

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

The rapid advancement of technology and globalization has reshaped the demands of education. Educational systems urgently need to shift away from passive knowledge transfer that relies on rote memorization and move into a more practical and relevant transfer of skills to students. In this matter, the emphasis on 21st-century skills in the classroom has become increasingly important, as it is hoped to prepare students to thrive in the modern world and face their future successfully. This shift calls for educational institutions to develop human abilities that cannot be easily replaced by sophisticated technology (Park et al., 2023). In response, many countries have directed their educational focus towards integrating 21st-century skills into their education curriculum. Among the key competencies of the 21st-century skills, critical thinking stands out as a priority that education systems must prioritize in students' learning (Thompson, 2011). Many schools around the world are starting to incorporate critical thinking into their classroom activities to prepare students for facing current and future challenges.

In Indonesia, the emphasis on critical thinking has been reflected in national education policy since the implementation of the Curriculum 2013. However, the emphasis has been strengthened and focused since the introduction of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Launched in February 2022 as part of the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative, this curriculum aims to improve educational outcomes for Indonesian students (Putri et al., 2023). The emphasis of critical thinking in the *Merdeka* Curriculum is reflected under the *Pancasila* student profile, which acts as the fundamental basis for directing educational policies, including being a reference for teachers in building the character and competence of students (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, Dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan,

Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022). The *Pancasila* Student Profile contains six dimensions, which include 1) faith, fear of God Almighty, and noble character; 2) independence; 3) cooperation; 4) global diversity; 5) critical reasoning; and 6) creativity. Gustianingrum et al. (2023) point out that students need to have critical thinking skills to achieve the goal of the critical reasoning dimension. It is vital for students to develop their own critical thinking skills, as it enables them to reflect on their own thinking and thought processes when gathering and processing information, analyzing and evaluating logic, and making decisions.

Indonesia's education system is undergoing major reforms with the introduction of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. It replaces the previously rigid and standardized approach with a more flexible and student-centered model that supports independent learning and adapts to students' individual needs (Purwani & Budiraharjo, 2024). This curriculum gives teachers the autonomy to adapt learning materials to what their students need and the local contexts. However, they still can continue to use textbooks as the main teaching tools for both content delivery and assigning students' exercises while also using additional materials from other sources (Rohimajaya et al., 2025).

Textbooks still maintain their significance to be widely used as a major source of classroom learning materials despite the innovation of learning technologies (Nesi et al., 2022; Shahid et al., 2021). The Indonesian government even legally acknowledges them as a fundamental learning resource. As cited in Article 1 of *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 8 Tahun 2016*, textbooks are the main learning resource to achieve basic competencies and core competencies and are declared feasible by the Ministry of Education and Culture to be used in educational units. Moreover, Article 1 of *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 21 Tahun 2023* also emphasizes that textbooks are books compiled for learning based on national education standards and the applicable curriculum. They remain

essential in education because textbooks align with the curriculum, support the implementation of curriculum reforms, and serve as the main instructional materials that help students achieve the objectives outlined in the curriculum standards (Li & Wang, 2024). Thus, there is a need for textbooks that support the current curriculum in order to support teaching and learning activities effectively.

The Indonesian government has published new official textbooks designed following the principles and goals of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Rinekso, 2021). These textbooks offer consistent progression, phase-based design, and pedagogical alignment with the vision of the curriculum. The government released the *Merdeka* Curriculum textbooks for all the subjects taught in Indonesian schools without exception. Among them, the EFL textbooks need to be highlighted due to the benefits they offer for both teachers and students.

English textbooks have served as a reliable source of standardized language input for English teaching since most of the EFL teachers in Indonesia are non-native speakers (Santi & Endarto, 2024). Richards (2001) argues that teachers who are non-native English speakers and who struggle to come up with authentic language input on their own may find textbooks to be a useful resource. A varied linguistic-related material contained in the textbooks may give exposure to the English language for students who are also non-native speakers (Djarmika et al., 2022; Mayangsari et al., 2018). For students, textbooks can also support their self-directed learning through reading the materials and working on the available tasks for practice. These benefits reflect the *Merdeka* Curriculum's vision of being flexible and adaptable, making textbooks a relevant resource for facilitating EFL classrooms.

Using textbooks in the Indonesian EFL classroom can contribute meaningfully to nurturing students' critical thinking as part of their 21st-century skill development. Tyas et al. (2020) argue that tasks and activities are part of the textbooks where Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) can be found. According to Brookhart (2010), critical thinking with the transfer



process and problem solving are the ones that form Higher Order Thinking Skills. Thus, critical thinking can be found in tasks in the textbook. In the language textbooks, the tasks have great importance for the purpose of showing materials, facilitating students to practice using the language, and stimulating critical and creative thinking skills (Inayah et al., 2022). Having students work on the tasks in the textbooks is beneficial for helping students grow their critical thinking skills.

Scholars have shown great interest in examining the promotion of critical thinking skills in the tasks of English textbooks used in Indonesian EFL settings. Utami et al. (2020) analyzed the textbook *Bahasa Inggris SMA/MA SMK/MAK Grade XII* published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The study examined the attainability of critical thinking elements in the textbook by analyzing its tasks and questions. The results indicate that the textbook accommodates almost all levels of critical thinking, including analyzing, evaluating, and creating. In the following year, Hestrian et al. (2021) investigated another EFL textbook for twelfth-graders that was developed under the Curriculum 2013. In the study, critical thinking skills are incorporated into a textbook that is not identified by title. The findings reveal that only a small number of tasks reflect critical thinking elements, with just six types out of nine critical thinking skills represented: clarification, reason and evidence, viewpoint or perspective, consequence and alternative, agreement and disagreement, and summary and conclusion. A few years later, Agustina et al. (2022) analyzed the textbook specifically titled *When English Rings a Bell* for eighth-graders. The inclusion of critical thinking skills in the questions and tasks is the subject of analysis in this study. From this study, it was found that only 29% of the tasks (37 items) involve critical thinking, whereas the remaining 71% (91 items) do not. The three textbooks were developed under the 2013 Curriculum.

On the contrary, there is only one study regarding the analysis of critical thinking skills in the tasks of textbooks developed under the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Linia et al. (2025) studied the *English for Nusantara* textbook for seventh-graders. An evaluation of tasks in Chapters 1 to 3 revealed that

critical thinking was present in only 17 tasks, reflecting the limited promotion of critical thinking within the tasks.

As most studies have primarily analyzed EFL textbooks under the 2013 Curriculum, research on how extensively the *Merdeka* Curriculum senior high school EFL textbooks promote critical thinking skills remains limited. To date, Linia et al. (2025) have conducted the only available study on a junior high school textbook, with the senior high school level remaining unexamined and indicating a significant gap in existing research. Al-Ghozali (2024) analyzed the *Work in Progress* textbook for tenth-graders in terms of its organization, quality, and appropriateness, noting that it includes activities that could support critical and creative thinking. However, the study provides no detailed explanation of how the tasks work to promote critical thinking skills, nor does it establish any clear link to specific indicators or frameworks. The extent to which the textbook promotes critical thinking skills is difficult to evaluate because of this limitation. Furthermore, findings related to critical thinking are presented only as a supporting element to justify conclusions about the textbook's overall pedagogical quality.

The *Work in Progress* for tenth-graders is a local EFL textbook published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Distributed across Indonesian high schools, particularly public schools, it serves as a primary medium in EFL classrooms. The textbook is mostly filled with activities for students to learn English. Considering its wide use in classrooms and its task-based design, this textbook provides a relevant context to examine how critical thinking skills may be incorporated into English learning tasks. The selection of this textbook is further supported by a preliminary survey conducted among tenth-grade students across the Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (Jabodetabek) area, which revealed that the majority of students who used the textbook in schools reported that it was used to complete assigned English tasks by their teachers. Previous research by Al-Ghozali (2024) also identified the

presence of activities promoting critical thinking skills in this textbook, thereby highlighting its potential relevance for further analysis in this study. Therefore, this study aims to address the gap by investigating the extent to which the EFL textbook *Work in Progress* for tenth-graders, which was developed under the *Merdeka* Curriculum, promotes critical thinking skills in its tasks.

## **1.2. Research Question**

From the given problem stated in the background, a research question was formulated to be answered by this present study:

1. To what extent does the *Work in Progress* English textbook for tenth-graders promote critical thinking skills in its tasks?

## **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

This present study intends to analyze the extent to which the *Work in Progress* English textbook for tenth-graders promotes critical thinking skills through its tasks. It further seeks to examine how these skills are integrated into various types of tasks and whether different task types contribute differently in promoting the students' critical thinking.

## **1.4. Scope of the Study**

The integration of critical thinking skills in the tasks of the *Work in Progress* English textbook for tenth-grade students is specifically examined in this study. It focuses on how the textbook tasks promote critical thinking skills by using Ilyas' critical thinking framework (2016). Additionally, this study categorizes tasks based on Nunan's (1999) task typology. Both frameworks serve to determine whether critical thinking skills are present in the tasks and whether some task types are more likely to promote certain skills.



## 1.5. Significance of the Study

### 1. Theoretically

This study seeks to contribute to research on evaluating critical thinking skills in the tasks of secondary-level *Merdeka* Curriculum EFL textbooks. Since studies on this topic remain limited and no research has specifically examined the extent to which the tasks of senior high school textbooks promote critical thinking skills, the present study addresses this gap by focusing on the *Work in Progress* textbook for tenth-graders. It is expected that the findings will serve as a reference for future research, along with the evaluation of EFL textbooks developed under the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

### 2. Practically

This study has the potential to offer a beneficial contribution to:

#### 1) Teachers

This study could enlighten teachers to be more selective when choosing learning materials aligned with students' needs. As a pivotal component of 21st-century skills, critical thinking must be carefully integrated into educational materials in order to foster critical thinking abilities in students. Therefore, teachers can reflect on the findings of this study to better guide their selection of appropriate teaching and learning resources.

#### 2) Educational institutions

This study could provide insightful reflections on educational institutions' choice of student learning textbooks. The findings will guide schools in choosing EFL textbooks that integrate critical thinking skills to better follow the *Merdeka* Curriculum's goal.

#### 3) Textbook authors and publishers

This study could offer constructive feedback on areas where the textbooks may fall short in encouraging critical thinking skills in students. Reflecting on the findings, both textbook authors and

publishers of the selected textbook can have guidance for future revisions or new material development.

### 1.6. State of the Arts

Textbooks are officially acknowledged as a national learning resource in Indonesian classrooms. Consequently, in order to identify how Indonesian EFL textbooks promote critical thinking skills, several studies have been conducted. Studies by Utami et al. (2020), Hestrian et al. (2021), and Agustina et al. (2022) analyzed English textbooks developed under the 2013 Curriculum. They found that many tasks provided in the textbooks they analyzed did not fully encourage students to think critically. Moreover, those textbooks are no longer relevant since it was developed under the 2013 Curriculum and are no longer being used in many schools in Indonesia nowadays.

Recent studies focusing on textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum remain limited. Linia et al. (2025) investigated the English for Nusantara textbook for junior high school, but their analysis was limited to only three chapters. Al-Ghozali (2024) examined the Work in Progress textbook for tenth graders and acknowledged that it includes activities that support critical and creative thinking. However, the information is only additional information to support his findings on the textbook's organization, quality, and appropriateness. He mentioned it descriptively without offering a systematic evaluation of the tasks through a specific critical thinking framework.

Given the limited and partial nature of existing studies, particularly at the senior high school level, a more comprehensive and framework-based analysis is needed. The existing gap is aimed to be addressed in this study by investigating the extent to which the *Work in Progress* textbook promotes critical thinking skills through Ilyas' critical thinking framework (2016). Moreover, Nunan's task typology (1999) is employed to gain further insight into the types of tasks that facilitate the development of these skills.