

EXAMINING THE DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGE SKILLS IN EFL TEXTBOOKS FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS: PATTERNS, GAPS, AND PEDAGOGICAL SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

This study investigates the distribution of language skills in English for Nusantara, an EFL textbook published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture for Grade VIII students at the junior secondary level (SMP/MTs). Employing a mixed-method design, the study quantifies the frequency of listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing activities across the five chapters and fifteen units of the textbook, and proposes adaptive pedagogical strategies for teachers to address observed skill gaps. The quantitative findings reveal a notable imbalance: reading dominates at 36.4% of all skill-labeled sections, while speaking, writing, and viewing each account for approximately 11-14%, despite being explicitly mandated competencies under the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Listening receives moderate coverage at 27.3% but is heavily concentrated in Unit 1 of each chapter. The qualitative phase presents close analyses of selected textbook activities and proposes five practical modifications integrating underrepresented skills without disrupting thematic coherence. While grounded in the Indonesian EFL context, the analytical framework and proposed solutions offer transferable insights for curriculum designers and classroom teachers working with comparable secondary-level EFL materials in other settings.

Keywords: *Kurikulum Merdeka, language skills distribution, EFL textbook analysis, junior secondary learners, skills integration*

A. Introduction

The development of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) depends fundamentally on learners' exposure to a balanced range of language skills. Research consistently affirms that listening, speaking, reading, and writing are not independent processes but interconnected modes of communication

that mutually reinforce one another (Tavil, 2010; Oxford, 2001). When any of these skills is neglected in the instructional process, learners are likely to experience uneven proficiency development that may compromise their ability to communicate effectively in real-world contexts (Kurniasih, 2011; Altmisdort, 2016).

The importance of balanced skill exposure is especially salient in the junior



secondary school context, where learners are at a transitional stage of language development. Having established basic communicative foundations in primary school, Grade VIII students are expected to build upon receptive and productive competencies in more complex and varied contexts. The materials used at this stage therefore bear a significant responsibility: they must not only present language input at an appropriate cognitive and linguistic level, but also ensure that all major skills are systematically practiced and developed across the academic year (Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin, 2021; Octavia et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, this responsibility falls largely on the nationally prescribed textbook *English for Nusantara* for Grade VIII (SMP/MTs), published by the Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi (Kemendikbudristek) in 2022. This textbook is used across all public junior secondary schools in Indonesia and constitutes the primary instructional resource for EFL teachers at this level. It is designed in accordance with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes a Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and calls for integrated skill development from oral to written modes. Specifically, the curriculum mandates the development of six language skills: listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and representing a broader framework than the traditional four-skill model.

Given this expanded set of expected competencies, it is important to ask whether the textbook's actual skill distribution aligns with the curriculum's ambitions. While the book's preface affirms a commitment to integrated skill development, the degree to which each skill is operationalized across its fifteen units remains an empirical question. Previous studies on EFL textbook analysis in Indonesia have identified recurring imbalances, particularly in the treatment of speaking and writing (Khairati & Rozani Syafei, 2024; Qian, 2022; Alemi & Hesami, 2014). Such imbalances may result from various factors, including examination washback, the prioritization of textual input for classroom management purposes, or assumptions about which skills require explicit scaffolding at particular proficiency levels.

Beyond simply identifying skill gaps, this study aims to be practically useful to teachers. Classroom teachers in Indonesia, like their counterparts in other centralized educational systems, are generally required to follow the prescribed textbook and cannot easily replace or supplement it without institutional support. However, they retain considerable agency in how they implement textbook activities, and can introduce modifications that enrich the skill coverage of any given task without substantially departing from the textbook's thematic and linguistic content.



This study aims to offer a set of concrete, teacher-friendly strategies for doing so.

The study addresses two research questions:

1. How are the language skills distributed across the units and chapters of *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII?
2. What adaptive strategies can teachers employ to achieve a more balanced distribution of skills within the textbook's existing framework?

While the findings are specific to this textbook and the Indonesian EFL context, the analytical approach and proposed solutions have implications for textbook evaluation and classroom practice in comparable educational settings. Imbalances in skill distribution are a well-documented challenge in EFL materials globally (Aljahdali & Alshakhi, 2023; Dewi & Muslim, 2023; Robb, 2022), and the methodological framework developed here may offer useful guidance for researchers and educators working with similar materials in other countries.

The structure of the article is as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature on language skill integration, textbook analysis, and the Indonesian EFL curriculum. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 presents the quantitative findings on skill distribution and the qualitative analysis of selected activities. Section 5 concludes with

implications for teaching practice and future research.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Language Skills and Their Integration

Theories of communicative language teaching have consistently emphasized that proficiency in a second or foreign language is not reducible to mastery of discrete linguistic structures, but requires the ability to communicate effectively across a range of interactional modes (Ghafar et al., 2023; Mangaleswaran & Aziz, 2019). This communicative perspective places the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing at the center of the instructional agenda, while recognizing that these skills operate interdependently in real-world communication (Aysu, 2025; Yuzar & Rejeki, 2020).

The traditional division of language skills into receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) modes has been widely used as a framework for curriculum design. However, this binary has been critiqued by researchers who argue that it oversimplifies the cognitive demands of language processing (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). Listening and reading, for example, involve active inferencing, prediction, and meaning construction, and cannot be adequately described as passive reception. Similarly,



speaking and writing require comprehension of prior input and cannot occur in communicative isolation. In practice, authentic communication almost always involves the simultaneous or sequential use of multiple skills, making integrated skill instruction a pedagogically sound and ecologically valid approach (Brown, 2007).

Skills integration understood as the deliberate combination of two or more language skills within a single learning task has been shown to enhance communicative competence, increase learner motivation, and facilitate the transfer of learning across modalities (Oxford, 2001; Nation, 2007). Integrated tasks mirror real-life communication scenarios more closely than single-skill tasks, and thereby offer learners more authentic opportunities for language use. Research on EFL classrooms supports this view: studies by Tavit (2010), Dewi and Muslim (2023), and Hama Saeed and Bostancı (2022) demonstrate positive effects of integrated skills instruction on communicative performance, particularly when listening is used as input for speaking or writing tasks.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* adopted in Indonesia from 2022 onward reflects this broader understanding of language skills. Rather than limiting itself to four skills, the curriculum formally recognizes six literacy skills: listening (*menyimak*), speaking (*berbicara*), reading (*membaca*), viewing (*memirsa*), writing (*menulis*), and

representing (*merepresentasikan*). This expanded framework acknowledges the multimodal nature of communication in the twenty-first century and places considerable emphasis on visual and digital literacies. Textbooks aligned with this curriculum are therefore expected to incorporate viewing and representing activities alongside the more traditional four skills.

1.2 Textbook Analysis and Skill Distribution

Textbook analysis is an established research tradition in applied linguistics and EFL pedagogy. Studies in this area typically evaluate how language skills are distributed and sequenced across a textbook's units, and assess the degree to which the book's actual content reflects its stated curricular goals (Alemi & Hesami, 2014; Qian, 2022). A common finding across such studies is that certain skills particularly listening and speaking tend to be underrepresented relative to reading and writing (Khairati & Rozani Syafei, 2024; Altmisdort, 2016). This may reflect the influence of high-stakes assessment systems that prioritize reading comprehension and written production, a pattern known as the washback effect (Koizumi et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, recent analyses of English textbooks for secondary school learners have identified persistent imbalances in skill coverage. Khairati and Rozani Syafei (2024) found



significant variation in task distribution across units of a nationally prescribed textbook, with productive skills receiving less consistent treatment than receptive ones. Similarly, Alemi and Hesami (2014) noted that speaking activities in EFL textbooks are often marginalized or presented without adequate scaffolding, leaving learners without sufficient support for oral production. These findings are echoed in international research: Qian (2022) analyzed task types in four Chinese high school English textbooks and found reading to be overwhelmingly dominant, with writing

and listening receiving comparatively little attention.

1.3 Sub-skills and the Complexity of Skill Coverage

Beyond frequency counts, it is important to recognize that each of the four main language skills encompasses a range of sub-skills that differ in cognitive complexity and pedagogical purpose. Table 1 illustrates the principal sub-skills associated with each language skill as identified in recent research (Kaur et al., 2024; Morgana, 2024; Peltonen, 2024; Chen et al., 2022).

Table 1: Language Skills and Their Principal Sub-Skills

Language Skill	Sub-Skills
Listening	Listening for gist; listening for specific details; listening to infer meaning; listening to recognize tone; listening to predict
Speaking	Speaking for fluency; speaking for accuracy; interactive speaking (turn-taking); expressing opinions; clarifying and repairing
Reading	Skimming for main idea; scanning for specific information; inferring meaning; identifying purpose and tone; understanding vocabulary in context
Viewing	Interpreting visual elements; identifying purpose of visual texts; analyzing multimodal texts; connecting visual and verbal information
Writing	Planning and generating ideas; organizing content; practicing vocabulary and grammar; editing and proofreading; writing for cohesion and coherence

The presence of a particular skill label in a textbook does not therefore guarantee meaningful skill development: a "listening" task that merely requires repetition of isolated words exercises a narrow sub-skill, while one that requires inferencing from a natural dialogue engages significantly richer competencies.

Similarly, a "writing" task that asks students to copy sentences exercises different abilities than one requiring them to construct an original paragraph. A comprehensive analysis of skill distribution must attend not only to frequency but also to depth and variety of sub-skill engagement.



1.4 Mode Combinations for Integrated Skill Practice

Effective skills integration typically involves combining skills from different modality types. Table 2 illustrates

common mode combinations and the kinds of activities they are suited to (Dewi & Muslim, 2023; Hama Saeed & Bostancı, 2022; Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020; Lee & Schallert, 2016; Tavil, 2010).

Table 2: Mode Combinations for Integrated Skills Practice

Mode Combination	Skills Involved	Example Activities
Receptive + Productive	Listening + Speaking	Listen to a dialogue, then discuss the content
Receptive + Productive	Reading + Writing	Read a model text, then write a similar one
Receptive + Productive	Listening + Writing	Listen to a passage, then write a summary
Productive + Productive	Speaking + Writing	Discuss ideas in a group, then write a paragraph
Receptive + Receptive	Listening + Reading	Listen to a text, then read a related passage
Multimodal	Viewing + Speaking	Analyze a poster, then present findings orally

B. Research Methods

This study employs a mixed-method design to analyze the distribution of language skills in *English for Nusantara* for Grade VIII (SMP/MTs), published by Kemendikbudristek in 2022. The textbook is divided into five thematic chapters and

fifteen units, as shown in Table 3. Each unit is further subdivided into sections, each explicitly labeled with a language skill or activity type (e.g., "Section 2 -Listening," "Section 3-Reading," "Section 5 -Your Turn: Writing").

Table 3: Thematic Structure of English for Nusantara Grade VIII

Chapter	Title	Units
Chapter 0	The Beginning	Introductory chapter (grammar, classroom language)
Chapter 1	Celebrating Independence Day	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3
Chapter 2	Kindness Begins with Me	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3
Chapter 3	Love Our World	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3
Chapter 4	No Littering	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3
Chapter 5	Embrace Yourself	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3

The first part of the analysis is quantitative in nature. It counts the number of explicitly labeled section-level activities in each unit that target each of the following skills: listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing. For consistency,

only sections with explicit skill labels in their headings are counted as primary skill activities. Sections labeled "Language Focus," "Say What You Know," "Fun Time," and "Enrichment" are excluded from the primary count, as they do not



target a single skill exclusively, though they may be noted in the discussion where relevant. The unit-level counts are aggregated by chapter and for the textbook as a whole.

The second part of the analysis is qualitative. It examines a selection of activities from units where a particular skill is absent or minimally represented, and proposes modifications that integrate the missing skill without disrupting the activity's original purpose, content, or thematic focus. For each selected activity, the analysis follows the same three-step procedure:

1. Activity description: The activity is described in terms of its form, content, and skill demands.
2. Proposed modification: A specific modification is proposed to

integrate a missing or underrepresented skill.

3. Learning benefits: The pedagogical rationale for the modification is explained, with reference to relevant research.

This framework parallels established approaches to textbook adaptation in EFL pedagogy (Nation, 2007; Brown, 2007) and is intended to be practically actionable for classroom teachers.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Quantitative Findings: Skill Distribution Across Units

Table 4 presents the distribution of language skill activities across the fifteen units of *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII, based on explicitly labeled sections.

Table 4: Distribution and Frequency of Language Skills Across Units and Chapters

Chapter	Unit	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Viewing	Writing
Chapter 1	Unit 1	2	2	0	0	0
	Unit 2	1	0	1	1	0
	Unit 3	0	0	1	0	1
Chapter 2	Unit 1	1	1	0	1	0
	Unit 2	0	0	2	1	0
	Unit 3	0	0	2	0	1
Chapter 3	Unit 1	2	1	0	0	0
	Unit 2	1	0	1	0	0
	Unit 3	0	0	1	1	1
Chapter 4	Unit 1	2	1	0	0	0
	Unit 2	0	0	2	0	0
	Unit 3	0	0	2	1	1
Chapter 5	Unit 1	2	1	0	0	0
	Unit 2	1	0	2	0	0
	Unit 3	0	0	2	0	1
Total		12	6	16	5	5
%		27.3%	13.6%	36.4%	11.4%	11.4%



The data in Table 4 reveals a clear structural pattern in the textbook's skill distribution. Reading is the most frequently targeted skill at the section level, accounting for 36.4% (n=16) of all explicitly skill-labeled sections across the book. Listening is the second most frequent at 27.3% (n=12), followed by speaking (13.6%, n=6), with viewing and writing each receiving minimal coverage at 11.4% (n=5) each.

Equally significant is the horizontal distribution pattern. Across all five chapters, Unit 1 consistently contains the highest concentration of listening and speaking activities, while Units 2 and 3 within each chapter shift markedly toward reading, with writing and viewing appearing almost exclusively in the final unit of each chapter. This internal chapter structure oral skills in the first unit, reading in the middle, writing and viewing at the end reflects the book's stated orientation of moving from oral to

written competencies, consistent with the Genre-Based Approach. However, this sequencing also means that speaking and writing are structurally de-emphasized within each chapter's overall arc, with speaking receiving no dedicated section in ten of the fifteen units, and writing similarly absent in ten units.

The treatment of viewing deserves particular comment. While the *Kurikulum Merdeka* explicitly includes viewing as a core competency, it appears in only five of fifteen units and is most commonly presented as a sub-activity within a reading section rather than as a standalone skill. This suggests a partial alignment between the textbook's actual content and the curriculum's expanded six-skill framework.

2. Structural Patterns by Chapter

Table 5 summarizes the chapter-level totals for each skill, offering a clearer view of cross-chapter variation.

Table 5: Chapter-Level Skill Frequency Totals

Chapter	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Viewing	Writing	Total
Chapter 1	3	2	2	1	1	9
Chapter 2	1	1	4	2	1	9
Chapter 3	3	1	2	1	1	8
Chapter 4	2	1	4	1	1	9
Chapter 5	3	1	4	0	1	9
Total	12	6	16	5	5	44

Table 5 confirms that reading dominates in Chapters 2, 4, and 5, while listening is relatively stable across chapters at 1–3 instances per chapter.

Chapter 2 (Kindness Begins with Me) shows the starkest imbalance, with reading accounting for four of nine skill-labeled sections and listening and



speaking each appearing only once. Chapter 5 (Embrace Yourself) shows no viewing activity at all, despite the visual nature of some of its thematic content (beauty, self-image, media). Speaking is consistently underrepresented at 1–2 instances per chapter, and writing appears only once per chapter throughout the book.

The dominance of reading reflects a broader tendency in EFL textbook design to rely on written text as the primary medium for presenting input. Written texts are easier to manage pedagogically they can be studied at the learner's own pace, annotated, and revisited while also being more straightforwardly testable. This may explain why the textbook leans toward reading, even in chapters whose thematic focus (e.g., Chapter 1 on Independence Day celebrations; Chapter 4 on environmental incidents) would lend itself naturally to oral narrative and listening activities.

The underrepresentation of writing is perhaps more surprising, given that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasizes the development of written production competencies as a major goal of the EFL curriculum at Phase D (Grades 7–9). Only five writing sections appear across the entire textbook, and each is concentrated in Unit 3 of its respective chapter. While Unit 3 activities typically involve more extended written production than the incidental writing required in language focus tasks (e.g., filling in charts, labeling

diagrams), the overall frequency is low for a textbook spanning a full academic year.

3. Qualitative Analysis: Adaptive Strategies for Better Skill Balance

Given the identified imbalances particularly the underrepresentation of speaking, writing, and viewing the following section presents a selection of adaptive strategies that teachers can employ to integrate these skills into existing activities. The examples are taken directly from the textbook and represent common activity types found across multiple units.

a. Extending a Reading-Only Activity into a Speaking Task

Several units in the textbook present reading activities without any follow-up oral production component. A representative example is found in Chapter 2, Unit 2 (Kindness and Happiness), where learners read the final section of *The Ugly Duckling* story and complete comprehension questions. The activity involves close reading of a narrative text, identification of key characters and events, and comprehension of vocabulary in context all firmly within the reading domain.

To integrate speaking into this activity, the teacher could add a structured storytelling component immediately following the reading task. After completing the comprehension questions, students could be asked to work in pairs

and retell the story to each other using a visual prompt card listing key events. This modification introduces the speaking sub-skill of *retelling* (a form of spoken production that draws on comprehension of a prior text), and creates a receptive-to-productive skill chain (Reading → Speaking) of the type described in Table 2. The benefits of this modification are multiple: it reinforces comprehension of the text, provides meaningful oral practice in a supported context, and develops fluency without requiring learners to generate entirely novel content. Li et al. (2023) note that sufficient linguistic input is a prerequisite for effective output, making a reading text an ideal scaffold for subsequent oral production tasks.

b. Adding a Pre-Listening Discussion to Build Speaking Opportunities

Chapter 3, Unit 1 (Look Around You) contains two consecutive listening sections (Sections 2 and 3) that present dialogues about environmental actions and a procedural monologue about handwashing. While the listening activities themselves are well-scaffolded and provide clear comprehension tasks, neither section includes a spoken pre-listening warm-up. The "Say What You Know" section that precedes them is brief and does not require extended oral production.

A straightforward modification would be to introduce a structured speaking warm-up before the first

listening section, in which students discuss in small groups what they know or think about saving the environment. The teacher could provide a set of prompt questions ("What actions do you take at school to save energy?" / "What are three ways people can reduce waste?") and ask each group to share one idea with the class before the listening begins. This modification introduces a speaking component (Section 6 of this unit is the only labeled speaking section in Chapter 3) in a thematically coherent way, and activates learners' prior knowledge in a manner that research has shown to facilitate listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2004). The resulting skill sequence Speaking → Listening creates an authentic communicative dynamic in which speaking (expressing prior knowledge and predictions) prepares learners for more effective listening.

c. Transforming a Viewing Section into a Viewing-Writing Integrated Task

Chapter 3, Unit 3 (Act Now) contains a dedicated viewing section in which students examine two posters one about donating old books and one about washing hands and discuss their visual and textual elements. This is one of the few viewing activities in the book, and its design is primarily analytical: students are asked to read and identify the elements of the posters rather than to produce anything in response.



A productive modification would be to extend this viewing task into an integrated viewing-writing activity by asking students, after analyzing the two model posters, to plan and draft a simple poster of their own on a related environmental theme. The viewing task then serves as a model-analysis phase (identifying key visual and linguistic features), and the writing task serves as a production phase in which students apply what they have observed. This modification creates a receptive-to-productive skill chain (Viewing → Writing/Representing) that is directly consistent with the *Kurikulum Merdeka's* own framework, which pairs viewing with representing as complementary skills. Nation (2007) argues that the four strands of language learning meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development all contribute to balanced proficiency, and integrated tasks of this kind simultaneously address meaning-focused input (viewing) and meaning-focused output (writing/representing).

d. Incorporating Writing into a Speaking-Dominant Unit

Chapter 1, Unit 1 (The Champion of Panjat Pinang) is the most listening-and-speaking-heavy unit in the textbook, with two listening sections and two speaking sections. However, it contains no writing section. While the thematic focus (discussing personal experiences of

Independence Day celebrations) is well-suited to oral interaction, the absence of any writing component means that learners do not have an opportunity to consolidate the language they have practiced orally in written form.

An effective modification would be to add a brief writing component at the close of the unit, asking students to write three to five sentences describing their own Independence Day experience, using the vocabulary and sentence structures practiced in the speaking activities. This post-speaking writing task exercises the productive-to-productive skill combination (Speaking → Writing), helps learners consolidate vocabulary and grammar in a written context, and provides the teacher with a product that can be used for formative assessment. Akkaya and Doyumğaç (2023) note that speaking and writing draw on overlapping linguistic resources, and that the explicit integration of both modes in a single unit deepens learners' command of target structures. Given that writing appears in only one unit per chapter throughout the textbook, this type of end-of-unit writing task would substantially increase written production without requiring any new thematic content.

e. Using Viewing to Activate Prior Knowledge Before Listening

Chapter 5, Unit 1 (Be Yourself) includes two listening sections that present a beauty advertisement and a



podcast about makeup, and a related story. Despite the explicitly visual and media-related nature of this content (beauty advertising is by definition a multimodal genre), the unit contains no viewing section. The "Say What You Know" warm-up does not involve any visual analysis.

A targeted modification would be to present students with a printed or digital image of a beauty advertisement before the first listening activity, and to ask them to analyze it using a structured observation frame: What colors does the advertisement use? What words appear in it? Who do you think it is aimed at? What message is it communicating? This pre-listening viewing activity creates the skill combination Viewing → Listening, helps learners build relevant background knowledge and vocabulary before they hear the advertisement's spoken component, and introduces an important dimension of media literacy that is consistent with the *Kurikulum Merdeka's* emphasis on twenty-first century skills. Yang (2024) observes that multimodal pre-task activities support comprehension and motivation in secondary EFL learners, particularly when the content draws on familiar aspects of popular culture.

D. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the distribution of language skills in *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII and found a discernible imbalance in how skills are

represented across the textbook's fifteen units. Reading is the most frequently targeted skill at 36.4%, followed by listening at 27.3%, while speaking, writing, and viewing each receive comparatively limited treatment. The internal structure of each chapter systematically concentrates oral skills in Unit 1 and reading in Units 2 and 3, with writing and viewing appearing almost exclusively as end-of-chapter activities. This pattern, while coherent with the textbook's stated progression from oral to written modes, results in a significant skill gap across the middle sections of the book that may constrain learners' overall communicative development.

To address these imbalances, five adaptive strategies were proposed: extending reading activities into speaking tasks; adding pre-listening speaking warm-ups; transforming viewing into integrated viewing-writing tasks; incorporating writing after speaking activities; and using viewing to activate prior knowledge before listening. Each strategy was grounded in specific activities from the textbook and supported by relevant research on integrated skills instruction. Although the findings are specific to the Indonesian EFL context, the analytical framework and proposed solutions may offer transferable insights for researchers and practitioners working with comparable secondary-level EFL materials elsewhere. Future research might extend this analysis by examining



how teachers in practice adapt these materials, and whether such adaptations produce measurable improvements in learner skill development.

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