

Evaluating the quality of high school coursebooks: Implications for materials development

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ABSTRACT

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A coursebook is one of the essential learning resources. However, limited research has highlighted the evaluation of English coursebooks for the high school level. This research intends to assess the efficacy of three high school English coursebooks under the Merdeka Curriculum to determine their strengths and weaknesses in meeting curriculum expectations and enhancing student learning. While the coursebooks are designed to aid English teaching and integrate reform, many reports have emerged regarding their usability, content relevance, and alignment with the local context. In evaluating these coursebooks with SQRAR, this research aims to analyze the suitability of these materials for the target students, the variety of exercises proposed, and the balance achieved between theoretical instruction and practical language use. The findings highlight the challenges educators and learners face regarding these materials and articulate suggestions for future coursebook revisions, such as adding more explicit teaching strategies, giving greater attention to pluralistic approaches, increasing engagement with authentic materials, and more modern technology-oriented tasks. The evaluation seeks to support ongoing efforts in developing curricula to ensure that English coursebooks can effectively foster students' learning.

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, coursebooks are notable learning tools, especially in English Language Teaching (ELT), where they act as tools for fostering language acquisition in learners (Irsyad et al., 2024). Unlike other learning materials, these English coursebooks under the Merdeka Curriculum aim to provide necessary language competencies alongside defined set educational goals. Nevertheless, even after the well-targeted objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, there are substantial difficulties concerning the actual implementation of these coursebooks (Salsabila et al., 2023).

Numerous studies have identified such gaps: the content is frequently inappropriate for the local context, does not relate to the cultural and social realities of the learners, and the activities contained in those coursebooks seldom advance a constructivist approach (Abdullah et al., 2023; Salsabila et al., 2023). Such challenges reveal a gap between the intended educational outcomes articulated in the coursebooks and the realities of Indonesian learners. However, although the intention of these coursebooks is to promote language proficiency, their actual utility and usefulness in the local context of the education system remains doubtful.

Therefore, this study aims to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the English coursebooks utilized in Indonesian high schools in order to solve the above issues and improve the quality of the coursebooks (Dariyani et al., 2022; Irzawati et al., 2023). Evaluating these

coursebooks will be done within the framework of curriculum theory and materials development to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. This analysis will be performed in a manner that is needed to improve materials to meet student's educational needs. The evaluation will assess content relevance, variety of learning activities, correspondence with curriculum objectives, and general accessibility for students' and teachers' usability (Sari & Fatmawati, 2024; Surani & Septiyani, 2024).

This study is unique because it applies SQRAR (Survey-Question-Read-Analyze-Recommend), a method for coursebook evaluation. This method has both qualitative and quantitative analysis, which captures all aspects of understanding effectiveness (Dariyani et al., 2022; Febriyanti et al., 2023; Sukarno, 2024). This study informs the design of future English coursebooks to enhance content, pedagogy, and design. The scope of the research goes beyond curriculum designers, teachers, and policymakers because it seeks to inform the development of educational materials that facilitate improvements in students' interaction and learning. Therefore, evaluating English coursebooks is undeniably important for meeting the requirements of learners and fulfilling the goals set by the Merdeka Curriculum (Irsyad et al., 2024). Scrutinizing the current coursebooks helps this research advance coursebook design and improve high school students' language development. This research aims to give suggestions and recommendations for future materials development, particularly coursebooks. Furthermore, this study will be instrumental not only in informing subsequent revisions but also in improving English language teaching in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses the English Coursebook Dynamic Evaluation model, which seeks to evaluate English coursebooks using a specific set of criteria. The model follows the SQRAR approach, which comprises a Survey, Question, Read, Analysis, and Recommendation. This approach enables the comprehensive evaluation of the coursebooks, highlights their shortcomings, and provides practical suggestions for subsequent revisions (Sukarno, 2024). The SQRAR model uniquely addresses the needs of evaluating English coursebooks under the Merdeka Curriculum by focusing on pedagogical effectiveness and alignment with modern educational demands. By integrating aspects of 21st-century skills, the SQRAR approach ensures that the coursebooks are evaluated for their content and adaptability to Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

Furthermore, this research analyzes three English coursebooks used in Indonesian high schools (SMA), all of which are by the Merdeka Curriculum. These textbooks were developed by the government of Indonesia to provide for the needs of the curriculum and to enable students to learn fundamental skills through the language. This study applies the SQRAR model so that these coursebooks undergo modification to adapt to the changing educational demands, especially in the context of Indonesia's Golden Generation Vision 2045.

The SQRAR model has five main steps for evaluating English coursebooks. The first step is to conduct a survey by experts regarding the coursebook's usability and effectiveness. In this case, the teachers, as practitioners, are also important participants in implementing the survey. The survey includes the selection of English coursebooks for senior high schools (SMA) in Yogyakarta. The selected coursebooks to be analyzed have a few pre-evaluation criteria. First, coursebooks should be effective when utilized in English language classrooms; that is, they promote the achievement of learning objectives as well as teaching activities within that educational framework. Second, they should be cost-effective and accessible to the teachers and students. Moreover, the selected coursebooks should be easy to comprehend, use, and intelligible with regard to the language and content employed. Finally, the coursebooks may also assist the learners in skill acquisition during and outside of classroom activities in a versatile and

flexible manner regarding teaching and learning situations and environments. The overall coursebook criteria, as defined above, guarantee that these materials are relevant not only for pedagogical activities but also for the educational system of Yogyakarta as a whole.

Next, the evaluation focus is guided by identifying critical questions based on the coursebook's considerations pertaining to modern educational requirements. The third step involves the scrutiny of the coursebooks and their content, structure, and pedagogical approaches comprising the coursebook's teaching methodology, which is also presented within the coursebooks in a staged manner. This is followed by an analysis of the data and the strengths and the weaknesses of the coursebooks' effectiveness that are revealed through pervasive trends. Finally, the coursebooks are improved by enhancing the relevance of the content, applying 21st-century skills and competencies, and meeting the educational objectives set by the Merdeka Curriculum and the future vision for Indonesia's education.

Regardless of the comprehensive evaluation framework offered by the SQRAR model, some constraints, such as expert judgments and evaluative bias when selecting which coursebooks to analyze, still exist. Additionally, the biases stemming from the participants' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum's objectives for learning vis-a-vis the absence of more diverse coursebooks that could have enriched the study may also be relevant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are elaborated based on some criteria that should be exist in the learning materials, including curriculum alignment, student engagement (consists of Industrial Revolution 4.0, critical thinking, collaborative learning), and also real world relevance (including HOTS and real-world application).

Work in Progress for Grade X

Curriculum Alignment

The Grade X English coursebook developed under the Merdeka Curriculum has marked advantages and challenges that affect its usability in improving students' learning experience. This assessment analyzes multiple aspects of the coursebook, including its coherence with curriculum objectives, level of usability, informational accuracy, and the extent to which learners actively participate. The coursebook effectively addresses the goals of general pedagogy. For example, it improves learners' strategic skills by engaging students with different practical activities in real-life and career settings (Ferdous & Novita, 2023). The vocabulary activities provided in each chapter assist the learners in developing their language skills through general English.

However, they would be enhanced if pertinent vocabulary from various professional fields were included. Having vocabulary boxes in every chapter is a commendable feature because they help increase the learners' vocabulary. For the students to gain a more balanced and contextualized learning experience, the coursebook could provide more specific vocabulary—especially from professional fields. There is a lack of a specific approach meant to facilitate students in navigating through the materials presented in the coursebook. It is one of the practical limitations. The integration of grammar tasks is not explicitly stated, which can leave learners puzzled (Aeni et al., 2024). Thus, the materials should adopt a specific teaching approach for supporting the students with outlines of grammar tasks that may be more easily followed in a learning progression framework. Furthermore, students would benefit from a more all-encompassing approach to learning the language by adding a section focusing on pronunciation.

Based on the evaluation regarding curriculum alignment, the future materials design could include more field-specific vocabulary. Moreover, a more structured approach to grammar teaching is needed, along with a section focusing on pronunciation to create a more balanced language-learning experience.

Student Engagement

The coursebook discusses Industry 4.0 by including activities that require students to publish their work using technology, such as barcodes or links (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). This is an attempt to modernize the education. However, the activities' topics like graffiti and film review superficial ways to situate adolescents within the teenage world and fail to grapple with broader global concerns or more sophisticated ones on Industry 4.0 (Aeni et al., 2024). The coursebook could pay more attention to emerging global issues, current affairs, and more advanced technological issues and consider how to help students understand the world beyond local settings.

The coursebook contains examples of the local language and culture. However, it could be better if it embeds different cultures from both local and global contexts to expand students' worldviews. In order to incorporate more diverse cultural elements, the coursebook needs to look beyond its borders (Ferdous & Novita, 2023). In addition, the coursebook contains some collaborative activities, but these do not depict authentic teamwork experiences.

Therefore, some improvements should be taken into account. Including local and global cultural elements is minimal, and expanding this would help broaden students' perspectives. Moreover, to equip learners with the collaborative skills needed in real-world settings, the coursebook should be designed with more teamwork activities, such as group projects, peer reviews, and other activities that necessitate cooperative problem-solving (Safitri et al., 2023).

Real-world Relevance

The textbook provides some form of character education by fostering responsibilities such as honesty, but these features are neither well integrated nor articulated clearly within the materials. Character education could be more thoroughly integrated into the curriculum by including concrete definitions of moral values and how these values can be practically applied in life. This would help learners appreciate the relevance of such values in their lives (Kasman & Lubis, 2022).

The coursebook severely lacks adequate treatment of real-life issues. While the activities present some rudimentary tasks, such as giving a short presentation, there is no treatment of profound and meaningful outcomes. The coursebook should provide more tasks to students that require real-world problem-solving, including but not limited to open-ended discussions, debates, and project-based learning activities (Swandana et al., 2023).

Lastly, while the coursebook incorporates some exercises that promote higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), like problem-solving and analysis, the absence of scaffolding in these exercises diminishes their usefulness (Aeni et al., 2024). It is more effective when HOTS is supported by gradual and systematized lower-order tasks, guiding students toward more advanced problem-solving and analysis. As cited in the work of Swandana et al. (2023), scaffolding can consist of directions and models that walk students through complex tasks. Therefore, the coursebook should incorporate more open-ended discussions, debates, and project-based learning activities to better prepare students for real-world challenges.

In summary, while the Grade X English coursebook has the potential to support English language teaching and learning under the Merdeka Curriculum, it requires address in some areas. By improving the incorporation of explicit instructional guidance, providing more comprehensive inclusivity for diverse levels of learners, and strengthening connections with authentic issues, the coursebook would be more appropriate for high school learners in

Indonesia. These changes would better meet the needs of educators and students and help the curriculum objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum.

English for Change for Grade XI

Curriculum Alignment

Considering the advantages of integrating aptitude exercises and skill activities, the English textbook from Grade XI appears to be adequate under the Merdeka Curriculum. Observations made during the trial period indicated satisfactory results; students were able to perform with a reasonable level of competence to the requirements set. They were able to demonstrate competence in using and combining spoken and written English across different contexts and communications. The coursebook fully meets these objectives, which are set out in the curriculum, as developing written and oral communication skills is the course's primary focus. The incorporation of GBA (Genre-Based Approach) in the teaching and learning processes is indeed something that enhances its effectiveness, as students are able to move through each component of the language in orderly stages or stepwise progression. The approach is used in a blended manner; every unit has grammar exercises (like verb tenses, conditionals, modals) that are well-organized and vocabulary exercises that are multifarious, like finding synonyms, defining target words, and keyword identification. These tasks support students' general English proficiency.

The coursebook aligns well with curriculum objectives, especially in developing both oral and written communication skills. It could further improve its pronunciation section beyond basic drills (Anagün, 2018; Shafie et al., 2019). Instructions or details on how to pronounce words would further enhance the controlled speaking section of the coursebook (Yang, 2022).

Student Engagement

The coursebook motivates learners to understand the concepts underlying Industry 4.0 by integrating technology. Students are provided with barcodes or links to publish their projects, which assists them in interacting with digital tools, thus helping them adapt to contemporary technology (Natuna et al., 2021; Xu & Zhou, 2022). Furthermore, the coursebook includes exercises that investigate climate change and other global issues, as well as current trends in technology. The student's understanding of global contexts could be broadened by diversifying the global issues included in the coursebook so that it goes beyond the local context and allows students to engage critically with the world (Anagün, 2018; Vural & Vural, 2021).

Although the coursebook integrates fundamental moral values related to character education, these aspects are often not adequately explained or depicted within the materials. Because values are not clearly stated in the coursebook, students may find it difficult to link the content to practical applications in their daily lives. According to Ali and Friends (2021) and Pratama (2018), the coursebook needs to link more character education to real life by providing example scenarios and activities that necessitate students to think about these contexts.

Furthermore, the coursebook encourages critical thinking since it includes other activities such as discussion, creative expression, and team activities like jigsaw reading. All are aimed at helping the learners acquire 21st-century skills such as effective communication, collaboration, and creativity. Also, some of the prescribed instructional guidelines on team-based activities, like jigsaw reading, emphasize cooperative skills (Bakri et al., 2023; Shafie et al., 2019). The coursebook, however, has a considerable lack of problem-solving activities. The coursebook should include more scenarios that require students to solve problems in order to make use of what they have learned in real life (Vural & Vural, 2021; Xu & Zhou, 2022).

In short, the coursebook successfully engages students by integrating technology, such as barcodes or links, to publish projects and interact with digital tools (Natuna et al., 2021). It

addresses global issues like climate change but could broaden this scope to include more critical global challenges, fostering deeper student engagement with the world beyond local contexts (Anagün, 2018). Collaborative activities, such as jigsaw reading, are present, but the coursebook could improve by incorporating more problem-solving activities that connect learning to real-life scenarios (Vural & Vural, 2021).

Real-World Relevance

The book also contains some guides for open discussions, which enable learners to polish their presentation skills within the framework of a writing task. Nonetheless, the activities do not fully immerse learners in real-life problems. Also, the mini-research assignments are scant and mostly observational or information retrieval tasks that are less challenging for the students to apply their knowledge critically. The coursebook would be better to include more comprehensive research assignments, problem-based learning projects, and case studies that motivate students to apply their learning to contextually relevant global or local problems. This would enhance the student's understanding of the practical utility of language.

Moreover, HOTS is encouraged in the coursebook through case study assignments, which facilitate a higher level of reasoning and problem-solving. The activities are designed to cover a hierarchy of cognitive skills from understanding to analyzing. However, while the activities steadily progress with increasing complexity, they still remain limited to the academic confines. To extend academic problem-solving skills, the book's authors could integrate more field-relevant tasks beyond academics that compel students to reason critically through real-world challenges (Aeni et al., 2024; Swandana et al., 2023). In addition, to enhance real-world relevance, the future coursebooks could include more problem-based learning projects and case studies related to their daily life. Furthermore, it could enhance students' understanding of how language learning applies in practical situations.

As noted earlier, the English coursebook for Grade XI under the Merdeka Curriculum has many advantages, especially its use of GBA, multimodal competency emphasis, and critical thinking and collaboration integration. Nonetheless, several aspects of the coursebook still require further refinement. The coursebook does not sufficiently equip Grade XI students with essential 21st-century skills (Lukiyanto & Wijayaningtyas, 2020; Natuna et al., 2021; Vural & Vural, 2021). The coursebook would be far more effective if the pronunciation exercises were widened, overfilled text boxes were trimmed, interaction with the real world was more enhanced, and a greater number of lower-order thinking skills activities were added. Adopting these suggestions would transform the coursebook into an invaluable resource for students, enabling profound language instruction while simultaneously honing vital analytical skills.

Life Today for Grade XII

Curriculum Alignment

The strengths of the Grade XII English coursebook for advanced learners include the alignment to curriculum goals and multimodal skill development. Its outline serves critical thinking, reading, and communication quite well. This coursebook does exceptionally well in vocabulary activities, including synonym identification and keyword recognition, which increases the students' command of general English (Adhikari, 2021; Liang, 2021). In addition, the mergers of skills where speaking is an output of listening and writing results from reading indicate a sound teaching methodology that integrates language skills (Adhikari, 2021; Chen, 2022; Liang, 2021).

However, even if the textbook claims to use a genre-based approach, there is a lack of clearly defined strategies within the specific genres that are exposed. Current educational policies emphasize that teaching resources should incorporate steps related to the GBA, including

Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF) and Modelling of the Text (MoT) to enhance instructional clarity (Jabsheh, 2024; Xiao, 2020).

Student Engagement

The coursebook integrates technology through barcodes or links yet does not aid in building students' digital literacy. Its incorporation is insufficient to meet the requirements of the 4.0 industrial revolution (Adhikari, 2021; Nxumalo & Nxumalo, 2023). It has already been demonstrated that using technology in teaching English as a second language increases students' participation and achievement through interactivity on digital platforms (Liang, 2021; L. Zhu, 2024). Thus, the coursebook's technological shortcomings can be tailored to address current educational requirements. In addition, although the coursebook addresses some topics related to global issues, there are glaring omissions on dire contemporary issues that would make the coursebook more relevant to student's lives and their academic world (Adhikari, 2021; Chen, 2022; Utami et al., 2023).

Although the coursebook does incorporate moral values such as responsibility and honesty, in particular, it needs deeper and more direct explanations regarding their applicability in the coursebook, making them more relevant to students' lives (Idrees et al., 2022; Wang, 2023; Zhu & Zhang, 2023). Also, from the perspective of inclusivity, the textbook still lacks different activities and materials for students. With different levels of English proficiency, lessons would be more accessible and improve educational outcomes (Dziuban et al., 2018; Liang, 2021).

The coursebook incorporates critical thinking and creative expression using discussion and presentation activities, integrating them into 21st Century Skills (Li, 2021; Lovett et al., 2021; Wang, 2024). Nevertheless, to enhance students' employability, it should facilitate collaboration using authentic works like group or peer-reviewed assignments that develop teamwork (Wang, 2024; Zhu & Zhang, 2023). Additionally, students' cultural understanding needs to be developed with relevant materials, which means teaching aligned with local and global cultures (Chen, 2022; X. Zhu & Zhang, 2023).

Real-World Relevance

Lastly, the coursebook aims to develop HOTS by including analysis and evaluation tasks. However, the practicality of these activities needs greater attention concerning real-life application (Idrees et al., 2022; Xiao, 2020; Zhu, 2024). The inclusion of project-based or problem-solving tasks that blend scholarly knowledge with practical application would greatly enhance the student learning experience (Belyaeva et al., 2019; Dziuban et al., 2018; Susanto, 2024).

In conclusion, although the Grade XII English coursebook is considered to be goal-oriented and provides a notable base for skill mastery, its enhancements regarding clarity on teaching methods, technological integration, and eliciting life relevance would make the material better suited for 21st-century learners.

Overall, the analysis of English Grade X, XI and XII textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum has some strengths and weaknesses that need to be worked on. They were all aligned with the curriculum objectives, such as the fostering of multimodal communication and incorporation of 21st-century concepts such as Industry 4.0. These characteristics would help the students to build essential language skills along with critical thinking skills firmly.

The positive highlights drawn from the textbooks include the engaging vocabulary exercises, as well as the critical thinking and HOTS skill activities provided in the texts. On the other hand, all textbooks lack instruction for students regarding grammar, pronunciation, and structural and mechanical frameworks of texts. There are no problem-solving or project-based activities essential for 21st-century students. The inclusion of current and global issues is

minimal, and the real-world application of these problems is nowhere to be found. Therefore, implementing these changes would improve the textbooks significantly.

The tenth-grade textbook seems to contain a deficiency of domain-specific vocabulary, while the tension within problem-solving activities and reading words in the eleventh-grade book is seen as overcrowded. Then, in the grade twelve coursebook, there is a clear lack of real-world application and technological integration. Furthermore, there seems to be a remarkable absence of character education that builds global citizenship, world cultures, and perspectives, which is deemed necessary for responsibility in a globalized society. In conclusion, the coursebooks are satisfactory; however, the educational systems should consider other teaching strategies, globally relevant perspectives, and modern technology to equip learners for their education and future professional opportunities successfully.

CONCLUSION

This study considers the effectiveness of three English Merdeka Curriculum textbooks for high school students, paying particular attention to how well course aims are achieved, the level of student participation, and the 21st-century relevance of the materials. As noted in the results, the books are successful in the attainment of multimodal competencies, critical thinking, and relevant subject matter; however, they also need improvement. These improvements are the lack of more explicit teaching strategies, greater attention to pluralistic approaches, increased engagement with authentic materials, and more modern technology-oriented tasks.

These research findings will be useful to teachers, educational planners, and textbook writers since they emphasize the need to develop coursebooks that are not only customized to educational objectives but also flexible to suit the varying requirements of the students. Next, the books would be more useful if they included differentiated instruction and greater accessibility features. Moreover, the study points out that the coursebooks are not supposed to be focused only on traditional language and communicative skills; rather, they should work towards equipping learners with skills to deal with the multifaceted challenges of real life. This change will help in developing learners who are globally aware thinkers and problem solvers. Additionally, this research points out the relevance and usefulness of the coursebooks in terms of promoting learning in students through their active engagement. The findings are useful in developing future coursebooks towards achieving the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum towards producing balanced, competent learners in Indonesia.

Conflict of interests

There are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication.

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