
Textbook Evaluation in Elementary Schools: An Approach Based on Early Childhood Development

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Abstract

In early English education, textbooks strongly influence children's language acquisition and development. Yet, many prioritize cognitive skills while neglecting emotional and physical growth, limiting their suitability for young learners. This study evaluates the English textbook *My Next Words*, developed under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, through an early childhood development lens encompassing cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions. Using a descriptive design, data were collected from textbook analysis and semi-structured interviews with five English teachers in Lengayang District, Pesisir Selatan Regency, West Sumatra. The data were then analyzed by measuring the percentage of each dimension of children's development to present the majority from three dimensions. The results of this study revealed that while the textbook effectively supports cognitive development (74.1%), it provides minimal attention to emotional (18.5%) and physical (7.4%) growth. Teachers further reported that activities were repetitive and cognitively oriented, restricting creativity and hands-on engagement. These findings highlight a significant gap in English for Young Learners (EYL) resources, where textbooks often lack balance across developmental domains. The study contributes to EYL and textbook development by underscoring the need for more holistic materials that foster not only language skills but also children's emotional and physical growth.

Keywords: Early childhood development, textbook evaluation, English for young learners, the Merdeka curriculum.

Introduction

Textbooks are academic publications created by highly skilled experts in their respective fields for students at specific educational levels (Haulle & Kabelege, 2021; Khachaturyan & Ghalacyan, 2023). They provide carefully selected material relevant to study topic (Garth, 2022), as well as exercises and activities that guide both teachers and learners in achieving curriculum

objectives (Riadini & Cahyono, 2021). Furthermore, textbooks serve several purposes: a) provide students with reference or instruction material; b) serve as evaluation materials; c) assist educators in carrying out the curriculum (Rismasari & Arsyad, 2023); d) influence teachers' instructional methods; and e) contribute to students' academic development (Umar & Ameen, 2022). In particular, English textbooks must be adapted to meet the developmental needs of young learners.

Due to the significance of utilizing English textbooks for young learners, they should possess suitable textbooks that align with their needs. This is because acquiring English skills is vital for young learners since they are in a key period known as the "Golden Age" (Lozanov, 1978). Nunan and Linse (2005) note that elementary pupils possess a strong ability to retain what they learn, and it is recommended that second language study begin at age six and continue until twelve (Jasrial et al., 2024). Thus, a developmentally appropriate English textbook is needed to facilitate young learners' language acquisition during this critical stage.

Perspectives from developmental psychology reinforce the necessity of designing child-appropriate materials. Piaget (1972) emphasized that children at the primary level are in the concrete operational stage, which requires learning through concrete, hands-on experiences rather than abstract input. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the importance of social interaction and scaffolding in language learning, which implies that textbooks must encourage peer collaboration, role-play, and interactive tasks. Brazelton and Greenspan (2000) further underline that children's growth depends equally on emotional, physical, and cognitive needs, meaning that materials cannot focus on one domain only. Supporting this, Cameron (2001) and Tavakol and Tavakoli (2023) argue that English for young learners should incorporate imagination, play, and kinesthetic learning to foster retention and engagement.

In Indonesia, textbooks are provided by the government based on the current curriculum, through which English is formally introduced at the elementary level (Jazuly et al., 2019; (Hazizah et al., 2025)). One such book is *My Next Words*. Linse and Nunan (2005) stress the necessity of recognizing children's developmental stages in textbook design, particularly early childhood, when language learning capacity is at its peak.

Children's growth can be categorized into three distinct dimensions: physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). These domains develop at different rates,

making it essential for textbooks to address all aspects rather than focusing solely on cognitive growth (Suryana et al., 2022) . Therefore, evaluating textbooks must consider developmental appropriateness alongside curriculum alignment. As Cunningsworth (1995) , Ellis (1997) , and Richards (2015) argue, textbook evaluation is essential because it allows educators to go beyond superficial assessment and obtain a systematic understanding of materials' strengths and weaknesses. However, previous evaluations of ELT materials in Indonesia have primarily examined curriculum alignment and content validity (Putri et al., 2022; Riadini & Cahyono, 2021) with limited attention to developmental appropriateness. Recent scholarship (Cade et al., 2022; Garton & Graves, 2014; Khoirunnisah et al., 2022; Lunga et al., 2022; Tomlinson, 2023) calls for holistic, child-centered materials that balance cognitive, affective, and physical domains.

This study seeks to fill that gap by evaluating the English textbook *My Next Words* using an early childhood development framework. By integrating document analysis and teachers' voices, this research not only provides an academic assessment but also captures the lived classroom reality. In doing so, it contributes a novel perspective to textbook evaluation in Indonesia by emphasizing whole-child development as a benchmark for quality learning resources. The problem of this study formulated into this research question: "how is the evaluation of my next word textbook for elementary schools based on early childhood development?"

Research Methodology

The current study used a descriptive analysis approach with the primary goal of analyzing the English textbook "My Next Words" for elementary schools in terms of child development, including emotional, physical, and cognitive elements. Linse and Nunan (2005) argue that the process of foreign language learning among young learners should be evaluated alongside their developmental stages, as textbooks and instructional materials play key roles in establishing classroom practices. A descriptive design was selected to allow systematic analysis of textbook content and triangulation with teachers' perspectives. It was aimed to meet the descriptive research perspective as argued by Furidha (2023), who state that descriptive research is especially beneficial when the purpose is to provide an accurate profile of a phenomenon, event, or item.

Data sources consisted of (1) document analysis of *My Next Words* and (2) semi-structured interviews with five English. This combination was used to cross-check results and ensure richer insights into the textbook's applicability. The study population consisted of English teachers working in elementary schools in Pesisir Selatan Regency, West Sumatra. Since it was not feasible

to include all teachers across the regency, cluster random sampling was applied, following Cohen et al. (2018). They state that cluster sampling is an efficient strategy for research with large populations distributed across huge areas since it saves money and time while retaining representativeness. The sampling frame consisted of 15 districts, and one district, Lengayang, was randomly selected. Inclusion criteria required teachers to be currently teaching English at the elementary level, (b) have used *My Next Words* in their classrooms, and (c) be willing to participate voluntarily.

Special emphasis was placed on how the textbook addressed the three dimensions of children's development. Emotional development was tested by determining whether the textbook promoted motivation, confidence, and social connection. Physical development was evaluated in terms of activities that may improve fine motor abilities, such as writing or drawing, as well as gross motor skills, such as singing action songs or acting out role-plays. Cognitive development was assessed in terms of comprehension, memory, problem-solving, and task sequencing. The researcher conducted document analysis to thoroughly assess the textbook against established criteria based on Linse and Nunan's (2005) framework for child development in language learning. In addition to documentation, semi-structured interviews were done with English teachers in the Lengayang District. The interviews were conducted to obtain teachers' thoughts, experiences, and evaluations about the applicability of *My Next Words*. Interviews gave valuable insights that supplemented the document analysis.

Two main instruments were used: documentation and interviews. Documentation was employed to evaluate the textbook in terms of emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Emotional development was assessed through indicators such as motivation, confidence, and social connection. Physical development was measured through activities fostering fine motor skills (e.g., writing, drawing), and gross motor skills (e.g., action songs, role plays). Cognitive development was evaluated in terms of comprehension, memory, problem-solving, and sequencing tasks. Document analysis followed Linse and Nunan's (2009) framework for children's development.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English teachers to explore their experiences and evaluations of the textbook's applicability. Data collection occurred in two stages: (1) systematic document analysis of the textbook and (2) individual teacher interviews, scheduled at convenient times to encourage candid responses. The teachers' interview was conducted for around an hour until the researcher achieved the target answers related to the textbook evaluation. The researcher interviewed them in their own school after getting the permission letter

from the school. Combining documentation and interviews facilitated triangulation and strengthened validity.

For data analysis, an evaluation grid was developed with criteria divided into emotional, physical, and cognitive dimensions. Each unit, lesson, and activity was coded using this grid. Two coders independently applied the grid, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$), indicating strong agreement. Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, with responses coded according to the three developmental aspects and compared with textbook findings. Additionally, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and the research followed ethical guidelines for studies involving human participants.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

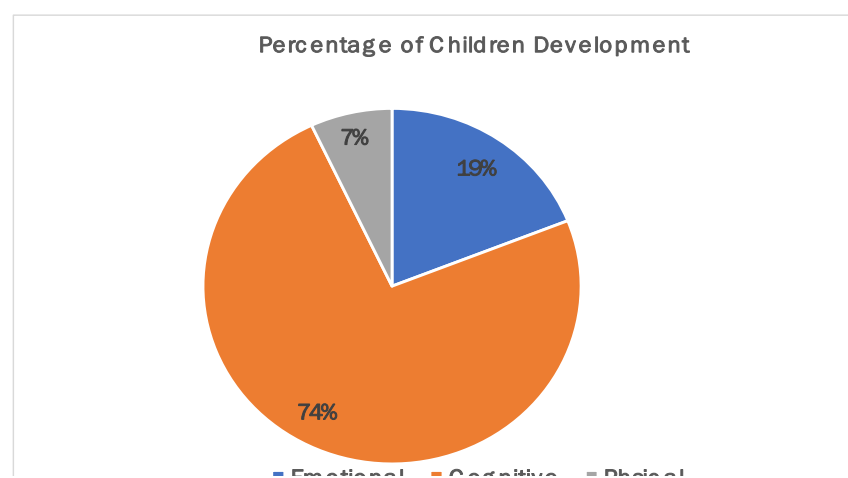
The results of this study, "Textbook Evaluation in Elementary Schools: An Approach Based on Early Childhood Development," are given by combining information from interviews with English teachers in the Lengayang District with findings from the analysis of textbook documents. The study looked at how closely the English textbook *My Next Words* addressed characteristics of children's emotional, cognitive, and physical development, as proposed by Linse and Nunan (2005). By combining book content analysis and teachers' perspectives, the study gives a full evaluation of the textbook's developmental appropriateness in the local educational context. The textbook was systematically evaluated as part of the first step of the analytical process. Each unit was investigated to see whether tasks and activities promoted emotional, cognitive, and physical development.

The results showed a highly inconsistent distribution across all three dimensions. The textbook had 81 activities spread out over twelve units. Only six of these activities encouraged physical development, while 60 of them focused on cognitive development and 15 on emotional development. These data suggest that the textbook prioritizes the cognitive domain, whereas the emotional and physical domains receive very little attention. This imbalance indicates that the textbook may not fully meet the entire developmental needs of elementary school students. Table 1 shows the distribution of developmental features to help visualize the imbalance more clearly.

Table 1. Distribution of Children's Development Aspects in My Next Word Textbook

Development Aspects	F	%
Emotional	15	18.5%
Cognitive	60	74.1%
Physical	6	7.4%
Total	71	100%

As demonstrated in Table 1, cognitive growth accounts for approximately three-quarters of textbook activities (74.1%), while emotional development contributes less than one-fifth (18.5%), and physical development receives the least attention (7.4%). These findings are also illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts the distribution as a pie chart.

**Figure 1.** Percentage of Emotional, Cognitive, and Physical Development in My Next Words

The figure emphasizes how cognitive development dominates the textbook, confirming the idea that whole-child development receives little attention in the text. The organization of textbook modules revealed a strong emphasis on cognitive tasks. Many classes focused on vocabulary memorization, spelling drills, and comprehension tasks in which students had to recall material or match words to pictures. While such exercises are essential for language learning, their overarching emphasis limits learners' ability to engage in collaborative, emotional, or kinesthetic experiences.

Teachers interviewed in Lengayang District consistently supported the trend identified in the analysis. They explained that classroom activities were largely dominated by repeated drills, such as filling in blanks, copying words, and rewriting short sentences. Opportunities for creativity, play, or movement-based learning were described as limited and inconsistent. Teacher A reflected:

“The textbook helps students remember many words, but sometimes it feels too monotonous because the students just repeat and write without doing activities that make them enjoy learning. I see that students can memorize words faster, but at the same time,

they look less excited. They do the work because I ask them to, not because they are interested. In the long run, I am worried this will make them think English is only about memorizing, not something fun to explore.”

This perspective illustrates the tension between cognitive progress and learner motivation. Teachers acknowledged that the book contributed positively to vocabulary development but expressed concern that its repetitive format discouraged creativity and reduced curiosity.

The analysis of emotional development showed that only fifteen activities included components that could foster self-expression or peer interaction. These consisted mostly of short dialogues, role-play introductions, and simple pair work. Teachers commented that while these activities were useful, their scarcity weakened the overall affective dimension of learning. Teacher B also shared:

“Children in elementary school require materials that make them happy and motivated. When students smile and laugh while learning, they remember the lesson more deeply. Unfortunately, the book only gives this kind of opportunity sometimes. Most of the time, students are just told to write, repeat, or copy sentences. For young children, this makes the classroom atmosphere too serious. I often need to add my own games or songs so that students don’t lose their interest.”

While teacher C added a similar observation, explaining the importance of confidence-building:

“In my class, I notice that children are shy when speaking English. If the textbook only asks them to write, they do not get the chance to practice speaking with their friends. Some small dialogues in the book help, but they are too short and not enough. I believe students need more activities that let them talk, act, and express themselves. Without this, they may feel afraid or think English is too difficult.”

Perhaps the most striking finding was the very low presence of physical development components. Only six activities (7.4 percent of the total) required movement or motor skills. Teachers strongly emphasized this shortcoming. Teacher D also explained:

“When children learn English, they must move, sing, and play. Young learners cannot sit still for too long. But this book does not give many opportunities for movement. If I follow only the textbook, the class becomes quiet and students quickly lose focus. That is why I often add clapping games, simple dances, or songs. These extra activities are important to keep the children’s energy high, but they are not supported by the textbook.”

Teacher E expanded on this point, stressing the practical challenge in classroom management:

“In grade one and grade two, students are very active. They like to run, jump, and talk to each other. If the lesson only asks them to write and repeat, they get bored and start to disturb their friends. This makes it hard for me to control the class. If the textbook had more activities with movement, such as role plays, songs, or even simple tasks like

pointing or acting, it would help me a lot. The students would learn English while also using their energy in a positive way.”

Teachers also expressed concern that the imbalance across developmental domains placed extra pressure on them to supplement the lessons. Teacher A explained:

“As teachers, we must be creative to fill the gaps in this book. We cannot rely on it alone because it is too focused on memorization. I usually bring my own materials, like flashcards, pictures, or short videos. I also prepare games and songs, but this takes more time and energy. Not all teachers may have the same resources, so the result is that some children only get the textbook activities without the additional support.”

Taken together, these findings show that teachers value *My Next Words* as a solid foundation for vocabulary and grammar acquisition, but they view it as incomplete for meeting the holistic needs of young learners. The lack of balance across cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects forces teachers to adapt and supplement heavily, which can create disparities in classroom experiences. Both the document analysis and teachers’ voices highlight the importance of designing primary school textbooks that integrate enjoyable, movement-based, and confidence-building activities alongside structured language tasks. Such balance is essential to ensure that young learners remain motivated, engaged, and able to develop not only linguistic knowledge but also emotional resilience and active participation in learning.

Discussion

The present investigation of an English textbook entitled *My Next Words* demonstrates a constant tension between cognitive formality and holistic child development in young-learner resources. The textbook's structured vocabulary lists, spelling drills, and comprehension tasks support memory, recognition, and basic syntactic understanding. However, recent literature emphasizes that effective materials must foster affective engagement, physical involvement, and sociocultural relevance to sustain meaningful learning (Şimşek & Dündar, 2018; Vitta, 2021). The analysis showed that cognitive development dominates the book (74.1%), while emotional (18.5%) and physical (7.4%) aspects are marginalized. This echoes earlier findings from Şimşek and Dündar (2018) and Samoudi and Mohammadi (2021), who reported similar imbalances in ELT textbooks for young learners.

From a developmental perspective, this imbalance contradicts major educational theories. Piaget (1972) posited that children in the concrete operational stage require interactive, hands-on activities to internalize knowledge. Yet, the *My Next Words* textbook largely neglects kinaesthetic tasks. Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory highlights that learning is mediated through

interaction and scaffolding, but the textbook provides very limited opportunities for peer collaboration or role-play. Likewise, Brazelton and Greenspan (2000) emphasized that emotional needs are inseparable from cognitive growth, yet the textbook devotes little space to activities that build confidence, reduce anxiety, or foster peer bonding.

The imbalance found in *My Next Words*, which emphasizes cognitive development while giving limited attention to emotional and physical aspects, can be explained by several possible reasons. First, the textbook seems to be designed with a traditional orientation toward vocabulary mastery and grammatical accuracy, prioritizing structured written tasks such as repetition and drills over interactive or creative activities. This reflects what Richards (2001) describes as a “structural view” of language, where the mastery of forms takes precedence over communicative and holistic competence. Such a design choice may also be influenced by curriculum pressures, as English at the primary level is often framed as a foundation subject with measurable outcomes like vocabulary recall and sentence formation (Cunningsworth, 19995; Tomlinson, 2015). In addition, publishing constraints, such as page limits and the need for standardized formats, may discourage the inclusion of interactive and movement-based activities, which typically demand extra space, illustrations, or materials (Harwood, 2010).

Another possible reason is the implicit assumption that teachers will supplement the textbook with additional games, songs, or interactive tasks, a pattern observed in many commercially published textbooks (McGrath, 2013). However, this creates inconsistencies, as not all teachers possess equal time, training, or resources to enrich lessons. Finally, the limited integration of child development principles suggests that the authors may have focused narrowly on linguistic input without fully considering the holistic nature of early childhood learning. As Piaget (1964) and Vygotsky (1978) emphasize, children’s cognitive, emotional, and physical growth are interconnected, and neglecting these dimensions risks reducing engagement and long-term motivation in language learning.

Teachers’ voices further confirm these theoretical concerns. Their reports of monotonous, repetitive tasks align with Tomlinson’s (2013) argument that materials failing to engage affective and physical dimensions reduce motivation and creativity. Krashen (2007) also stress that affective variables such as low anxiety, confidence, and motivation are crucial to second language acquisition. The lack of such elements in *My Next Words* risks undermining students’ enthusiasm and active participation. Moreover, Cameron (2010) and Pinter (2011) remind us that embodied learning, through singing, gesture, drama, and play, is vital for sustaining children’s attention and

comprehension. Yet, this study found only 7.4% of activities in the textbook addressed physical development, forcing teachers to improvise by adding their own games and songs.

In comparison with previous studies, the findings reveal both similarities and divergences. Like Şimşek and Dündar (2018), this study confirms that ELT textbooks often prioritize cognitive learning at the expense of affective and physical engagement. However, in contrast to Vitta (2021), who found recent trends towards more balanced and holistic ELT materials, the Indonesian textbook *My Next Words* remains traditional and heavily cognitive. This divergence may be attributed to the centralized and standardized process of government textbook development, which prioritizes alignment with curriculum objectives over child-centered pedagogy. The lack of culturally localized content, also noted by Ratri and Tyas (2022), may further explain why teachers in this study felt the materials were not sufficiently engaging or contextually relevant.

Theoretically, these findings support the view that textbook evaluation should not be limited to cognitive alignment but should also consider developmental appropriateness (Garton & Graves, 2014; Tomlinson, 2023). Practically, the results highlight the urgent need for teachers to adapt *My Next Words* by supplementing it with role-plays, songs, games, and collaborative projects, while policymakers and authors should explicitly integrate developmental psychology principles (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978) into textbook design. This study thus emphasizes the need for a paradigm shift in ELT materials: from curriculum-driven cognitive focus to child-centered holistic development.

Based on the results of the study, textbooks are appropriately positioned as educational scaffolds that teachers must alter rather than absorb completely. This conclusion is supported by recent methodological literature, which supports textbooks that provide credible scaffolding and systematic cognitive sequencing, while also allowing for flexibility for teachers to adjust in emotional, physical, and cultural contexts (Richards, 2017).

For English teachers, these findings imply the importance of engaging critically with textbooks rather than using them passively. Since *My Next Words* provides limited emotional and physical support, teachers should not only supplement the materials with interactive, playful, and movement-based activities but also be actively involved in the process of evaluating and adapting textbooks. As Alshumaimeri and Alharbi (2024) emphasize, involving teachers in textbook evaluation increases their sense of ownership and engagement in the educational process, leading to more motivated and committed teaching. In this context, teachers in elementary schools can strengthen their professional agency by tailoring lessons to children's developmental needs,

thereby transforming the textbook from a rigid curriculum tool into a flexible scaffold that fosters holistic growth.

In conclusion, the evaluation of the “My Next Words” textbook highlights a developing issue with ELT resources: textbooks frequently offer structured cognitive support but disregard the emotional, physical, and cultural needs of young learners. Although widespread, imbalance presents a chance. Following current evaluative approaches, authors and educators can create developmentally appropriate materials based on the textbook's clear cognitive flow.

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study provides a novel contribution by integrating an early childhood development framework into ELT textbook evaluation, an approach rarely applied in previous Indonesian studies. The evaluation of *My Next Words* highlights a clear imbalance: while the textbook effectively supports cognitive growth through vocabulary and comprehension tasks, it offers limited opportunities for emotional and physical development. Such an imbalance risks lowering motivation, creativity, and engagement in young learners, confirming that cognitive focus alone cannot meet the holistic needs of children in their formative years. Teachers’ insights reinforced this finding, showing how they must supplement the book with additional activities to maintain learner interest

Based on these findings, several targeted recommendations are proposed. First, textbook writers should integrate balanced activities that nurture emotional and physical development alongside cognitive learning. This can be achieved through role-plays, songs, games, storytelling, and collaborative tasks that reflect children’s developmental needs. Second, policymakers and curriculum developers should ensure that textbook evaluation guidelines explicitly incorporate developmental appropriateness criteria across cognitive, emotional, and physical domains. This would help align government-issued materials with holistic child-centered pedagogy. Lastly, teachers are encouraged to adapt and enrich existing textbooks with creative, contextualized, and movement-based activities to bridge developmental gaps and sustain learner engagement in the classroom. Thus, by addressing these dimensions, ELT materials can evolve from curriculum-driven products into child-centered resources that better support the holistic growth of young learners.

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