

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE AND CONTENT OF THE *ENGLISH FOR NUSANTARA* TEXTBOOK IN *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM ENGLISH INSTRUCTION: A CASE STUDY OF SEVENTH-GRADE ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions regarding the utilizing and content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook within the *Merdeka* Curriculum for seventh grade at an Islamic junior high school. These perceptions reveal how teachers understand and interpret various educational contexts, particularly in relation to utilizing and the content of the textbook. By gaining insight into these perspectives, the researcher can further examine how teachers engage with teaching materials and the subsequent impact on the teaching and learning processes. Additionally, this study aims to provide valuable insights for curriculum developers and textbook publishers, enabling them to create more relevant and effective educational resources. The *English for Nusantara* textbook has received positive teacher perceptions. They consider this textbook to be relevant and of high value in helping students' English learning. In addition, the materials presented in this textbook are believed to align with the objectives of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and effectively increase student engagement and language skills. Therefore, this positive perception can be the basis for further developing more effective textbooks and teaching methods to meet the desired educational standards.

Keywords: *Merdeka* Curriculum, *English for Nusantara* textbook, Teacher perception

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to explore teachers' perceptions of utilizing the content of *English for the Nusantara* textbook in the 7th grade in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Teacher perception is a way of understanding or interpreting various educational contexts, especially in the context of the utilization and content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook for grade 7th in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Teacher perception is a teacher's view of something and interprets it according to what they see (Levitt, 2001). In this case, teachers' perceptions reflect how they assess the flexibility and innovation offered by this curriculum, as well as how effective the textbook is in supporting English language learning goals. Textbooks are the main tool utilized in the learning process, so their effectiveness is important to achieve the desired learning outcomes. According to Muslich (2010), textbooks are used to support learning activities. The central government supports the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in educational units by developing student textbooks and teacher guides.

Education is always related to the curriculum, which means achieving educational goals. The curriculum functions as a tool to achieve academic goals more effectively and efficiently and as a benchmark for the education system in Indonesia (Puad & Ashton, 2022). The curriculum is utilized to achieve educational goals more effectively and efficiently and to

monitor academic progress in Indonesia. Considering that the Indonesian curriculum often changes, this change was made to improve the quality of Indonesian education. Nadiem, as Minister of Education, issued a new curriculum named "*Merdeka Belajar*". The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced to improve the goddess education system (Dewi & Putri, 2022). This curriculum change also includes an application that provides teachers with various reference materials to improve teaching practices and share experiences. Sherly and Sihombing (2020) explain that *Merdeka Belajar* involves providing autonomy to schools, teachers, and students to foster innovation, independent learning, and creativity, with teachers serving as the key initiators of this autonomy. This curriculum change affects learning, including textbook selection.

Textbooks as learning tools are required by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. According to Hermawan et al. (2022), textbooks are the main teaching tool in Indonesia and are considered important for independent learning. In this context, the textbook *English for Nusantara Class 7*, issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, served as a primary instructional resource. The central government supports the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in educational units by developing student textbooks and teacher guides as the main textbooks. This textbook has become a learning reference source that can be modified to develop learning according to student needs. The *English for Nusantara* textbook is a textbook specifically developed to support English language learning in a local context. This textbook is designed according to *Merdeka Curriculum* learning. *English For Nusantara*, published by the Ministry of Culture, Research, and Technology, is an English textbook for grade 7th junior high school. This textbook adapts to the curriculum currently being implemented in Indonesia, namely the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The *English for Nusantara* textbook contains various materials, starting from developing speaking, writing, and reading to the development of social values such as honesty, discipline, and cooperation.

In presenting material by the learning outcomes in the *Merdeka Curriculum*, it is important to consider that teacher perceptions can be partial and do not always reflect students' views or needs. The teacher's perception is a partial and incomplete view of something so real, capable of different interpretations when seen from various points of view. It depends on how and what curriculum rules and materials the teacher utilizes in the classroom. Teacher perception is a person's process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting the information obtained to create something meaningful in education. Teacher perceptions encompass the internal cognitive and emotional frameworks that shape how educators interpret classroom interactions and inform instructional decisions (Borg, 2003).

Along with this research, the researcher found previous studies that were almost similar. Nooralam and Sakhiyya (2022) emphasize that "textbooks as the primary resources should follow the latest curriculum version in teaching-learning processes," reflecting teacher expectations for alignment with Merdeka Curriculum standards. Meanwhile, Amiruddin and Syafitri (2023) observed that although government-issued textbooks like *English for Nusantara* are designed as primary resources, some teachers still use them as supporting text rather than the main material. Complementing this, Fatma and Ratmanida (2023) report that teachers generally perceive Merdeka Curriculum implementation positively, appreciating the flexibility of designing modules and assessments aligned with curriculum outcomes. Although relevant, the current study has differences from previous research. This research focuses on explaining teachers' perceptions of the use and content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook in the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This research seeks to study teachers' perceptions in the Islamic junior high school environment utilizing observation, interview, and documentation methods.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach, which aims to explore and describe phenomena or events through the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Researcher can explore and understand the meaning and context behind experiences and social interactions through this approach. Qualitative research allows researcher to gain deeper insight into the reality being studied by focusing on the quality and depth of information. Merriam (1998: 1) states that research that focuses on discovery, understanding, and insight from the perspective of the subject being studied can significantly contribute to providing knowledge and practice in the field of education. In addition, Ary et al., (2010) stated that qualitative descriptive research investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, and existing materials. This study aims to explore the phenomenon related to teacher perceptions of the use and content of *English for Nusantara* in English learning at Islamic junior high school.

This study also employed a case study approach to investigate teachers' perceptions of the use and content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook, and to explore their experiences in evaluating, selecting, and integrating the textbook into *Merdeka* Curriculum-based English instruction. A case study is an in-depth exploration of a limited system of activities, events, or individuals based on extensive data collection. According to Cresswell (2012), a case study is an appropriate method to explore phenomena in depth in a particular context, thus providing a richer and more detailed understanding of the issues. This is in line with (Merriam, 1998, p. 29) in that a case study is a design that is suitable for situations where it is impossible to separate the variables of the phenomenon from their context. Based on that principle, this study explores teachers' perceptions of the use and content of *English for Nusantara* in English learning at Islamic junior high schools. It also examines factors that can influence teachers' perceptions of the use and the content of *English for Nusantara* and identifies problems that arise in the process of selecting, analyzing, and integrating *English for Nusantara* textbooks.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

This study presents results and discussion related to teacher perceptions regarding the use of *English for Nusantara* textbooks as a tool for teaching English to grade VII Islamic junior high school students. It also explores their perceptions of the material content within these textbooks. The participants included two English teachers from an Islamic junior high school, with the observation process lasting approximately 40 minutes for each teacher. Additionally, interviews were conducted, ranging from 10 to 25 minutes. Observations were carried out in a structured format, following specific guidelines, while interviews comprised questions posed directly by the researcher.

Observation Result: Teachers' Perception toward the Use of *English for Nusantara* Textbook & Teachers' Perception toward the Content of *English for Nusantara*

The researcher and the two English teachers conducted observations on two different dates. The first observation with T1 occurred on Friday, October 25, 2024, and the second with T2 on Thursday, October 31, 2024. In this activity, the researcher observed the English teaching and learning process utilizing the content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook. The observation was carried out when the teacher started and ended the lesson.

Observation Checklist

<i>Teachers' perceptions of the Use of English for Nusantara textbook</i>					
Aspect Observation	Indicators	Implementation			
		T1		T2	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Use of Media and Learning Resources	Teachers use <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook published by the Ministry of Education	✓		✓	
	Teachers use <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook in the classroom	✓		✓	
	Teachers use only <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbooks as learning resources		✓	✓	
	Teachers use textbooks of their own choice	✓			✓
	Teachers use many sources other than <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbooks	✓			✓
Teaching Methods	Teachers use methods such as discussions, practice, and other activities when using <i>English for Nusantara</i> .	✓		✓	
<i>Teachers' perceptions of the content English for Nusantara textbook</i>					
Aspect Observation	Indicators	Implementation			
		T1		T2	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Use of Media and Learning Resources	Teachers use all the material in a certain chapter in the <i>English for Nusantara</i> Textbook	✓			✓
	Teachers use materials with the same topic, but not from the <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook		✓	✓	
	Teachers use the exercises in the <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook	✓		✓	
	Teachers use exercises other than <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook		✓	✓	
	Teachers use the exercises in the <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook as homeworks for students	✓		✓	
	The exercises in the <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook are used to check students' understanding of the material	✓		✓	
	The content of the <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook helps capture students' attention during the teacher's lesson	✓		✓	
	Teachers show a good understanding of the teaching material in the <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook	✓		✓	
Understanding of Material	Teachers can clearly explain the basic concepts of <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook	✓		✓	
	Teachers set learning objectives that align with the material from the <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook	✓		✓	
	Teachers can relate the teaching material in <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook to students' experiences and contexts	✓		✓	
Integration of Character Values	Teachers insert character values in <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook in teaching		✓		✓
	Teachers can mention character values in <i>English for Nusantara</i> textbook (such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation)		✓		✓

Based on the observation and results from the first problem formulation, teachers' perceptions of utilizing English for the Nusantara textbook include several things. T1 and T2 positively perceive utilizing *English for Nusantara* textbooks in English learning, although their approaches to utilizing English are slightly different. T1 is more consistent in relying on this textbook as the primary source, which reflects her belief in the completeness of the material in supporting the learning objectives that have been set. In contrast, T2 tends to utilize this textbook selectively, combining it with other sources to provide variation in learning, which shows flexibility and the ability to adjust to students' specific needs. The methods utilized by T1 and T2 are pretty varied; this learning strategy reflects their ability to adapt and involve students through several approaches to support different learning styles and maintain learning dynamics. T1 opens up space for students to share their ideas and opinions related to the material in the textbook, provides opportunities for students to practice the language skills they are learning and describes the textbook to real-world situations so that students can understand it more easily. This strategy helps maintain the order of learning while ensuring that all materials that are considered necessary have been covered systematically. T2 invited students to work together to understand the material and utilized practical examples from everyday life to strengthen students' understanding of the material. Overall, both T1 and T2 positively perceived utilizing *English for Nusantara* textbooks in learning English, although their approaches were different. Based on the second problem formulation, two English teachers' perceptions of the content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook were positive.

Based on the observation results, T1 and T2 had a positive perception of the *English for Nusantara* textbook content in learning English. T1 tended to rely entirely on this textbook as the primary source of learning, ensuring consistency in delivering materials and covering all aspects of learning systematically. In contrast, T2 utilized materials selectively and combined them with other sources to maintain variety and adjust learning to students' needs. In terms of exercises, T1 only utilized exercises from the textbook, either as class activities or homework, to evaluate students' understanding in a structured manner. T2, on the other hand, utilized exercises from the textbook as an evaluation tool but also utilized other sources to provide variety and enrich students' learning experiences. Although their approaches differed, both understood the *English for Nusantara* textbook content well. T1 and T2 utilized appropriate methods to achieve learning objectives, utilizing textbook materials or other sources. It reflects their flexibility and ability to adjust learning to students' needs.

Interview Result: Teachers' Perception toward the Use of *English for Nusantara* Textbook & Teachers' Perception Toward the Content of *English for Nusantara* Textbook

Interviews were conducted with two English teachers to gather their perceptions of the use and content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook in grade 7th English learning at an Islamic junior high school. The interview with T1 took place on Friday, October 29, 2024, while the interview with T2 was held on Thursday, November 5, 2023. A total of 23 questions were asked during the interviews, which each lasted between 10 to 25 minutes and were conducted in the school environment. Each teacher has a different perception of the *English for Nusantara* textbook, as indicated by research data. The findings presented in this section are derived from an analysis of data collected through both written and oral interviews.

Based on the interview results from the first problem formulation, teachers' perceptions of utilizing English for Nusantara textbooks. T1 and T2 positively perceive the use of English for Nusantara textbooks in learning English. 1) *Personal Experience*: The Personal Experience factor does not affect teachers' perceptions of using *English for Nusantara* textbooks. Although

both have different teaching experiences, T1 and T2 have the same perception of using English for Nusantara textbooks in schools. 2) *Needs*: this factor can affect teachers' perceptions of using *English for Nusantara* textbooks because T1 and T2 consider that the materials in the *English for Nusantara* textbooks are to the needs of students in this school. T1 stated that this textbook is comprehensive enough for classroom teaching, considering its complexity. Meanwhile, T2 emphasized that this textbook is an excellent source for learning English, highlighting that the materials are easy to understand and relevant to students' needs. 3) *Situation*: Based on the percentage of T1 and T2, the learning situation and conditions are running well according to the learning objectives. Teachers happily participate in classroom learning, especially when using *English for Nusantara* textbooks. 4) *Students' Ability*: The interview results showed that using *English for Nusantara* textbooks is based on students' abilities at school. T1 and T2 revealed that the *English for Nusantara* textbook is based on students' abilities. T1 revealed that this textbook accommodates several student ability levels, making it easier for teachers to deliver material that all students can understand well. T2 felt that the material presented in this textbook is relevant to students' daily lives and is tailored to their needs and ability levels, which helps them achieve learning objectives more effectively. 5) *Students' Interest*: The results showed that T1 and T2 explained that students were quite happy and active when participating in class learning. T1 also added that they would be happier if there were games in learning. It can help teachers consider the *English for Nusantara* textbook and help teachers determine student interests. 6) *Workshop/Training*: T1 and T2 revealed that they had never attended or participated in any training on the English for Nusantara textbook. 7) *References*: The interview results found that teachers utilize additional learning references besides this textbook. T2 was revealed by combining additional references, mainly textbooks from previous teaching experiences in other schools. This additional material allows him to introduce variations and enrich the curriculum for students. While T1 only utilized *English for the Nusantara* textbook as a medium in Teaching. References are a factor that can help teachers implement textbooks.

Based on the second problem formulation, two English teachers' perceptions of the content of the *English for Nusantara* textbook were positive as follows: 1) *Lesson Material*: it can be seen that both T1 and T2 considered that the English for Nusantara textbook offers materials that meet students' needs and presents up-to-date content. T1 felt that the arrangement of the materials in the English for Nusantara textbook was helpful for them in delivering lessons effectively so that students could understand and apply the knowledge gained better. In addition, T2 considered that the teaching materials in the textbook presented logical and systematic learning materials. 2) *Vocabulary and Structure*: In this aspect, T1 and T2 considered that the textbook's vocabulary was presented in simple to complex forms. This arrangement makes it easier for students to understand and master the material gradually so that they can follow learning development more clearly. 3) *Exercises*: T1 and T2 considered that the exercises in the English for Nusantara textbook were practical in improving and testing students' understanding of the material presented. T1 Especially for reading and speaking exercises, teachers felt that these activities helped students understand the text and communicate orally, and significantly improved their vocabulary. T2 With some well-structured exercises, students can develop their English skills comprehensively. 4) *Illustrations*: In this aspect, T1 and T2 assessed that this textbook has an attractive appearance and clear illustrations, so that it can improve students' understanding. 5) *Physical Appearance*: In this aspect, T1 and T2 assessed that this textbook has a cover appearance, images, and writings that attract readers' attention.

The researcher also found that teachers have negative perceptions of textbooks from the observations and interviews. It can be seen as follows: 1) *Integration of Character Values*: The observation on character values shows that teachers, T1 and T2, have not implemented the

values in the *English for Nusantara* textbook into learning. It seems that T1 and T2 focus more on academic aspects and English language skills without paying attention to character development, which should be an integral part of the learning process. 2) *Situation*: Based on the percentage, T1 has a different perception that the learning situation and conditions are not going well because some students do not pay attention to the teacher when teaching. It shows the duality in classroom learning. 3) *Illustration*: In this aspect, T1 and T2 assess that the textbook presents an attractive appearance and clear illustrations so that it can improve student understanding. However, T1 believes some students still struggle to understand what is being studied.

Based on the results and findings of observations and interviews, teachers generally have positive perceptions of using the content of *English for Nusantara* in learning English. T1 tends to rely entirely on this textbook as the primary source because it is considered to have complete and systematic material. At the same time, T2 is more flexible by combining it with other sources to provide variation in learning and adjust to students' needs. Both utilize several methods in Teaching, such as involving students in discussions, connecting material to real-world situations, and providing appropriate exercises to improve their understanding. In addition, in terms of the textbook's content, both T1 and T2 considered that this textbook's material, vocabulary, structure, exercises, illustrations, and physical appearance were quite good and supported the learning process. They also agreed that the logical and systematic arrangement of the material helped students understand and apply their knowledge effectively.

However, several aspects are critical in the teacher's perception of this textbook. One is the integration of character values that have not been optimally implemented in the learning process because teachers focus more on academic aspects and students' English skills. In addition, although the illustrations in the book are considered enjoyable and straightforward, some students still have difficulty understanding the material presented. T1 also noted that the learning conditions did not go well in some situations because some students paid less attention when the teacher was teaching. It shows challenges in ensuring the effectiveness of utilizing this textbook in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the *English for Nusantara* textbook offers significant support for English language learning, particularly in the context of Islamic junior high schools. Both observational and interview data from this study indicate that teachers perceive the textbook as a well-structured, comprehensive, and engaging resource that aligns with students' abilities and learning needs. The materials, vocabulary progression, exercises, illustrations, and overall physical design contribute positively to the teaching and learning process, making it easier for students to understand and enjoy English lessons.

However, despite these strengths, there are still important areas that require further attention and development. One key issue is the limited integration of character education values during classroom implementation. Although the textbook contains elements aimed at promoting character development, such as moral values and social skills, the teachers involved in this study tended to focus more on linguistic and academic content. As a result, the potential of the textbook to foster holistic student growth, including ethical and moral aspects, was not fully realized.

Additionally, the lack of specific training or professional development related to the *English for Nusantara* textbook presents a significant challenge. Without adequate guidance or support, teachers may struggle to implement all aspects of the textbook effectively, especially those related to character education and student-centered pedagogy. Therefore, it is recommended that future efforts include the provision of targeted workshops or training

programs to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to use the textbook to its fullest potential.

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