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A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF READING MATERIAL IN THE ENGLISH FOR NUSANTARA TEXTBOOK

Shofi Rahayu Fithrotun Nisa^{1*}, Lu'luil Maknun²

¹ Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta

Email: ¹221310007@student.mercubuana-yogya.ac.id, ²lulu@mercubuana-yogya.ac.id

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Corresponding Author:
Shofi Rahayu Fithrotun Nisa

Email Corresponding:
221310007@student.mercubuana-yogya.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the reading materials in the English textbook for Nusantara Grade VIII based on Cunningsworth's (1995) eight textbook evaluation criteria, focusing on the reading texts and reading-related tasks in Chapters 1 to 5. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with document-based content analysis. Data were collected from Chapters 1–5 of the textbook and analyzed using an evaluation checklist consisting of 22 indicators, which were developed based on Cunningsworth's (1995) eight criteria, with each indicator classified into one of the categories "Fulfilled," "Partially Fulfilled," or "Not Fulfilled." Sixteen of the twenty-two indicators have been fulfilled, while four have been partially fulfilled and two have not yet been fulfilled. The reading materials are closely aligned with the Phase D learning outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum Indonesia and follow a consistent structure before, during, and after reading, although coverage of grammar, initial exposure to the text, and pronunciation support remain uneven across chapters. These findings are useful for English teachers who want to adapt their reading instruction in the classroom, for textbook developers who are revising the "English for Nusantara" textbooks, and for curriculum evaluators who focus on the pedagogy of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) at the junior high school level in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that evaluated textbooks comprehensively while focusing on individual skills, this study applied Cunningsworth's comprehensive eight-criteria framework in a specific, in-depth manner to reading materials at the chapter and unit levels, thereby revealing structural patterns that had not been identified previously.

Keywords: *reading materials; textbook evaluation; English for Nusantara; Cunningsworth's framework; content analysis; Merdeka Curriculum*

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are an important part of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). They serve as the foundation of the curriculum, a source of language input, and, in many cases, a substitute for a syllabus that guides classroom activities (Nunan, 1991). In Indonesia, curriculum reforms have occurred frequently, with the national curriculum revised eleven times since 1947 (Sumarsih et al., 2022). The current Merdeka curriculum of Indonesia emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, and competency development aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile (Ulinniam et

al., 2021). Therefore, teaching materials, especially textbooks, are expected to support the learning outcomes stipulated in Decree No. 046/H/KR/2025 of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency (BSKAP, 2025).

One of the textbooks developed to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is English for Nusantara. Published by the Ministry of Education, this textbook is widely used in junior high schools across Indonesia. This book integrates contextual and genre-based learning materials while embedding the values of the Pancasila Student Profile

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(Nooralam & Sakhiyya, 2022). Because reading requires students to process written text efficiently while engaging in various cognitive processes, the quality of reading materials is crucial for supporting reading comprehension and overall language development (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Given that Indonesian 15-year-olds continue to perform below the international average in reading literacy (OECD, 2023), it is important to examine how reading materials are presented and developed in this textbook. Several previous studies have examined the English for Nusantara textbooks from various perspectives: (Febraningrum & Suroso, 2023; Yakfi et al., 2024) alignment with the curriculum, CEFR level (Sulistiani, 2024), task types (Damayanti & Mukarto, 2024; Maulana et al., 2025), lexical density (Basir et al., 2025), the cognitive level of comprehension questions (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Ekalia et al., 2025), and cultural representation (Margana et al., 2026; Sephiani et al., 2025). However, no one previous study has evaluated the reading material in grade VIII textbooks based on a comprehensive textbook evaluation framework that covers various aspects.

This study addresses this gap by using Cunningsworth's (1995) textbook evaluation framework, which evaluates eight criteria: aims and approach, design and organization, language content, skills, topics, methodology, teacher's books, and practical considerations. This framework provides a comprehensive and practical basis for textbook evaluation at the classroom level (Maknun & Widhiatama, 2026; McGrath, 2016; Tomlinson, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the presentation and development of reading materials in the English for Nusantara textbook for Grade VIII, specifically the reading texts and reading-related tasks in Chapters 1-5, using Cunningsworth's (1995) framework to evaluate their pedagogical and structural strengths and weaknesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW***Textbooks in EFL Instruction***

Textbooks are widely regarded as one of the most important tools in language teaching: they shape the way language is taught (Nunan, 1991), serve as the primary source of language input and practice (Richards, 2001), and

facilitate communication between teachers and students (Abdala, 2024; Maknun et al., 2026). Because the quality of a textbook directly affects how effectively it can be used (Na'imatul Husni, 2025), conventional textbooks integrate the four language skills with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Budiarsih, 2022; Widhiatama et al., 2026), which helps teachers deliver instruction that is consistent across the whole class.

The English for Nusantara Textbook

English for Nusantara is the Ministry-published Grade VIII textbook developed under the Merdeka Curriculum (Damayanti et al., 2022). This book adopts a Genre-Based Approach and integrates the Pancasila Student Profile so students can develop linguistic competencies and character values (Latifa et al., 2023), while understanding various types of texts has been linked to improved reading comprehension (Andreani et al., 2021; Mualim et al., 2025). The grade VIII volume consists of Chapter 0 (Beginning) and five thematic chapters: Celebrate Independence Day, Kindness Starts from Yourself, Love Our World, Don't Litter, and Accept Yourself, of which this study analyzes the reading material in Chapters 1 through 5.

Cunningsworth's Textbook Evaluation Criteria

Textbook evaluation is crucial in English language teaching (ELT) because textbooks rarely receive systematic quality reviews despite playing a central role in the classroom (Sheldon, 1988). Cunningsworth (1995) proposed evaluating textbooks based on eight criteria: (1) aims and approach, (2) design and organization, (3) language content, (4) skills, (5) topics, (6) methodology, (7) teacher's books, and (8) practical considerations. Although there are more recent models for evaluating instructional materials (McGrath, 2016; Tomlinson, 2023), Cunningsworth's criteria remain distinctive because they combine comprehensiveness with classroom-level practicality and have been widely applied in textbook evaluation research, thereby supporting their suitability for this study.

Previous Studies

Previous research on English textbooks for the Nusantara generally shows positive results but

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has not been comprehensive. Febraningrum and Suroso (2023) found a 94% alignment with the curriculum in Grade 7 textbooks, but identified weaknesses in terms of support for pronunciation and listening skills. Sulistiani (2024) found that 8th-grade textbooks adequately support reading and writing skills but insufficiently develop speaking skills. Yakfi et al. (2024) confirmed alignment with Phase D learning outcomes without specifically examining reading quality. The research focusing on tasks (Damayanti & Mukarto, 2024) and studies at the cognitive level (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Ekalia et al., 2025) found a tendency toward low-level comprehension tasks, while linguistic studies (Basir et al., 2025; Fata et al., 2022) confirm that the overall readability level is adequate. The other studies that applied the Cunningsworth framework to Indonesian English language teaching (ELT) textbooks (Aprilia & Zulfa, 2025; Zakaria, 2024; Yuvia, 2022) evaluated these textbooks holistically, rather than focusing only on the reading materials. Although much research has been conducted, no study has specifically applied Cunningsworth's eight-criteria framework to the reading materials in the English for Nusantara Grade VIII textbook. Therefore, this study addresses that gap.

Conceptual Framework

This study used Cunningsworth's (1995) eight criteria as a framework for analyzing the reading texts and reading-related tasks in Chapters 1–5 of the textbook. Each criterion examines a different aspect of the material, including curriculum alignment, structural organization, language use, skill development,

topic relevance, teaching methodology, teacher support, and practical usability, enabling the strengths and weaknesses of the reading materials to be identified systematically and providing useful insights for teachers, textbook developers, and future researchers.

METHODS**Research Design**

This study used a qualitative descriptive design with document-based content analysis (Bowen, 2009), which is appropriate for describing, interpreting, and evaluating reading materials based on Cunningsworth's (1995) criteria, rather than testing hypotheses (Creswell, 2012).

Research Object

The object of analysis was the English for Nusantara Grade VIII textbook (Damayanti et al., 2022), an official textbook published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology for use under the Merdeka Curriculum. Specifically, this study analyzed the reading texts and reading-related tasks in Chapters 1–5: Celebrating Independence Day, Kindness Begins with Me, Love Our World, Don't Litter, and Embrace Yourself.

Research Instrument

The researcher was the primary instrument, supported by a 22-indicator evaluation checklist developed from Cunningsworth's (1995) eight criteria. Each indicator was classified as Fulfilled, Partially Fulfilled, or Not Fulfilled based on documented textual evidence, following the operational rubric summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation Checklist Rubric

Criterion	n	Fulfilled	Partially Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Aims and Approach	1	Reading texts/tasks align with CP Phase D targets.	Text aligns with CP Phase D but some units feel disconnected.	Materials do not reflect the mandated CP Phase D objectives.
Design and Organization	1	Clear pre-, while-, and post-reading sequence present across chapters.	Sequence present but incomplete/inconsistent in several chapters.	No consistent pedagogical sequence found across chapters.
Language Content	3	Grammar, pronunciation, and social values consistently appropriate.	Content available but insufficient or inconsistent in several sections.	Content inappropriate or fails to support pronunciation/grammar.
Skills	12	Good variety of genres; strategies and cross-skill integration effective.	Skills developed only partially; limited genre variety or integration.	Texts fail to develop reading skills effectively or are isolated.

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Criterion	n	Fulfilled	Partially Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Topics	2	Topics relevant, varied, and enrich global/local awareness.	Some topics relevant, others less suitable or less varied.	Topics irrelevant, monotonous, or fail to expand awareness.
Methodology	1	Instructions consistently foster active, collaborative reading.	Some activities support active learning, others remain passive.	Instructional methods do not support active reading activities.
Teacher's Books	1	Clear, explicit reading guides and answer keys provided.	Guide available but offers limited support or incomplete keys.	Teacher's guide and answer keys unavailable or inadequate.
Practical Considerations	1	Fonts legible, layout accessible, visual assets supportive.	Materials practical but with some limitations in design.	Text illegible or layout counter-productive to classroom use.

(Source: adapted from Cunningsworth, 1995)

Data Collection and Analysis Technique

Data were collected by thoroughly reading the textbook, identifying all reading texts and reading-related tasks in Chapters 1–5, comparing each with the checklist indicators, and documenting supporting evidence at the page level. The data were analyzed following the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing proposed by Miles et al. (2014). The findings were interpreted qualitatively, rather than scored numerically, in line with Krippendorff's (2004) content analysis

approach to determine the extent to which the reading materials fulfilled Cunningsworth's (1995) evaluation criteria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the content analysis of the reading materials in Chapters 1–5 of the English for Nusantara Grade VIII textbook (Damayanti et al., 2022), organized according to the twenty-two indicators representing Cunningsworth's (1995) eight evaluation criteria. F = Fulfilled, PF = Partially Fulfilled, NF = Not Fulfilled.

Table 2. Reading Material Evaluation Checklist

No	Criterion	Indicator	Status	Representative Evidence
1	Aims & Approach	Alignment of reading texts/tasks with CP Phase D outcomes.	F	Ch.1 recount → Ch.2 narrative → Ch.3 informational/procedural → Ch.4 factual recount → Ch.5 reflective narrative, each matching the targeted Phase D text type.
2	Design & Org.	Pre-/while-/post-reading sequence across chapters.	F	Three-stage sequence recurs in Units 2–3 of every chapter (e.g., Ch.1 Unit 3, pp. 53–64).
3	Language Content	Main grammar items appropriate for Grade VIII.	PF	Explicit grammar in Ch.1, 2, 4; absent in Ch.3 and largely absent in Ch.5.
4	Language Content	Pronunciation work (stress, sounds, intonation).	NF	No dedicated pronunciation instruction was found in any chapter.
5	Language Content	Social-function values relevant to daily life.	F	Cooperation, nationalism, volunteerism, environmental responsibility recurs across all chapters.
6	Skills	Texts introduce new grammar/vocabulary.	F	New vocabulary and Simple Past Tense modelled in Ch.1 Unit 2, reinforced in later tasks; recurs Ch.2–5.
7	Skills	Explicit reading-skill/strategy development.	F	Staged Say What You Know–Reading–Viewing–Your Turn sequence develops prediction and comprehension.
8	Skills	Integration with listening/speaking/writing.	F	Reading linked to Language Focus and writing tasks in every chapter.
9	Skills	Reading for pleasure /	F	Personal-response tasks (e.g., alternative ending to The

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No	Criterion	Indicator	Status	Representative Evidence
		intellectual satisfaction.		Ugly Duckling) appear in Ch.1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
10	Skills	Adequate, consistent frequency of reading text.	F	Multiple substantial texts per chapter in Units 2–3.
11	Skills	Reading exposure from the introductory unit.	PF	Unit 1 of every chapter relies on listening/speaking/viewing; extended reading begins only in Unit 2.
12	Skills	Appropriate level of text authenticity.	F	Texts resemble real blogs, reports, and social-media posts pitched at an accessible level.
13	Skills	Variety and appropriateness of genres.	F	Blogs, fables, social-media posts, biography, and serial narrative across Ch.1–5.
14	Skills	Structural completeness of the reading section.	PF	Unit 1 of every chapter lacks a dedicated reading section; Ch.3 Unit 1 and Ch.5 Units 2–3 only partially complete.
15	Skills	Scaffolding: scene-setting, background, pre-reading Qs.	F	Word Boxes and pre-reading questions consistently precede reading texts.
16	Skills	Varied post-reading questions (literal/discourse/inference).	PF	All three types present in Ch.1–2; Ch.4–5 mainly literal/inferential with limited discourse-processing.
17	Skills	Engagement of background/world knowledge.	F	Prior-knowledge activation (e.g., parade traditions) precedes new content in every chapter.
18	Topics	Variety and range of topics.	F	Themes range from independence-day traditions to environmental sustainability to personal growth.
19	Topics	Topics expand awareness and enrich experience.	F	Local traditions (Ch.1) to the global Bye Bye Plastic Bags movement (Ch.4) broaden students' awareness.
20	Methodology	Active/collaborative engagement in reading.	F	Pair work, group discussion, role play, and projects consistently follow reading texts.
21	Teacher's Books	Explicit reading guides, answer keys, teacher support.	NF	No evidence within the Student Book, which was the scope of this study.
22	Practical Consideration	Font legibility, accessibility, visual support.	F	Readable serif fonts, colour illustrations, comic strips, and Word Boxes used throughout.

(Source: content analysis of Damayanti et al., 2022, Chapters 1–5)

Aims and Approach

Indicator 1 was fulfilled. The reading materials in each chapter align with the text types specified in the Phase D Learning Outcomes: recount texts in Chapter 1; narrative texts in Chapter 2; informational and procedural texts in Chapter 3; factual recount texts in Chapter 4; and reflective narrative texts in Chapter 5. Each text is supported by vocabulary activities, comprehension questions, language focus exercises, and guided writing tasks. These findings indicate that the reading materials are purposefully designed to achieve the curriculum objectives rather than serving as generic supplementary content.

Design and Organization

Indicator 2 is fulfilled: the reading activities across all five chapters consistently follow the pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading

sequence. However, this consistency primarily applies to Units 2 and 3 in each chapter; Unit 1 generally does not have a specific section for reading (Indicator 14, Partially Fulfilled), so the sequence is incomplete in every unit of this book.

Language Content

Of the three language content indicators, grammar coverage (Indicator 3) was rated as partially fulfilled because grammar instruction was provided in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 but was not included in Chapter 3 and was only minimally included in Chapter 5. Pronunciation instruction (Indicator 4) was rated as Not Fulfilled because no evidence of word stress, pronunciation, or intonation activities was found in any chapter. In contrast, social-function values (Indicator 5) were rated as Fulfilled, with themes such as cooperation,

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nationalism, volunteerism, and environmental responsibility consistently integrated throughout the textbook. The absence of pronunciation support is noteworthy, given that automatic word recognition contributes to fluent reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). This finding may indicate that pronunciation instruction is intended to be addressed in other language-skill components, such as listening or speaking, rather than within the reading materials.

Skills

Of the twelve Skills indicators, ten were rated as Fulfilled and two as Partially Fulfilled. Reading materials effectively introduce new vocabulary and grammar (Indicator 6), support explicit reading-strategy instruction (Indicator 7), integrate reading with listening, speaking, and writing (Indicator 8), and encourage reading for pleasure (Indicator 9). They also provide authentic and genre-varied reading texts (Indicators 10, 12, and 13), supported by strong scaffolding and background-knowledge activation (Indicators 15 and 17). However, Indicator 11 was rated as Partially Fulfilled because substantial reading texts are introduced only in Unit 2 of each chapter rather than in Unit 1. Likewise, Indicator 16 was rated as Partially Fulfilled because the post-reading questions increasingly emphasize literal and inferential comprehension while providing fewer opportunities for discourse-processing activities in Chapters 4 and 5

Topics

Both Topics indicators (Indicators 18 and 19) were rated as Fulfilled. The textbook presents themes that progress from Indonesian cultural traditions and moral values to environmental sustainability, global citizenship, and personal growth. This progression broadens students' perspectives from local to global contexts while maintaining relevance to their everyday lives.

Methodology

Indicator 20 was Fulfilled: reading tasks are consistently followed by pair work, group discussion, collaborative games, role play, or projects (e.g., comic-strip and poster tasks), actively engaging students rather than leaving them as passive recipients of text.

Teacher's Books

Indicator 21 was not fulfilled: no reading-specific lesson guides or answer keys were found. This reflects the scope of the study, which examined only the Student Book, and should not be read as evidence that the accompanying Teacher's Guide lacks such support.

Practical Considerations

Indicator 22 was Fulfilled. Reading sections consistently use legible serif fonts, colour illustrations, comic strips, and Word Boxes that support comprehension.

Summary of the Findings

Overall, sixteen of the twenty-two indicators were rated as Fulfilled, four as Partially Fulfilled (Indicators 3, 11, 14, and 16), and two as Not Fulfilled (Indicators 4 and 21). The only criterion that was entirely Not Fulfilled was Teacher's Books, which consisted of a single indicator and fell outside the scope of this study rather than reflecting a deficiency in the textbook itself. The remaining shortcomings were primarily related to chapter-specific instructional design, including grammar coverage, the balance of question types, the completeness of the reading sequence, and pronunciation support, rather than broader aspects such as topic selection, skill integration, or practical usability. These findings suggest that the textbook demonstrates strong overall quality while still containing specific areas for improvement. This supports the findings of Yakfi et al. (2024), who rated the textbook as "Good," while also showing that a detailed, criteria-based evaluation can reveal chapter-level weaknesses that may not be evident in more general assessments. Such findings highlight the importance of systematic textbook evaluation not only for textbook selection but also for continuous revision and improvement.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the reading materials in Chapters 1–5 of the English for Nusantara Grade VIII textbook using Cunningsworth's (1995) eight-criterion, twenty-two-indicator framework. The findings indicate that the reading materials are well aligned with the Phase D Learning Outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum; follow a consistent pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading sequence

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where reading materials are provided; integrate effectively with other language skills; and present varied, authentic, and culturally relevant topics that activate students' background knowledge. However, four areas require improvement: uneven grammar coverage across chapters, the introduction of substantial reading texts only from Unit 2 onward, the absence of a complete pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading sequence in Unit 1 of each chapter, and fewer opportunities for discourse-processing activities in the later chapters. Two indicators were rated as Not Fulfilled within the scope of this study: pronunciation instruction and the Teacher's Book criterion, the latter reflecting the study's focus on the Student Book rather than a limitation of the textbook itself.

Overall, sixteen of the twenty-two indicators were rated as Fulfilled, four as Partially Fulfilled, and two as Not Fulfilled. These findings indicate that the reading materials are pedagogically sound, aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, and appropriate for Grade VIII EFL learners, while still presenting opportunities for improvement in grammar coverage, reading progression, instructional sequencing, and discourse-processing activities. Based on these findings, teachers may consider providing additional reading activities in Unit 1, together with pronunciation and discourse-processing exercises, to strengthen students' reading development. Textbook developers may consider distributing grammar instruction and reading-stage sequencing more consistently across chapters and introducing substantial reading texts earlier in each chapter. Future research could extend this evaluation to the accompanying Teacher's Guide, other English for Nusantara textbooks for different grade levels, and classroom-based studies examining how teachers and students use the reading materials in practice.

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