

## ELT TEXTBOOKS IN INDONESIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CURRICULA

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### ABSTRACT

This research compares the coverage of language skills, types of learning tasks, and curriculum conformity between two English textbooks (Oxford International Primary English, an international textbook, and My Next Words, a nationally developed textbook for third-grade students in Indonesian classrooms). Using a qualitative content analysis methodology, the investigation examines how each textbook systematically construes language skills, task design, and curricular coherence. The results show that the content in the national textbook has focused heavily on basic literacy skills, repetition, and the incorporation of local cultural themes. However, it offers few opportunities for communicative language use, problem-solving, and higher cognitive functions. Meanwhile, the international textbook reflects a more balanced integration of the four language skills, inquiry types, project-based learning tasks, and global issues to enhance learners' understanding. The findings of the study indicate that a national English language teaching material can be improved by adding local content, authentic texts, an intercultural perspective, and communicative project work. The research also highlights significant implications for curriculum designers, textbook writers, and teacher education institutions that aim to enhance the overall quality of English language teaching in the Indonesian context.

**Keywords:** *Curriculum design, ELT Textbook, Oxford International Primary English.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The global use of English as an academic, economic, and intercultural lingua franca has accelerated the expansion of English Language Teaching (ELT) in formal education systems worldwide. In contexts where English is learned as a foreign language, including Indonesia, ELT is no longer merely a school subject but a strategic instrument for improving learners' future academic and professional competitiveness. Scholars such as Graddol (2006) and Crystal (2003) have argued that English proficiency is increasingly associated with access to global knowledge, higher education, and international mobility. Consequently, the quality of English instruction at the primary level has become a critical concern, as early learning experiences strongly influence learners' long-term language development and attitudes toward English. In Indonesia, this urgency is further

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intensified by the rapid growth of international schools and the parallel use of nationally and internationally produced textbooks, which embody different curricular ideologies and pedagogical priorities. Despite this reality, little empirical evidence is available to explain how these different textbooks actually shape early English learning. This situation makes a systematic comparison between national and international ELT textbooks not only relevant but urgently necessary.

In Indonesia, ELT is integrated from the elementary level through secondary education, reflecting the government's recognition of English as a global language. While English is not a mandatory subject in all public primary schools, it is universally taught as a local content subject (*muatan lokal*), particularly in the cities and private schools (Sulistiyo, 2016). This early exposure is intended to expose students to some basic vocabulary, pronunciation, and limited communicative functions. Literature on early foreign language learning indicates that meaningful engagement, contextualized input, and an affective, supportive environment help young learners (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017). So resources for teaching, which are available at the early years level, notably textbooks, carry a certain weight in mediating the translation of these principles into classroom life.

Another feature of Indonesia's education scene is that the national system coexists and is embedded with international schools, which use different curricula. The national schools follow the national curriculum, the most recent of which is the Merdeka Curriculum, known as the National Curriculum Standard. International schools, however, use recognized curricula aligned with Cambridge Assessment International Education, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, or the OIC. Such curricula are typically guided by international standards, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and aim toward inquiry-based learning, intercultural understanding, and critical thinking. The co-existence of these two systems leads to differences in educational aims, course books, and the learning processes within ELT.

In this binary system, textbooks are the first and primary mediational means that seek to bridge curriculum intentions and classroom practice. Textbooks, in addition to language input, help determine patterns of classroom interaction, learning tasks, cultural content, and assessment (Richards, 2001). Seemingly more common autonomous vs. invasive types of curriculum delivery (i.e., student-centred) in some EFL contexts like Indonesia, where teachers base most instructional activities upon textbooks, which function as the *de facto* syllabus (particularly at the primary level; see McGrath 2013). As Littlejohn (2011) contends, textbooks contain pedagogical assumptions underpinning language learning, learner and teacher roles and authority, which makes textbook analysis an important step toward understanding how the curriculum is enacted within real classrooms.

School textbooks play a huge role at the primary level, as young readers rely heavily on visual support, sequenced progression, and engaging activities to nurture early literacy and oral language skills. Cameron (2001) argues that input to YL must strike a balance between linguistic simplicity and cognitive challenge,

so that learners are not just committing language to memory but also learning to make meaning. Similarly, Brewster et al. (2002) emphasize the importance of using songs, stories, and activities to integrate skills and enhance overall language development. Thus, the assessment of ELT textbooks in the primary context for children makes linguistic coverage, as well as task design, skill integration, and language system, all important features.

Although significant attention has been paid to textbooks more generally, there is a growing gap between EFL materials produced within countries and those published internationally. National textbooks in Indonesia are written to be consistent with the government's policy, local content, and cultural materials. They are likely to focus on being accessible, inclusive, and familiar with local names, places, and culturally relevant themes. However, International textbooks are written for an international market and often include culture-specific references, authentic materials, and inquiry tasks. These divergent orientations raise interesting questions about how different series of textbooks promote language and communicative competence, not to mention a sense of 'global readiness', in young learners.

Several prior studies have revealed that ELT textbooks aligned with national curricula tend to prioritize accuracy in grammar, repetition of vocabulary, and control of practice, especially at lower levels (Subekti, 2020; Widodo, 2018). This approach can help establish the basics of literacy skills and minimise learners' anxiety, particularly in environments with little to no exposure to English outside the classroom. However, they also warn that overreliance on scripted activities may limit opportunities for meaningful interaction and thinking (Nunan, 2003). International textbooks, on the other hand, have generally been acclaimed for fostering communicative language teaching, project-based learning, and intercultural competence; they may nonetheless fail to adequately account for local relevance or contextual appropriateness (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). In addition to these internationally referenced studies, research published in local Indonesian journals has further highlighted the importance of textbook evaluation from classroom-based perspectives. For example, Setiawan (2023) examined teachers' evaluations of an English coursebook and found that textbook suitability is frequently mediated by teachers' instructional choices, task adaptation, and classroom context. Similarly, discourse-oriented research by Yanto and Pravitasari (2023) demonstrates that the realization of interpersonal meaning in EFL textbooks varies across materials, influencing how communicative competence and interactional engagement are fostered. These findings reinforce the need to examine ELT textbooks not only in terms of linguistic coverage and task types but also in relation to pedagogical intention and communicative orientation.

While there is a body of research on EFL textbooks in Indonesia, the majority has focused on either TEFL (Mansor & Al-Hazmi, 2014; Janatova & Zukas, 2013) or tertiary education (Rennekamp et al., 2001), with very little research specifically examining primary school materials. Furthermore, research typically examines textbooks within a single curriculum rather than making systematic comparisons across curricula. Comparison of different types of

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textbooks at the national or international level is relatively infrequent, focusing on curriculum design, task type, and integration of language skills. The deficit is all the more striking since international schools have proliferated in Indonesia, and parents' wish for an international approach to primary learning has been rapidly expanding.

At the same time, curriculum innovations such as the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum have brought new pedagogical approaches into schools, such as learning that respects diversity, student-centred learning, and context-based teaching<sup>4</sup>. Although theoretically consistent with current ELT practice, there are questions about how effectively these progressive/ principles can be operationalised in materials when compared with products benchmarked against international content. Curriculum innovation is more likely to fail without corresponding new teaching materials (Tomlinson, 2012). The empirical testing of EM textbooks is therefore required to test for curricular and pedagogical coherence.

Given this situation, the current study contributes to the call for a systemic investigation of ELT textbooks used in national and international primary schools in Indonesia. It particularly focuses on two Grade 3 textbooks: *My Next Words* of the Merdeka Curriculum and *Oxford International Primary English* of the Oxford International Curriculum. Grade 3 is an important year in the English acquisition process as it moves from language initiation to more formal literacy, reading, and writing. A review of textbooks at this grade level provides insights into how the reach language is scaffolded and built.

Accordingly, this study is guided by three explicit research questions that structure the entire analysis: (1) How do the two textbooks differ in their coverage and integration of the four English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)? (2) How do the two textbooks differ in terms of task types and learning activity design, particularly with regard to the balance between controlled practice, creative tasks, and project-based activities? (3) How do the two textbooks differ in their curriculum and thematic orientation, especially in relation to local cultural content, global themes, and the integration of 21st-century skills? By addressing these three questions, the study systematically examines how each textbook operationalizes pedagogical priorities and curricular goals in primary-level ELT.

Accordingly, drawing on the textbook analysis frameworks proposed by Littlejohn (2011) and Cunningsworth (1995), this study conducts a systematic qualitative content analysis to examine how the two selected Grade 3 textbooks—*My Next Words* (Merdeka Curriculum) and *Oxford International English* (Oxford International Curriculum), realize their pedagogical priorities through language skill coverage, task design, and curriculum and thematic orientation. Rather than merely describing surface features of the materials, the analysis seeks to reveal the underlying pedagogical assumptions embedded in each textbook and how these assumptions shape opportunities for developing communicative competence, critical thinking, and global awareness among young learners. Importantly, this study does not aim to judge the superiority of one curriculum over the other, but

to identify points of convergence and divergence in how national and international curricular goals are translated into classroom materials at the primary level.

Finally, this study contributes to ELT scholarship by providing timely empirical evidence on how two contrasting curricular systems currently operating in Indonesia are concretized in primary school textbooks at a crucial stage of early English learning. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for teachers in selecting and adapting materials, for curriculum developers in refining textbook design, and for policymakers in aligning curriculum intentions with instructional resources. In doing so, the study responds to the growing need for ELT materials that are both locally grounded and globally oriented, enabling Indonesian learners to meet national educational goals while also developing the competencies required for participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study was designed as a qualitative descriptive research using content analysis to investigate and compare two Grade 3 ELT textbooks that represent the two dominant curricular streams currently operating in Indonesian primary education: *My Next Words Grade 3*, which is officially developed in line with the Merdeka Curriculum and widely used in national schools, and *Oxford International English Grade 3*, which is aligned with the Oxford International Curriculum and commonly adopted in international schools in Indonesia. These two textbooks were selected because they are not only pedagogically influential but also function as standard instructional materials within their respective systems, making them representative cases for examining how national and international curricular orientations are translated into classroom materials at the primary level.

Textbook curricula and underlying educational philosophies. The research design was based on the assumption that textbooks are curriculum realizations and pedagogical artifacts that express underlying educational philosophies (Richards, 2001; Littlejohn, 2011). Thus, we can consider how textbook content reflects the realization of curricular objectives, such as communicative competence and early literacy development, in classroom materials. A comparative analysis was conducted to provide further insight into the similarities and differences between national and international textbooks for the development of primary-level ELT materials.

### **Research Instrument**

The primary instrument for this research was a textbook content analysis model based on existing ELT material evaluation models introduced by Cunningsworth (1995) and Littlejohn (2011). The frameworks were chosen because they include detailed criteria that cover the surface and underlying pedagogic content of LTMs. The adapted instrument contained three main analytical concepts that are directly related to the research purposes of this study.

The first analytical dimension focused on the integration of language skills, examining the presence, balance, and sequencing of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities in each textbook. This analysis aimed to identify

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whether the textbooks primarily promoted isolated skill practice or adopted an integrated-skills approach in which multiple language skills are developed in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing manner. Contemporary communicative language teaching and task-based learning frameworks emphasize that language skills are most effectively acquired when they are taught in an integrated way through meaningful communication rather than in isolation (Richards, 2006; Nation & Macalister, 2010). An integrated-skills orientation is therefore considered essential for supporting both communicative competence and functional language use, particularly in primary-level ELT contexts.

The second dimension concerned the types and objectives of tasks, concerning the kind of activities (e.g., repetition drills, songs, dialogues, projects, and inferential reading tasks), levels of cognitive demand required from learners in performing these activities, and whether or not they stimulated learner creativity, interaction, and higher thinking level. This dimension was rooted in Bloom's (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) revised taxonomy and task-based language teaching in which meaningful language use and learner participation are highlighted.

The third dimension was curriculum and thematic alignment, which examined the extent to which textbook content reflected curricular objectives, cultural representation, global themes, and 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and intercultural competence. This dimension was considered relevant to determine the congruence of textbook content with the characteristics of the 21st-century skills and competences aspired to by the Merdeka Curriculum and the Oxford International Curriculum.

Evaluation checklist and code sheet: evaluation criteria. To ensure that the analysis is both clear and consistently applied, an evaluation checklist was created, drawing on theoretical understanding of these three dimensions. The checklist was used to systematically examine each unit, lesson, and task of the chosen textbooks.

#### **Data Collection Techniques**

The data were collected through document analysis, focusing on the content of two English textbooks used in Grade 3 of Indonesian primary schools. Grade 3 was deliberately selected because it represents a crucial transitional stage in early English learning, where learners move from initial oral exposure and vocabulary recognition toward more structured reading and writing activities and more systematic language use. At this level, textbooks begin to play a more decisive role in shaping learners' literacy development, learning strategies, and communicative practices. Therefore, examining materials at this stage provides particularly valuable insights into how foundational language skills, task design, and curriculum priorities are scaffolded and expanded in primary ELT.

The textbooks were purposively selected because they function as official and widely used instructional materials within their respective curricular systems: *My Next Words Grade 3* for the Merdeka Curriculum in national schools and *Oxford International English Grade 3* for the Oxford International Curriculum in international schools. This makes them representative cases for analyzing how

different curricular orientations are realized in classroom materials at a critical stage of early English education.

The international textbook analyzed in this study was *Oxford International English: Student Book 3* (Oxford University Press), which follows the Oxford International Curriculum. This textbook was selected based on information published on the official Oxford International Curriculum website, which lists several schools in Indonesia that have adopted this curriculum, including Beverly School, Manado Independent School (MIS), and Prestige Montessori School. These schools represent Indonesian institutions implementing the Oxford International Curriculum framework, in which *Oxford International English* functions as a core English instructional material at the primary level. Therefore, this textbook was chosen as a representative example of internationally benchmarked ELT materials currently used in Indonesian international school contexts.

A scrutiny of each textbook, unit-wise, revealed all the instructional content for the purpose. The learning activities, texts, figures, and respective instructions were all considered data. No sections were cut from the analysis, as the goal was to capture a complete pedagogical profile of each textbook, not individual features.

The relevant information was systematically noted on the forwarding coding sheet during data collection. The main focus is on skill, task type, and thematic orientation of classified tasks. Descriptive messages were then written to articulate elements of patterns, repetitions, and unique C ) Ls noticed in each textbook.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis following systematic qualitative data analysis procedures proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014, 2020) and principles of qualitative content analysis outlined by Krippendorff (2018). The analysis was conducted through several iterative and cyclical phases to ensure a rigorous, transparent, and systematic interpretation of the textbook data. This iterative process allowed patterns, categories, and pedagogical tendencies to be identified, refined, and verified across repeated cycles of reading, coding, comparison, and synthesis.

First, data familiarisation was conducted by revisiting both textbooks frequently to gain a general sense of their organisation, pedagogical trends, and content. This facilitated the researcher's recovery of initial patterns in skill integration, task design, and thematic emphasis.

Second, we coded and categorized within the predetermined analytical framework. Every task and activity was encoded for (1) language skill focus, (2) type of trial and level of processing, and (3) curricular and thematic coverage. Codes were reviewed and refined iteratively as patterns emerged.

A third step of data reduction and comparison occurred as coded data was traced through to comparative tables and descriptive matrices. These tables facilitated comparison of domestic and international textbooks with respect to the three levels of analysis. Task types and skill coverage frequencies and

distributions were qualitatively described, with a focus on dominant trends rather than on building statistical generalizations.

Last, interpretation and synthesis involved connecting the results to other theories of ELT and previous work. This procedure was implemented so that analyses did not remain merely descriptive at the surface level. Instead, it provided critical pedagogical implications of the findings for curriculum development and language learning outcomes. The interpretation was consciously controlled and not hypostatized or inducted beyond that specified within the research design.

By these procedures, the study is guided by rigorous methodology and coherence among research questions, data sources, and methods of analysis, serving as a valid reference for comparing ELT textbooks used in primary schools in local and international schools in Indonesia.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### Finding

This study compared two Grade 3 English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks used in Indonesian primary schools: *My Next Words Grade 3* (national textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum) and *Oxford International English Grade 3* (international textbook aligned with the Oxford International Curriculum and referenced to CEFR standards). The comparison focused on three main dimensions: (1) language skills coverage, (2) task design, and (3) curriculum and thematic alignment. The findings show clear differences in pedagogical depth, learning opportunities, and cultural orientation between the two textbooks.

**Tabel 1. Language Skills Coverage**

Indicators	National Textbook ( <i>My Next Words Grade 3</i> )	International Textbook ( <i>Oxford International English Grade 3</i> )
Listening	Present (simple commands, "Listen and circle")	Present (audio tasks, listening for detail and main idea)
Speaking	Present (repetition, guided pair tasks)	Present (discussions, drama, oral sharing)
Reading	Present (simple word recognition)	Rich (fiction, non-fiction, longer texts)
Writing	Present (copying words, completing sentences)	Rich (story writing, information texts, structured process)

The national textbook provides foundational skill-building for early-stage learners, while the international textbook offers richer, more integrated language practice to support higher-order thinking and communication.

**Figure 1. Example of language skills in the national textbook, grade 3, Merdeka Curriculum**

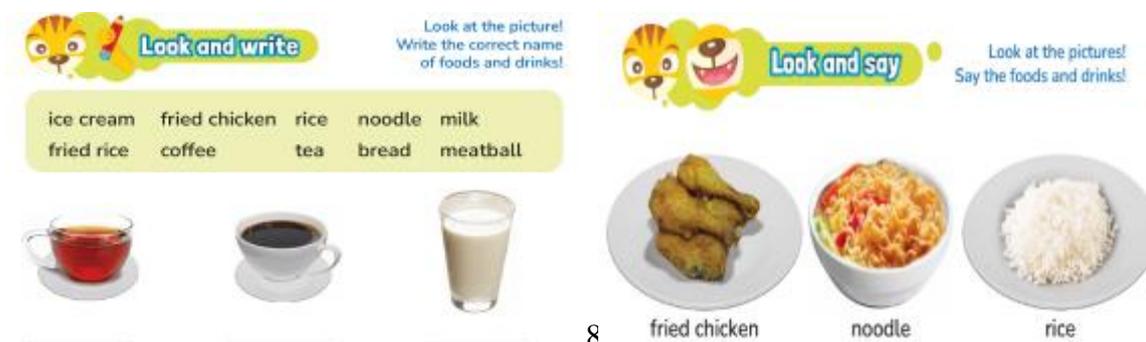


Figure 2. Example of language skills in an international textbook, Grade 3, Oxford International Curriculum

**"He who asks a question is a fool for a minute; he who does not remains a fool forever."**  
Chinese proverb

**Talk time**  
1 What do you think is happening in these pictures?  
2 How do you get to school? On foot? By bus? By car?

**1A Fiction Speaking, listening and vocabulary**  
**Describing journeys to school**  
A Read the words in the box and match them to the meanings below.  
cyclist journey pedestrian  
1 A person who rides a bicycle  
2 A person who is walking along the road  
3 A trip from one place to another  
B Copy the sentences below. Choose a word from the box to fill each gap.  
catch bus waits late  
Each morning, the school \_\_\_\_\_ stops in my village.  
I am often \_\_\_\_\_ and have to run to \_\_\_\_\_ it!  
The driver always \_\_\_\_\_ for me.  
C With a partner, talk about your journeys to school. How are they similar? How are they different?

**1B Fiction Reading**  
**Stories with familiar settings**  
This story is about a boy called Abdullah, who lives in a village in Malaysia. Abdullah catches butterflies and sells them. He uses the money to buy special porridge for his grandfather.  
**Abdullah's Morning**  
Each day, as Abdullah sets off for school he **shrugs** into the straps of his **satchel** and **snatches** up his butterfly net from beside the door. His mother puts in papaya and banana and flat pancakes for his lunch. She smooths his hair and tells him to study hard and listen to the teacher, because she wants him to do better than **weave** baskets and catch butterflies for the rest of his life.  
But Grandfather reaches for his hand as he is going out the door and whispers in his ear.  
"Catch me a butterfly today Abdullah, a big green butterfly if you can."  
And Abdullah knows that Grandfather is hungry for the porridge that he likes as much because his teeth are all gone.

**Glossary**  
porridge food made by boiling oatmeal to a thick paste  
shrugs lifts and drops shoulders  
satchel bag you wear for carrying school books  
snatches grabs something quickly  
weave make something by crossing strips over and under each other

**1H Fiction Writing workshop**  
**Your writing**  
3 Complete a paragraph plan to help you write the rest of your story. In the plan, write a sentence that explains what will happen in each paragraph.  
Remember to use a new paragraph when you change any of the following:

Time	e.g. Ten minutes later...
Place	e.g. They walked into the kitchen.
Character	e.g. The old lady ripped into the room.
Action	e.g. Suddenly, a door burst open.
Speaker	e.g. The old man declared, "I want fought back in this house!"

4 Now write the rest of the story in full. Include details about what the house looks like inside, as well as any noises and smells. Describe how Dolores feels. Choose your words carefully to make it interesting for the reader.  
If the house becomes a happy house, you could describe how the outside changes.

Both textbooks cover the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the depth and complexity of these skills differ significantly. The national textbook, *My Next Words Grade 3*, provides foundational exposure to all four skills. Listening activities mainly consist of simple classroom instructions and short tasks such as "Listen and circle" or "Listen and repeat." These tasks focus on recognizing sounds and understanding basic vocabulary. Speaking activities emphasize repetition, choral responses, and short guided pair work using structured question-and-answer patterns like "Do you like...?" This approach helps learners practice pronunciation and build confidence, but it offers limited opportunities for spontaneous or extended communication.

Reading tasks in the national textbook focus mostly on word recognition and short, simple sentences. Learners practice identifying vocabulary and understanding basic meanings rather than analyzing longer texts. Writing activities are also basic, including copying words, labeling pictures, and completing sentence frames. These tasks support early literacy development but do not require students to produce extended written texts.

In contrast, *Oxford International English Grade 3* provides richer and more integrated skill development. Listening activities involve audio tasks that require

learners to identify main ideas and specific details. Students listen to short narratives or informational texts and respond to comprehension questions, which promotes deeper understanding.

Speaking tasks go beyond repetition. Students participate in discussions, oral sharing, role-play, and classroom drama. These activities encourage learners to express opinions, retell stories, and interact more freely with peers. Reading materials are more varied and include fiction, non-fiction, and informational texts with longer passages. Learners are introduced to different text types and practice comprehension strategies such as identifying key ideas and making simple inferences.

Writing tasks in the international textbook are more structured and process-oriented. Students engage in story writing, information texts, and guided writing stages such as planning and drafting. Writing is treated as a meaningful communication activity rather than only a mechanical exercise. Overall, while both textbooks address the four skills, the national textbook focuses on basic skill-building, whereas the international textbook promotes integrated learning and higher-order thinking.

**Tabel 2. Task Types**

Indicators	National Textbook (My Next Words)	International Textbook (Oxford International Primary English )
Matching / fill-in-the-blank	Yes	Yes
Songs / games / chants	Yes (“Let’s sing”, games like snakes and ladders)	Rare
Role-play / dialogues	Yes (structured Q&A: “Do you like...?”)	Yes (pair work, classroom drama)
Creative tasks / projects	Limited (cut-and-stick, group work)	Rich (writing posters, poems, reports)
Grammar coverage	Implicit (within usage)	Explicit instruction and practice

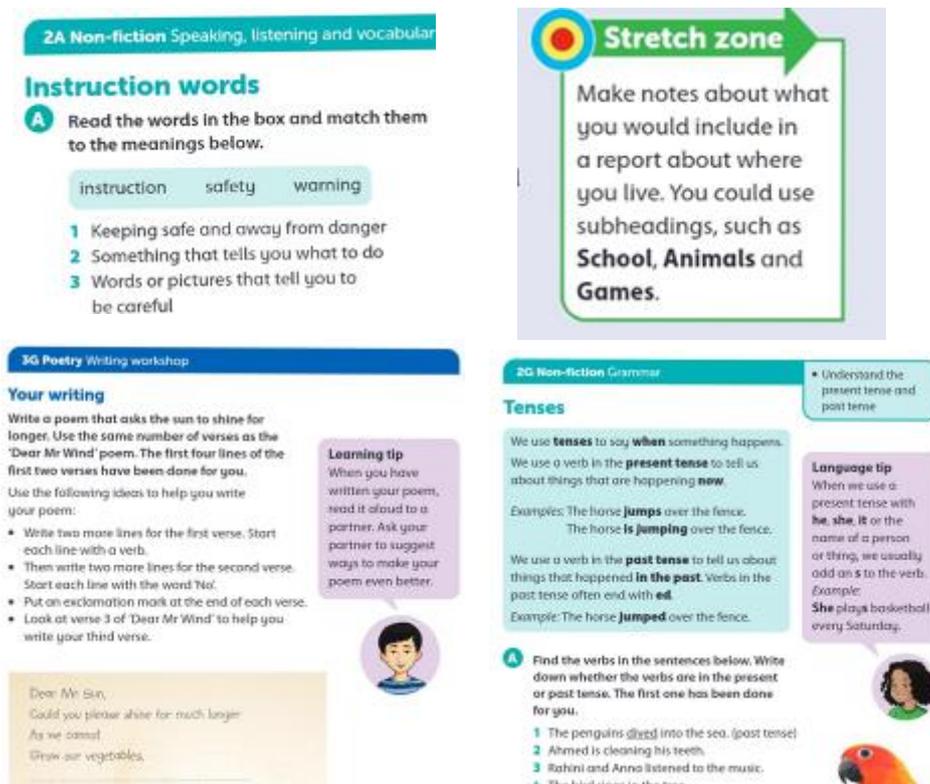
The national textbook focuses on memorization, fun interaction, and basic structured tasks suitable for early learners, while the international textbook emphasizes creativity, open communication, and structured grammar learning.

**Figure 3. Example of task types in the national textbook grade 3 Medeka Curriculum**





Figure 4. Example of task types in the international textbook Oxford International Curriculum



The second dimension analyzed was task types and learning activities. The national textbook uses consistent and simple task formats, including matching, fill-in-the-blank exercises, songs, games, and short role-play. Activities such as “Let’s sing” and board games help create a fun and engaging classroom atmosphere. These tasks are suitable for young learners and support motivation.

However, most tasks remain highly structured and controlled. Grammar is taught implicitly through repeated exposure rather than explicit explanation. Students learn language patterns through practice without detailed rule discussion. While this approach can be appropriate for young learners, it may limit their understanding of grammatical structures and their ability to apply them independently.

Creative tasks in the national textbook are limited. Some activities involve cutting, sticking, or simple group work, but they are usually short and guided. There are few extended projects that require planning, critical thinking, or

problem-solving. As a result, learners have fewer opportunities to engage in complex or open-ended tasks.

In comparison, the international textbook provides a wider variety of tasks. In addition to matching and fill-in-the-blank exercises, it includes discussions, pair and group work, drama, creative writing, and project-based tasks such as writing posters, poems, and short reports. These tasks require students to actively use language for meaningful purposes.

Grammar instruction in the international textbook is more explicit. Rules are explained clearly and followed by structured practice. This approach supports students' understanding of language forms and accuracy. Many tasks also integrate multiple skills, for example, reading a text, discussing it, and then writing a response. This integrated design encourages learners to use language in connected and meaningful ways.

Overall, the national textbook emphasizes repetition, memorization, and simple structured tasks. The international textbook emphasizes creativity, communication, and structured language development. The differences reflect two pedagogical orientations: one focusing on accessibility and basic learning, and the other promoting autonomy and higher cognitive engagement.

**Tabel 3. Curriculum and thematic focus**

<b>Curriculum alignment</b>	<b><i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum, CP-aligned</b>	<b>Oxford Curriculum, CEFR-aligned</b>
Local cultural content	Rich (e.g., Mi Aceh, Papeda)	Minimal
Global themes	Limited (Italy, pizza, etc.)	Rich (climate, wildlife, cultures)
21st-century skills	Partial (group work, collaboration)	Strong focus (problem-solving, global thinking)
Inclusivity	Yes (diverse Indonesian names, scenarios)	Yes (diverse global representation)

The national textbook is more localized and culturally relevant for Indonesian learners, while the international textbook is globally oriented and skill-rich, designed to prepare students for international learning environments.

**Figure 5. Example of curriculum alignment and thematic focus in the national textbook Grade 3 Merdeka Curriculum**

**I like Mi Aceh**  
KANTIN BHINEKA  
I like fried rice. Do you like it?  
No, I don't like it. I like Mi Aceh.

**I don't like rice**  
Alfonso is Made's friend.  
Alfonso is from Italy. He lives in front of Made's house.  
He likes pizza and spaghetti.  
He doesn't like rice.

**Let's find out** Ask your friend, "Do you like...?"  
Do you like ice cream?  
No, I don't like it.

No.	Name					
1.	Joshua	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						

**Talk time**  
1. What is the climate like in Australia?  
2. How do people in Australia live?  
3. What are some of the animals in Australia?  
4. What do people in Australia do for fun?  
5. How do people in Australia get around?  
6. What are some of the cities in Australia?

**Australia**  
Australia is a large island continent in the southern hemisphere. It is the world's sixth largest country and has a population of over 25 million people.

The third dimension examined curriculum alignment and thematic focus. The national textbook is aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum and competency-based learning outcomes. It includes strong local cultural content, such as references to Indonesian foods, traditions, and daily life contexts. This localization helps learners relate English learning to their own experiences and strengthens cultural identity.

Inclusivity is reflected through the use of Indonesian names and familiar social situations. However, global themes are limited. Although some international references appear, most topics remain close to students' immediate environment. Elements of 21st-century skills, such as collaboration, are present but not deeply developed.

On the other hand, the international textbook is aligned with the Oxford International Curriculum and CEFR standards. It emphasizes global themes, including climate, wildlife, and cultures from different countries. This broader thematic focus promotes global awareness and prepares learners for international educational contexts.

The international textbook also integrates 21st-century skills more strongly. Many tasks require problem-solving, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Students are encouraged to reflect on issues, share opinions, and work together on projects. Inclusivity is shown through diverse global representation in characters and contexts, although Indonesian local culture is less emphasized.

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These findings indicate that the national textbook prioritizes cultural relevance and contextual familiarity, while the international textbook prioritizes global perspectives and skill development. Both approaches offer different educational advantages.

In summary, both textbooks support primary-level English learning but differ in scope, depth, and orientation. The national textbook provides accessible, culturally relevant materials with strong foundational skill development. It emphasizes structured tasks, repetition, and local contexts suitable for beginner learners. The international textbook offers more varied input, integrated skill practice, explicit grammar instruction, and richer thematic content. It promotes higher-order thinking, creativity, and global awareness. While it may be more cognitively demanding, it provides broader preparation for international learning environments. These differences reflect the broader goals of their respective curricula. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes contextual relevance and foundational competence, while the Oxford International Curriculum emphasizes global standards and comprehensive skill development.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare Grade 3 English language textbooks used in Indonesian national and international school contexts by analyzing language skill coverage, task design, and curriculum and thematic alignment. The findings indicate that although both textbooks aim to develop basic English proficiency, they reflect substantially different pedagogical orientations that stem from their underlying curricular philosophies. This discussion interprets these differences through contemporary ELT theories, materials development principles, and previous textbook studies, demonstrating how curriculum ideology is concretized in classroom materials at the primary level and how it shapes learners' learning opportunities.

With regard to language skill coverage, the findings confirm that both textbooks include listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities; however, they differ markedly in depth, balance, and integration. The national textbook, *My Next Words Grade 3*, prioritizes initial exposure through short listening commands, repetition-based speaking activities, early word recognition tasks, and highly controlled writing activities such as copying or gap-filling. This design reflects a skills-separation and form-focused orientation that is commonly found in early-stage foreign language instruction and is consistent with foundational literacy approaches that emphasize gradual input, repetition, and cognitive simplicity (Cameron, 2001; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Such an approach can be pedagogically justified in contexts where learners have limited exposure to English outside school and where instructional time and teacher proficiency may be constrained.

However, contemporary second language acquisition research suggests that while controlled input is necessary, it is not sufficient for developing communicative competence. The international textbook, *Oxford International English Grade 3*, demonstrates a more balanced and integrated-skills orientation by combining listening for gist and detail, extended speaking through discussions

and drama, exposure to multiple reading genres, and scaffolded writing processes. This reflects the principles of communicative language teaching and task-based learning, which emphasize that language skills develop most effectively when they are used together in meaning-focused activities rather than taught in isolation (Richards, 2006; Ellis, 2017). Integrated-skills instruction also aligns with functional views of language use, where learners learn to comprehend and produce language as a unified communicative resource rather than as discrete components.

The contrast in reading and writing practices is particularly significant because literacy development at the primary level plays a decisive role in long-term academic language proficiency. While the national textbook limits literacy work to word-level recognition and sentence-level production, the international textbook exposes learners to both narrative and informational texts and guides them through extended writing tasks. Research on young learners indicates that children are capable of engaging with longer texts and producing extended output when appropriate scaffolding is provided (Pinter, 2017; Gibbons, 2015). From a sociocultural perspective, such scaffolding enables learners to operate within their zone of proximal development and gradually appropriate more complex discourse practices. Therefore, the richer literacy ecology offered by the international textbook is likely to support not only linguistic development but also cognitive and academic discourse growth, provided that teachers are equipped to mediate these tasks effectively.

In terms of task design, the findings reveal a clear contrast in pedagogical priorities. Both textbooks include controlled exercises such as matching and fill-in-the-blank tasks, reflecting a shared recognition of the role of form-focused practice in early language learning. However, the national textbook places stronger emphasis on songs, games, and chants, which primarily serve affective and motivational functions. This is consistent with established principles of young learner pedagogy, which stress the importance of play, rhythm, physical activity, and emotional engagement in sustaining attention and lowering anxiety (Brewster et al., 2002; Pinter, 2017). In contexts where English is a foreign language and exposure is limited, such affective scaffolding is pedagogically valuable.

Nevertheless, the analysis shows that in the national textbook these activities are rarely extended into tasks that require learners to use language for meaningful communication. Most creative activities are limited to procedural engagement (e.g., cutting, sticking, or simple group work) rather than genuine language production. In contrast, the international textbook includes a wide range of project-based and creative tasks, such as writing posters, poems, and short reports. Project-based learning and task-based pedagogy have been shown to promote learner autonomy, deeper cognitive processing, collaboration, and sustained language use (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Ellis, 2017; Thomas, 2000). From a usage-based perspective, such extended output opportunities are crucial because they push learners to reorganize and consolidate their linguistic resources (Swain, 2005).

Another important difference concerns grammar treatment. The national textbook adopts a predominantly implicit approach, presenting grammatical

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structures through usage without explicit explanation. This approach resonates with early naturalistic acquisition models and Krashen's (1982) emphasis on comprehensible input. However, more recent research suggests that input alone is not sufficient, especially in instructed foreign language contexts. The international textbook integrates explicit grammar instruction with communicative practice, reflecting a form-focused instruction approach. Ellis (2006, 2017) argues that explicit attention to form, when embedded in meaningful communication, facilitates accuracy and long-term development without undermining fluency. Thus, the international textbook's grammar pedagogy represents a more theoretically balanced and instructionally robust model.

These differences in task and grammar design also reflect contrasting conceptions of learner roles. The national textbook largely positions learners as imitators and responders, whereas the international textbook increasingly positions them as meaning-makers, problem-solvers, and creators of texts. As Littlejohn (2011) argues, such roles are not accidental but are embedded in material design choices that reflect deeper pedagogical values and beliefs about learning. In this sense, the two textbooks embody different theories of learning: one more transmission-oriented and one more constructivist and participatory.

With respect to curriculum and thematic alignment, the national textbook strongly foregrounds local cultural representation, while the international textbook emphasizes global themes and intercultural perspectives. The inclusion of Indonesian names, foods, customs, and daily contexts in *My Next Words Grade 3* supports learners' identity affirmation and contextual relevance. This is consistent with principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which argue that learning becomes more meaningful when new knowledge is connected to learners' lived experiences (Gay, 2010). In foreign language education, such localization can reduce psychological distance and enhance engagement.

However, the limited presence of global themes in the national textbook may restrict learners' early development of intercultural awareness. In contrast, the international textbook reflects Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence by introducing learners to environmental issues, wildlife, and diverse cultures. Matsuda (2012) further argues that English education should prepare learners for international communication in a multilingual world, not merely for interaction with a single native-speaker culture. From this perspective, the international textbook offers a broader ideological orientation toward English as a global lingua franca.

The integration of 21st-century skills further differentiates the two materials. While both textbooks include collaborative elements, the international textbook more systematically promotes inquiry, problem-solving, creativity, and global thinking. These competencies align with contemporary educational frameworks that emphasize preparing learners for complex, unpredictable real-world challenges (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; OECD, 2018). The partial and implicit inclusion of these skills in the national textbook suggests that curriculum reform ideals have not yet been fully realized at the materials level.

Importantly, both textbooks demonstrate different but complementary forms of inclusivity. The national textbook promotes inclusivity through local

diversity, while the international textbook emphasizes global diversity. This confirms Widodo's (2018) argument that inclusivity in textbooks can be realized through multiple representational strategies depending on curricular goals and target learner populations.

Taken together, the findings reveal a persistent pedagogical gap between national and international ELT textbooks in Indonesia. The national textbook excels in accessibility, affective support, and cultural grounding but provides limited opportunities for extended communication, critical thinking, and global engagement. The international textbook offers richer cognitive, linguistic, and intercultural affordances but may be less embedded in learners' immediate sociocultural realities. This pattern corroborates earlier comparative studies of ELT materials (Subekti, 2020; McGrath, 2013).

From a pedagogical standpoint, these findings suggest that neither textbook model is sufficient on its own. As Tomlinson (2012) argues, effective materials must balance familiarity and challenge, local relevance and global exposure. A principled integration of the strengths of both approaches—combining cultural grounding with communicative, project-based, and intercultural tasks, would better serve Indonesian primary learners.

In sum, this study demonstrates how curriculum orientation profoundly shapes textbook design and, by extension, classroom learning opportunities. By situating the findings within contemporary ELT theory and materials development research, the discussion highlights the necessity of evaluating textbooks not only in terms of content coverage but also in terms of the kinds of learners and learning practices they promote. These insights are crucial for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to improve the quality of early English education in Indonesia. involved in the English language education of young learners in Indonesia.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This study aims to explore language skills, task types, and curriculum alignment in two Grade 3 English textbooks, namely Oxford International Primary English (International Curriculum) and My Next Words (National Curriculum), used in Indonesian schools. Local textbook that focus more on simple vocabulary and cultural content can support early literacy, but it does not provide space for critical thinking and communication. On the other hand, international textbook supports inquiry-based learning, international issues, and four language skills equally. This study proposes an improvement on the national textbooks to provide a unique balance of global and local characteristics in localized editions. Suggestions for better preparing students for exchange include developing national materials that include authentic texts, implementing project-based learning, and incorporating intercultural content. In addition, it is advised to compare the content and teacher education.

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