CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the background, research questions, research objectives, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

A.   Background

English textbooks are vital media in the educational environment, facilitating the teaching-learning process. These media transcend basic exercises and reading materials, encapsulating curriculum objectives and embodying modern instructional approaches. Nunan (1958) emphasizes their significance by stating that textbooks guarantee consistency and continuity in education, serving as an important link between curricular aims and classroom practices. Similarly, Cunningsworth (1995) asserts that textbooks are instrumental in achieving educational outcomes by fostering meaningful engagement and comprehension among students.

The combined emphasis on content and design in textbooks is critical for moulding students' educational experiences. High-quality textbooks must be precisely matched with academic standards and customized to meet the different needs of students. Garinger (2002) emphasizes textbooks' varied responsibilities, including their use as primary instructional resources, providers of activity ideas, and vehicles for curriculum implementation. This underscores the importance of carefully crafting textbooks that strike a balance between instructional rigour, accessibility, and engagement.

In EFL classrooms, textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping instruction and guiding student learning. However, their use varies significantly depending on teachers' beliefs, instructional objectives, and classroom contexts. Kurniawati (2006) highlights that teacher beliefs strongly influence how textbooks are employed. Some educators treat textbooks as adaptable resources, modifying content to better suit learners' needs, while others follow them rigidly and sequentially. These contrasting approaches reflect differing pedagogical orientations, particularly between learner-centred and more traditional, text-

dependent teaching styles. Teachers who prioritize learner autonomy tend to engage with textbooks flexibly, promoting interaction and contextual relevance, whereas more prescriptive use often limits classroom adaptability and critical engagement. Kurniawati also notes the underexplored connection between textbook use and its impact on students' learning experiences, a dimension this study seeks to examine in the context of contemporary secondary education.

At the same time, one critical yet often overlooked dimension of textbooks is their visual design. Beyond serving as supplementary decoration, visual features, such as images, layout, typography, and color, substantially shape how students process, interpret, and retain information. In contexts where learners may face linguistic challenges, visuals provide alternative pathways for comprehension, reduce cognitive overload, and foster motivation (Mayer, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Moreover, the Indonesian Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka both emphasize student-centred and project-based learning, which rely heavily on multimodal materials to support creativity and critical thinking. Thus, focusing on visual elements is not only timely but also essential to understanding how textbooks function as learning tools in today's classrooms.

Research in multimedia learning demonstrates that integrating well-designed graphics with text can significantly enhance cognitive processing and facilitate the understanding of complex material (Mayer, 2009). In the context of textbooks, visual features are an important element of teaching effectiveness. Research has shown that when visuals are aligned with content, they support comprehension by complementing textual information and helping learners assimilate complex ideas more efficiently (Tomlinson, 2003; Mukundan et al., 2011). These findings reinforce the role of visuals not only as decorative elements but also as pedagogical tools that improve learning outcomes. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize the importance of visual communication in instructional materials, claiming that it is a critical semiotic resource for generating meaning and facilitating deeper comprehension. This viewpoint is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesia's Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka, where these curricula promote project-based and thematic learning, often integrating visual tasks to foster creativity and

critical thinking (Rahmawati, 2023; Rahmi, 2023). Furthermore, analyses of English textbooks reveal that visual features are intentionally designed to support students' cognitive processes and facilitate the completion of learning tasks, thereby aligning with the learner-centred and creative aims of these educational reforms (Nurfadhilah, 2022).

One key insight from previous studies is the critical importance of balancing content and design in English textbooks. Tomlinson (2003) argues that a well-designed textbook does not merely present meaningful content but also engages students through its visual appeal, which significantly enhances learner motivation. This notion is further supported by Mukundan et al. (2011), who emphasize the integral role of visuals, layout, and overall design in promoting cognitive engagement. These studies underscore the necessity for textbooks to be both visually stimulating and pedagogically sound in order to support the learning process. According to Mayer (2009), integrating well-designed visual features with textual content enhances cognitive processing and learner engagement. In the context of Indonesian curricula, such as Curriculum 2013, the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013) highlights the increasing recognition of visual elements as vital tools to improve comprehension and foster creativity. Empirical research further supports this, showing that visual aids in Indonesian English textbooks significantly contribute to student engagement and understanding (Sari & Cahyono, 2020). Research on textbooks developed for the Curriculum 2013 reveals that the use of clear and contextually relevant visuals greatly facilitates student learning, highlighting the importance of textbooks that not only align with curricular objectives but also incorporate design elements that address diverse learning needs.

In conclusion, while English textbooks cannot fully encapsulate all aspects of the teaching-learning process, their critical role as foundational educational resources remains unquestionable. They function not only as vehicles for content delivery but also as reflections of broader educational philosophies and societal values. The systematic analysis of textbook design and content is, therefore, integral

to ensuring these resources support pedagogical objectives and optimize student learning outcomes.

B.   Research Questions

Visual elements in English textbooks influence students' engagement and their alignment with curriculum objectives. This study aims to analyze the role of visual elements in English textbooks from two curricula to address the questions:

1. What are the types of visual elements found in textbooks from Curriculum 2013?
2. What are the types of visual elements found in textbooks from Curriculum Merdeka?
3. What are the similarities and differences found in both textbooks from Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka?

C.   Research Purposes

This study aims to analyze the role of visual elements in English textbooks from two curricula with the objectives:

1. To identify the key visual elements in English textbooks designed for Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka.
2. To identify the key visual elements in English textbooks designed for Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka.
3. To identify the similarities and differences between Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka.

D.   Research Significances

1. Practical Significances

This study offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and publishers on designing more effective and visually engaging textbooks. The findings can inform future improvements in textbook design, ensuring that visual elements align with educational goals.

2. Theoretical Significances

By exploring the relationship between visual design and curriculum objectives, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on textbook analysis and educational material design, particularly in the Indonesian context.

E.   Research Scope

This study focuses on two English textbooks published by Erlangga, Pathway to English for SMA/MA Grade X (Curriculum 2013) and the Curriculum Merdeka edition. Both textbooks are designed for tenth-grade students in Indonesian senior high schools but reflect different national curricula. The Curriculum 2013 edition offers a genre-based approach and includes cross-curricular activities connecting English to subjects like natural and social sciences. It aims to promote real-life communication through meaningful, content-based learning, extensive reading, and character education. Meanwhile, the Curriculum Merdeka edition offers a diverse and engaging English learning experience based on Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran/CP). It emphasizes six integrated language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and presenting) supported by features such as character values, cultural awareness, grammar and genre texts, critical thinking tasks, and mini projects.

The analysis is limited to Chapter 9: "A Long Time Ago" from the Curriculum 2013 edition and Unit 1: "Language, Lens of Understanding" from the Curriculum Merdeka edition. Both chapters present the narrative text genre, which is a central component of the senior high school English curriculum. These chapters were chosen because they are rich in visual elements, provide a clear representation of narrative texts, and are pedagogically significant for assessing how visuals support comprehension and engagement. Moreover, narrative texts are naturally supported by illustrations, as visuals help depict characters, events, and settings, making the stories more vivid and accessible for learners. This makes narrative-focused units particularly suitable for examining the role of visual elements in enhancing students' understanding and motivation.

The study emphasizes visual elements, including images, layout, typography, colour schemes, graphics, and visual aids, to compare how each textbook visually supports the learning process and encourages English language use in context.

F.   Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is built upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Communication Theory, which serves as the grand theory underlying this research. This theory views visual elements as semiotic resources that play a crucial role in meaning-making, particularly in educational materials. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, visuals communicate meaning through three key dimensions: representation (how visuals depict reality or abstract concepts), interaction (the relationship between visuals and viewers, such as gaze and engagement), and composition (how elements are arranged on a page to guide perception and comprehension). By applying this framework, the study examines how visual elements in textbooks interact with pedagogical objectives, particularly within the context of Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka in Indonesia.

Beyond its foundation in visual communication theory, this study also draws on curriculum design principles to explore how visual elements contribute to curriculum effectiveness. Research indicates that well-designed visual elements enhance cognitive processing and learning outcomes by reducing cognitive load and supporting information integration (Mayer & Moreno, 2003). Curriculum design frameworks increasingly recognize the importance of integrating visual elements to foster deeper understanding and engagement in learners (Educational Psychology Review, 2020). Textbooks are not merely instructional tools but also cultural documents that reflect societal values, norms, and knowledge. In addition to their role as language training instruments, textbooks serve as primary resources in teaching, providing students and educators with continuity and structure. According to Nunan (1985) and Cunningsworth (1995), textbooks play a pivotal role in achieving specific educational goals, guiding learning experiences, and acting as primary references for educators. In the context of Curriculum 2013, textbooks emphasize a structured, teacher-centred approach, whereas Curriculum Merdeka promotes creativity, student-centred learning, and critical thinking.

Visual elements lie at the heart of textbook design, significantly influencing student engagement, comprehension, and instructional clarity. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Communication Theory, this study categorizes visual elements into several components: images, layout, color usage, typography, and text readability. Images include photographs, illustrations, and infographics, serving both decorative and pedagogical functions by enhancing the book's aesthetic appeal and directly supporting content comprehension. Layout refers to the arrangement of text and visuals on a page, impacting readability and instructional flow. The strategic use of color creates emphasis, organizes content, and elicits emotional responses that facilitate learning. Additionally, typography, including font style, size, and readability, is crucial in ensuring clarity and visual consistency. Lastly, text readability evaluates how visuals and text are combined to ensure student accessibility.

Kress and van Leeuwen's framework further divide visual elements into three main types: representational visuals, interactive visuals, and compositional visuals. Representational visuals depict real-world objects, people, or scenarios, providing learners with concrete references to support understanding. Interactive visuals, such as dialogue-based images, comics, or question-based visuals, engage students and encourage active participation. Compositional visuals serve as structural elements that organize information and direct the reader's focus through elements like white space, alignment, and visual hierarchy (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

By analysing these visual elements, this study aims to explore their role in facilitating learning and ensuring that textbook design aligns with pedagogical objectives. A well-balanced use of representational, interactive, and compositional visuals, along with effective layout, typography, and color application, can significantly impact how students engage with and comprehend learning materials (Mayer, 2009).

The interaction between visual elements and curriculum objectives is crucial in determining textbook effectiveness. The Curriculum 2013 prioritizes a structured, teacher-centred approach, often supported by visuals that reinforce key concepts or provide step-by-step guidance (Kemendikbud, 2013). In contrast, the Curriculum

Merdeka encourages the use of visuals that stimulate creativity, foster student interaction, and reflect inclusivity and cultural diversity (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Analysing how these visual elements align with each curriculum's objectives offers valuable insights into their role in supporting pedagogy.

To investigate this, the study employs a comparative content analysis of English textbooks designed for the Curriculum 2013 and the Curriculum Merdeka. This analysis focuses on identifying types and variations of visual elements, comparing their frequency and purposes, and evaluating their alignment with curriculum goals. Key aspects include the balance between text and visuals, cultural and contextual relevance, and the extent to which visuals are used for pedagogical purposes rather than merely for decorative appeal (Neuendorf, 2017; Sari & Cahyono, 2020).

The theoretical foundation of this framework integrates Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar, which examines how visual elements convey meaning through representation, interaction, and composition. Additionally, principles of curriculum design guide the analysis of how textbooks reflect each curriculum's educational philosophy. Based on these foundations, the study follows the process outlined below:
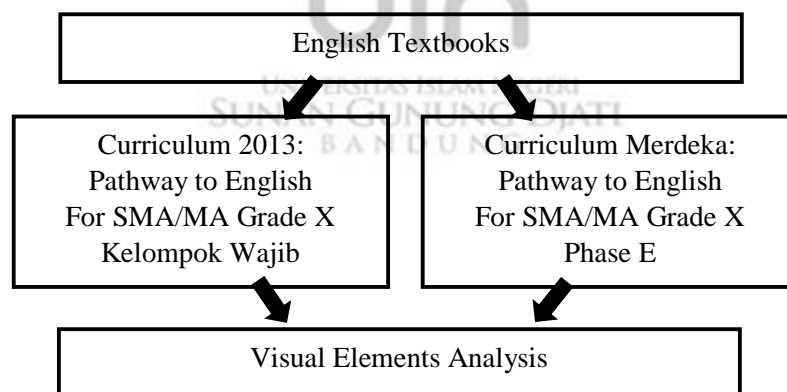
Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

In summary, this framework highlights the interdependence of visual elements, textbook design, and curriculum objectives. By focusing on how visual elements align with the pedagogical priorities of the Curriculum 2013 and the Curriculum

Merdeka, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of their role in enhancing the effectiveness of English textbooks in secondary schools in Indonesia.

G. Previous Studies

The importance of visual elements in textbook design has been extensively acknowledged in the literature on materials development. Tomlinson (2003) highlights the need to balance content and design, delivering meaningful input while simultaneously engaging learners through accessible and visually stimulating formats to ensure textbook effectiveness. This perspective positions visual elements as essential tools for enhancing learner motivation, comprehension, and retention in language education. This foundational insight establishes the critical role of visual elements as complementary tools in facilitating learning outcomes. Building on this foundation, Mukundan et al. (2011) developed a comprehensive textbook evaluation checklist that includes criteria such as layout, visual usage, and alignment with pedagogical goals. Their findings reinforce the notion that visual appeal plays a critical role in learner engagement and satisfaction. The study also highlights the need for visuals to serve not merely decorative purposes but also as pedagogical aids that support curriculum objectives.

Recent international studies have further examined the role of visual and cultural content in ELT textbooks. For instance, Asl and Marzban (2020) analyzed the Vision English series for Iranian secondary schools, finding that images and thematic content contributed to shaping students' national identity. Similarly, Ahmadipour and Fathi (2022) compared local and international textbooks in Iran, revealing that visual elements, layout, and cultural representations substantially influenced learner perceptions and engagement.

Chao (2020), through an analysis of three ESL textbooks, found that visuals, particularly images and symbols, subtly convey cultural messages and support language acquisition. Likewise, Liu and Xu (2020) compared textbooks used in Mainland China and Hong Kong, concluding that visuals are often shaped by broader socio-political ideologies, which, in turn, influence pedagogical intentions and learners' reception of the materials. These studies demonstrate that visuals in textbooks reflect deeper educational and cultural priorities.

In the Indonesian context, research on the visual design of English textbooks is growing. For example, Prastikawati and Ardi (2020) analyzed textbooks developed for the Curriculum 2013 and found that clear, culturally relevant, and contextually appropriate visuals significantly improve student comprehension and motivation. However, their study was limited to a single textbook and did not explore comparisons across different curriculum frameworks. Similarly, Hapsari (2021), in her evaluation using the Cunningsworth framework, acknowledged visual elements but treated them as a secondary consideration, highlighting the need for more in-depth visual analysis.

Recent analyses of English textbooks from Curriculum 2013 and Curriculum Merdeka reveal significant shifts in design philosophy. The research indicates a noticeable transition toward more interactive and student-friendly visuals in textbooks aligned with Curriculum Merdeka. These changes reflect broader pedagogical shifts that emphasize creativity, independence, and active learning, aligning with the goals of the newer curriculum. This shift is particularly evident in textbooks such as Erlangga's "Pathway to English for SMA/MA Grade X", where updated visual designs support learner-centred approaches.

Despite the growing body of literature on English textbook evaluation in Indonesia, few studies have conducted a focused, comparative analysis of visual elements across textbooks designed for Curriculum 2013 and Kurikulum Merdeka. Most existing research treats visual features as supplementary rather than as central pedagogical tools. Moreover, while international scholarship has emphasized the instructional and cultural significance of visuals (Asl & Marzban, 2020; Ahmadipour & Fathi, 2022; Chao, 2020; Liu & Xu, 2020), similar in-depth analysis remains scarce in the Indonesian EFL context. Therefore, this study aims to address that gap by analyzing and comparing key visual elements, including images, layout, color usage, and visual aids, in two Pathway to English textbooks published by Erlangga under the different curricular frameworks.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of several theories used in this study, such as textbooks, textbooks in the EFL context, visual elements, key components of visual elements in textbooks, Curriculum 2013, and Curriculum Merdeka.

A. TEXTBOOK

1. Definitions of the textbook

Textbooks are a structured educational resource that facilitates teaching and learning by systematically organizing and presenting subject matter. Textbooks offer organized content that reflects educational standards and pedagogical approaches, helping teachers deliver lessons systematically while supporting students in achieving targeted learning outcomes. Cunningsworth (1995) defines textbooks as resources published to provide a structured and leveled framework for language input, practice, and development. Textbooks serve as instructional guides for teachers and students, offering coherent content aligned with curriculum objectives and teaching strategies. Textbooks play a major role in promoting comprehension and engagement, as they often represent the primary materials used in language classes. Furthermore, Nunan (1985) emphasizes that textbooks function as a vehicle for syllabus delivery, bridging the gap between curriculum goals and classroom implementation, and providing consistency and continuity in teaching.

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, textbooks are essential because they provide crucial input, support learning, and offer contextualized practice in the absence of a native language environment. Textbooks are not merely a collection of exercises; they also reflect pedagogical choices, cultural ideologies, and teaching philosophies embedded in their content and design, as noted by Ula (2024). Therefore, textbooks play a multifaceted role that extends beyond serving as learning materials, shaping educational experiences, informing lesson planning, and enhancing learners' engagement with language and culture.

Apart from providing linguistic input, textbooks also serve as tools for assessment, skill development, and exposure to cultural values and ideologies