculum has a more structured approach, with chapters that often prioritize communication skills such as introducing yourself, congratulating yourself, practicing intonation, and making announcements. The theme raised in the 2013 Curriculum also includes descriptions of tourist attractions, history, and important figures, but it is not as intensive as the thematic integration as in the Merdeka Curriculum. The main difference that can be observed is that the Merdeka Curriculum seems to be designed to encourage creativity and project-based learning with a focus on practical application, whereas the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes developing basic skills in communicating and understanding formal texts.

The Comparisons of the material for learning needs-oriented to the mastery of language skills and competencies

Table 2 compares the learning themes or topics in the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum, highlighting different learning approaches. In Merdeka Curriculum, themes are more directed to build student competence through real experience and contextual relevance, such as describing sports, providing physical and mental health tips, and discussing art such as graffiti. These topics integrate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of students, reflecting a constructivist approach that emphasizes experiential learning according (Kolb, 1984) In contrast, the 2013 curriculum tends to focus on traditional language skills, such as introducing yourself, congratulating yourself, understanding tourist descriptions, and telling historical figures and folklore. This approach is more reflective of the theory of behaviorism, where learning is centered on the development of competencies through repetition and practice according to (Skinner, 1954).

Tabel 2. Themes Found in the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 curriculum

Topic/ Theme	The Merdeka Curriculum	The 2013 Curriculum
1	<i>Sport (chapter 1) (describing and the sports they play (physical description)</i>	Talking about self (introduction oneself, family, friends)
2	<i>Sport (chapter 2) (telling a sport event using 5 senses (qualities and characteristics)</i>	Giving Congratulating and complementing other
3	<i>Sport (chapter 3) (giving tips to have physical and mental health (life style)</i>	Talking about intonations of doing weekend/holiday/school activities
4	<i>Sport (chapter 4) (talking about healthy and less healthy food and drinks (nutrition food and drink)</i>	Understanding descriptions of ecotourism destinations and historical building and describing them
5	Arts (Chapter 5) (talking about graffiti)	Understanding descriptions of recreational places and describing them
6	Arts (chapter 6) (talking about a fractured part of story (narrative text (stories and character)	Understanding and giving announcement
7	-	Recounting an experience of meeting an idol/favourite singer
8	-	Recounting a historical even, The battel of Surabaya
9	-	Retelling about past events related to the life of prominent figures e.g. B.J Habibi

10		Retelling about past events related to the life of prominent figures e.g. Cut Nyak Dien
11		Telling about folktales (e.g., Issumboshi) to entertain
12		Telling about folktales (e.g., Malin Kundang) to entertain
13		Talking about the life of The Wright Brother
14		Telling about folktales (e.g., Strong Wind) to entertain
15		Discussing the moral and cultural values of songs, e.g., You've Got a Friend

This comparison shows that the Merdeka Curriculum is more aligned with the principles of 21st-century education, which emphasizes the development of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity skills (4C's). By involving students in themes relevant to real life, the Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for learning through exploration and reflection, in accordance with inquiry-based learning theory (John Dewey, 1997) On the other hand, the 2013 Curriculum approach still has advantages in building a more structured language skill base. However, to face global challenges, it is good that this approach is improved by integrating more practical experiences and collaborative learning as exemplified by the Merdeka Curriculum. This is in line with the concept of student-centered learning, where students are not only recipients of information but also actively contribute to the learning process. Therefore, from the explanation above, it can be concluded that the Merdeka curriculum is more suitable for teaching English in vocational high schools according to the researcher.



According to researchers The Independent Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum have different views and approaches to education, although they both aim to improve the quality of learning in Indonesia. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and relevance to the needs of the modern era, especially through a Project-Based Learning approach, learning differentiation, focusing on essential competencies such as literacy and numeracy, and formative assessments that focus on the student learning process. The curriculum is designed to provide a contextual learning experience, tailor to students' needs, and encourage the development of 21st-century skills such as creativity, communication, and critical thinking. On the other hand, the 2013 Curriculum is more structured with an integrated thematic approach, assessments that include attitudes, knowledge, and skills, as well as a more standardized learning plan. This curriculum is suitable for educational contexts that require uniform guidance, but it is often considered to be inflexible and burdensome for students and teachers due to the wide scope of the material. In today's context, the Independent Curriculum is more relevant to face changes in the digital era and globalization, while the 2013 Curriculum still has value in a more structured education system. The success of the implementation of both is highly dependent on the readiness of teachers, facilities, and support from various parties.

Conclusion

The Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum shows that the two curricula have different learning approaches in teaching English to grade 10 students. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes more on real-life experience-based learning, contextual relevance, and the development of student creativity. This is reflected in learning themes that integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects such as sports, art, and folklore. In contrast, the 2013 curriculum focuses more on developing basic structured language skills, such as introducing yourself, understanding descriptions of tourist attractions, and telling history and folklore. Although this approach is effective in building the fundamentals of language skills,



it places less emphasis on practical application and exploration of hands-on experience.

The Merdeka Curriculum, in accordance with the principles of 21st century education, prioritizes the development of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (4C's) skills. By engaging students in real-life relevant themes, this approach is in line with inquiry-based learning theory and constructivist learning. As a recommendation, although the 2013 Curriculum has advantages in building the foundation of language skills, the integration of practical experience and collaborative learning is needed to face global challenges. Therefore, the Merdeka Curriculum approach is more suitable to be applied in teaching English in Vocational High Schools, because it provides a more meaningful and relevant learning experience to the needs of students.

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