An Evaluation of Texts in *Merdeka* Curriculum-based English Textbooks for Tenth Graders Based on the Criteria of PISA Reading Text

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian students' mean-performance in PISA reading tests always score low. Issues dealing with unfamiliarity with the assessment are one of the causative factors. As a step to improve the quality of education, a new curriculum known as Merdeka curriculum was developed. The new curriculum is claimed to give the students more opportunities to acquire basic knowledge and skills such as literacy and numeracy. To support the implementation of the curriculum, new textbooks as one of the main teaching and learning sources were also opened. However, to what extent these textbooks have supported to make PISA reading tests familiar to the students does not defined yet. Three major characteristics build PISA reading tests, namely texts, processes, and scenarios (including contexts and tasks). Hence, this article aims at presenting the evaluation of texts for reading found in two English textbooks for tenth graders, that were developed based on the Merdeka curriculum. Content analysis was used to evaluate the texts based on the latest characteristics of texts used in PISA reading literacy assessment. The results revealed that the texts were not yet fully PISA-characteristic. Therefore, some recommendations were proposed as to the textbooks that can better represent texts used in PISA reading tests.

Keywords: Reading, PISA reading test, Merdeka curriculum, English Textbook, Text.

1. INTRODUCTION

Evaluation is a way of assessing a subject using criteria governed by a set of standards to see how well it achieves its goals. The subject can be a project, program, practice, product, policy, strategy, or organization, etc. By evaluating, information such as to what extent the subject has achieved the goals in order to make the requisite changes can be obtained. The changes are made to make things better. In education, evaluation is done by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information of any aspects of a program of education or training, and is used to determine the extent to which students are achievement instructional objectives. In short, it is to keep track of students' progress and/or of students' learning outcomes.

One of necessary abilities in the 21st century the students should achieve is literacy. Literacy is used to refer to the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts [1], but now it is considered as a means of today's identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication [2]. Thus, literacy is not only an ability but also an instrument for obtaining and making information.

At school, the students are provided with the opportunity to acquire information and specialised knowledge and skills of languages through language – related subjects, including English subject. In other words, the students should have learned to acquire and use literacy from these classes. To keep track of students' progress and/or of students' literacy, teachers can use their own-build test or ready-to-use assessments as long as they are reliable.

There is, for example, an international assessment for 15-years-old students named Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), PISA is used to test literacy of students near the end of mandatory schooling (in Indonesia, it is for high school students). The student test takers are supposed to answer questions and surveys. The results of PISA inform education policy makers and teachers about their education systems and teaching because the assessment measures how well the skills and knowledge in three domains, including reading. Besides, some reports that tell the teachers

detailed information about their students' performance of the aspects being assessed are also released. Since there are many countries participate in the assessment, each of the governments can monitor the students' mean-performance regionally, nationally, and internationally and make comparisons. Thus, the participant countries can reflect on their educational systems and learn from countries whose mean-performances were better. Hence, it is no wonder that many countries have taken part in this international assessment.

There are many types of literacy assessed in PISA, such as reading literacy, numeracy, information literacy, digital literacy, etc., and they all starts with reading. In other words, the leading component of all types of literacy is reading literacy. According to OECD [3], being proficient in reading requires several processes, such as understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on and engaging with texts, and reading proficiency is of use to realize their reading goals, expand their knowledge and capabilities, and contribute in society.

Now that reading proficiency is on demand, teaching of reading in English language teaching should therefore facilitate the learners to acquire and use the requisite reading processes. However, based on the results of PISA reading tests (2000 - 2018) that has been taken every once three years, Indonesia could only score under the minimum competency level. It shows that the student representatives had not been literate in reading. Hence, Indonesia should reflect the current education system, especially in high schools; which part of the system has not been preparing the learners to face such challenges.

According to some studies on general factors of why Indonesian students did not perform well in the PISA. This condition is relevant with the fact that the students were new to this kind of assessments and some aspects that constructed the test. Unfamiliarity with text, thinking skills, and reading processes emphasized in PISA certainly makes the types of reading tasks presented different from those that have been done at schools [4, 5].

In response to this issue, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology identified that the curriculum 2013 has some shortcomings. As a step to mobilize in favour of the changes required, actually a new curriculum called the *Merdeka* curriculum has launched. This new curriculum will give freedom to teachers to teach subjects according to the learners' characteristics and to focus on teaching essential materials, so that they will have more time to facilitate learners to gain requisite basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy. In addition, it will let the teachers to develop their own teaching instruments according to the learners' needs by using holistic and flexible approach. Besides, the teachers will be encouraged by digital resources as references for implementing teaching autonomously. Nevertheless, the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum is still optional; the schools are free to choose either to keep using the 2013 curriculum, the simplified 2013 curriculum (the Darurat curriculum) or to shift to the new one when they are ready. Currently, there are more than 2500 driving schools and participated schools in Indonesia have implemented the *Merdeka* curriculum to the tenth grade students.

In order to help with the *Merdeka* curriculum's implementation, the stakeholders provided the teachers and students with reading material resources. One of the most frequently used resources is textbooks [6–8]. The ministry have provided both teachers and students with a set of new textbooks, entitled "*Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress untuk Siswa SMA/SMK/MA Kelas X*". Textbooks compiled based on the Merdeka curriculum by other publishers have also been found in bookstores, including "*Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA-MA/SMK-MAK Kelas 10*" by Yrama Widya, "*Pathway to English*" by Erlangga and many more.

In order to see whether those textbooks have been supported to cope with the unfamiliarity with elements of PISA reading tests or not, a textbook evaluation should be taken. Textbook evaluations allow teachers and other stakeholders to determine which textbook or parts of the textbook to be used by students [6, 7, 9]. This paper discusses how successfully the textbooks have assisted the students' awareness of the PISA reading test characteristics.

2. RELEVANT THEORETICAL REVIEW
2.1. Texts used in a PISA reading test

According to PISA 2018 framework [10], there are three major characteristics that build PISA reading literacy assessment, namely, texts, processes, and scenarios. This study only focused on texts used in PISA. Four aspects of the text need to be concerned: a) medium, b) source, c) format, and d) types.

First, texts used in the assessment are presented in either print or digital medium [10]. The printed texts are always static, but the digital texts can be both static, in which the interaction between texts and readers are limited to scrolling, paging, and a find function, and dynamic, that the readers can interact with the texts beyond the static one. They can go to other pages by using embedded hyperlinks, search keywords and highlight them, as well as communicate by using email, forums and instant messaging services.

Second, the texts are sourced from single or multiple sources. The single-source text consists of a single unit of text written definitely by an author or a group of authors. Meanwhile, the multiple-source text consists of multiple units that have multiple different authors, publication dates, and reference titles and numbers. Such text is, for example, texts from a website, which are written into some webpages with different titles but they refer to the same topic.

Third, the texts loaded in the assessment are texts arranged in paragraphs or sections (continuous texts), in the form of matrix (non-continuous texts), and in the combination of some paragraphs with pictures and graphs (mixed texts) [10]. Fourth, there are some types

of texts used in the assessment [11]. They are descriptive, narrative, argumentative, expository, instructional and transactional texts. Among them, exposition text is most frequently appeared in the test [12].

2.2. Relevant Studies

Previously, several studies [13–15] related to the evaluation of English textbooks for high school students in Indonesia have been carried out. The textbooks were evaluated based on the criteria of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) [13]; of a good English textbook in terms of practicality, interface, activities, and skills [14], and in term of readability [15]. However, those were textbooks compiled based on the 2013 curriculum and did not use the PISA reading framework.

3. METHOD

This study aimed at investigating how well texts learned by students in grade 10th from their English textbooks meet the criteria of texts used in PISA reading test. Therefore, an evaluation study was carried out. Two textbooks were used in this study, namely "*Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress untuk Siswa SMA/SMK/MA Kelas X*" provided by the Ministry of Education Research Culture and Technology in 2021 (named Textbook A for further) and "*Buku Bahasa Inggris untuk Siswa SMA-MA/SMK-MAK Kelas 10*" published by Yrama Widya in 2021 (named Textbook A for keeps).

Texts used in reading literacy activities in these textbooks were collected through the following stages. First, the researcher scrolled down or flipped each page of each textbook to read through all texts provided. Second, she marked pages in which reading and literacy related materials were loaded. Third, she read all texts and copied all relevant ones.

The collected data were analyzed by using content analysis procedure. All texts found in the textbooks were analysed based on the characteristics of texts exposed in the latest PISA reading framework [10]. To compare them, the frequency and percentage of each aspects were calculated. The results were interpreted and evaluated by using evaluation checklist, as one of necessary instrument in textbook evaluations [9]. The checklist can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation Checklist

No.	Aspect		Textbook A	Textbook B
1.	Medium			
	a.	Printed		
	b.	Digital		
2.	Organization and Navigation			
	a.	Static		
	b.	Dynamic		
3.	Source			
	a.	Single		
	b.	Multiple		
4.	Format			
	a. Continuous			
	b. Non-continuous			
	c.	Mixed		
5.	Types			
	a.	Description		
	b.	Narration		
	c.	Exposition		
	d.	Argumentation		
	e.	Instruction		
	f.	Transaction		

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After following the stages of collecting the data, A set of 16 texts were accumulated from reading related tasks and enrichment sections, which provided further readings beyond the classroom, in Textbook A. In the same way, the researcher gathered 18 texts from reading activities in Textbook B.

The texts were analyzed concerning five aspects: medium, source, format, type, and context. First, since Textbook A was published in a form of PDF-formatted textbook, it shows that the texts were presented in digital medium. Such texts enabled the students to interact with them. Not only could they scroll, page, and find function (static), but the students could also go to other pages by using embedded hyperlinks, search keywords and highlight parts of texts (dynamic). Just like Textbook A, there were 18 texts in total found in the second textbook. However, they were presented in printed medium, which is always static. That pointed how restricted student-text interaction was facilitated through. Thus, both textbooks loaded the same amount of texts for learning reading; however, student-text interaction was more facilitated in Textbook A than another was. Now that Textbook A was in PDF format, it was found that it enabled to have texts presented in both printed and digital medium together.

Second, based on the content analysis, eight of 16 texts in Textbook A were written by a definite author or group of authors, provided with a definite time of writing or publication date and a definite reference title or number. That was shown on how the texts were taken to the textbook. Yet, Textbook B only got all texts that were single sourced (as seen in Figure 1).
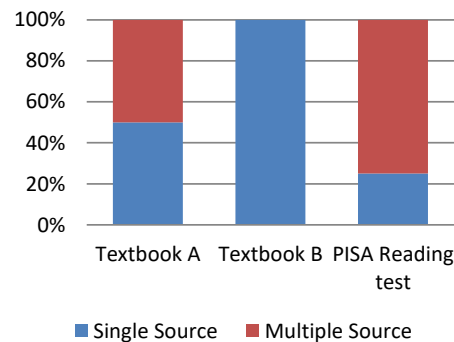

Figure 1 Percentage of texts concerning their source

Third, in accord with the text format, non-continuous and mixed texts contributed prominently to Textbook A. Figure 2 illustrates that Textbook A has all formats of text and they differed in portion. In contrast, Textbook B did not have any non-continuous text in it although it has more texts than another did. On the other hand, texts found in PISA reading test compiled non-continuous texts in majority.
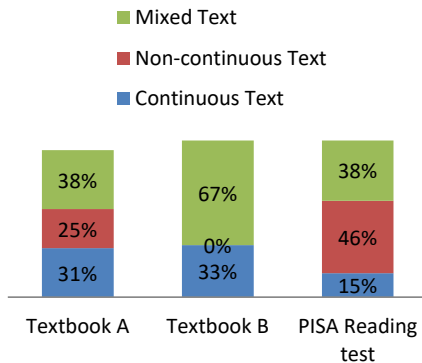

Figure 2 Percentage of texts concerning their format

Fourth, Figure 3 shows how well the texts found in the two textbooks followed the characteristics of texts used in the PISA 2018 reading test. Six types of text were used in the test, namely a) description, b) narration, c) exposition, d) argumentation, e) instruction, and f) transaction. Meanwhile, instructional and transactional texts were not found in any reading-related task or enrichment section of the first textbook. Instead, the researcher found expository text more frequently than other types. On the other hand, the second textbook did not provide any text in the type of instruction and transaction for reading as well. Still, it is illustrated in Figure 3 that exposition and narration were dominant in the second textbook.
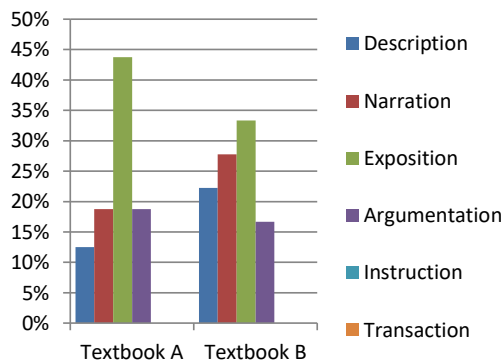

Figure 3 Percentage of texts concerning their type

Based on the results of data analysis above, the evaluation was presented in the following table.

Table 2. Evaluation on the textbooks

No.	Aspect		Textbook A	Textbook B
1.	Medium			
	a.	Printed	✔	✔
	b.	Digital	✔	
2.	Organization and Navigation			
	a.	Static	✔	✔
	b.	Dynamic	✔	
3.	Source			
	a.	Single	✔	✔
	b.	Multiple	✔	
4.	Format			
	a.	Continuous	✔	✔
	b.	Non-continuous	✔	
	c.	Mixed	✔	✔
5.	Types			
	a.	Description	✔	✔
	b.	Narration	✔	✔
	c.	Exposition	✔	✔
	d.	Argumentation	✔	✔
	e.	Instruction		
	f.	Transaction		

Table 2 shows that Textbook A got almost every aspect checked. First, in term of medium, texts found in Textbook A were more PISA-like because they can be represented in both printed and digital way, so that they were organized and navigated both statically and digitally. Second, since, PISA reading test used both single and multiple source texts, showing that Textbook A has represented PISA reading text characteristic in terms of source. Third, all formats of PISA reading texts were found in this textbook, therefore, texts for reading in Textbook A was PISA-characteristic. Lastly, Textbook A loaded all types, except the last two. Even so, it contained exposition in majority like the PISA reading test.

On the other hand, it can be seen clearly from Table 2 that Textbook B was less in every aspect. It lacked digital medium, dynamic organization and navigation, non-continuous format, and instructional as well as transactional texts for reading activities.

Hence, comparing these two textbooks, Textbook A was more supported to solve the problem dealing with unfamiliarity with texts used in the PISA reading test than Textbook B was.

Learning new knowledge structures and processing them will be more challenging when the components are unfamiliar [16]. Vice versa, it will be easier when the students have been aware of them. Several studies found that the student test takers were so new to some elements of PISA reading test, such as its texts, reading and thinking processes, and types of question [4, 5] that they did not find them at schools. Reflecting on that,

one of ways to ensure the students to be familiar with something is by learning it.

Based on the empirical evidence, texts for reading the students learned in the 2013 curriculum English textbooks only use a printed medium texts which were mostly in continuous format and limited in types. Now that these new textbooks have been developed, unfortunately it still lacks in certain aspects.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion above, a conclusion was reached that texts found in the textbooks had not yet made the students familiar with all aspects characterizing texts found in a PISA reading test. Nevertheless, Textbook A successfully represented texts used in PISA reading test in three matters, namely text medium, source, and format, regardless of the portions they served. Besides, Textbook B has not familiarized the students with many characteristics of text used in the PISA reading test.

Hence, some recommendations were put forward. First, both textbooks should collect more multiple texts. Those can be sourced from websites that present texts in several webpages. Thus, teachers are encouraged to find such relevant texts and manage students do read, learn and experience the texts in supplementary activities. Second, in order to fill in the blank of transaction texts in Textbook A, those in the listening or speaking activities can be reused as the text to read in reading activities. It is on teachers to design how relevant instructions will run creatively. Next, it would be better if reading materials are designed in a web page with following tasks to do. By doing so, not only will the students increase reading frequency, but they will also be exposed to digital texts for learning purposes. Moreover, in order to maximize the contribution of Textbook B in making the students familiar with PISA texts, providing the textbook in digital form would be a great, first step. Further, the missing texts can be included in the digital version of the textbook. In short, since neither Textbook A nor Textbook B is enough, teachers need to design supplementary materials in order to give opportunity to the students to explore today's texts.

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