

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the study's background, outlines the research questions, states the objectives, defines the scope, and explains the significance of the research.

1.1 Background of the Study

The landscape of 21st-century education is marked by the increasing need to develop learners who are not only academically competent but also equipped with critical thinking and collaboration skills. These two competencies have been widely recognized as essential for preparing students to navigate the complexities of the modern world, characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and complex social challenges (Fullan et al., 2018). In Indonesia, this vision is reflected in national education policies such as the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, which aim to cultivate students who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of reflective thinking, effective communication, creative problem-solving, and meaningful collaboration (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2024).

However, the reality in Indonesian classrooms often falls short of these aspirations. National and international assessments consistently reveal that Indonesian students lag in essential literacies, including English proficiency and reading comprehension. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2024), Indonesia ranks 80th out of 116 countries, placing it in the "low proficiency" category. Similarly, the PISA 2022 results show that Indonesian students scored significantly below the

OECD average in reading literacy, with only 25% of students reaching the minimum proficiency level necessary for critical engagement with texts (OECD, 2022). These findings suggest not only linguistic deficiencies but also a deeper issue: the lack of development of higher-order thinking skills, particularly in the areas of critical thinking and collaboration.

One contributing factor to this learning gap is the persistent reliance on traditional, teacher-centered methodologies in language instruction. Studies by Shofiah et al. (2024) and Pratami et al. (2022) indicate that English classes in Indonesian junior high schools often focus heavily on grammar-translation methods, vocabulary memorization, and mechanical writing tasks, with little room for exploration, discussion, or reflective reasoning. Writing exercises tend to be viewed as isolated technical drills rather than as opportunities for students to articulate ideas, construct arguments, and engage collaboratively in problem-solving activities (Abbas & Fathira, 2022). As a result, the potential of writing to foster deep learning, understood as learning that is meaningful, transformative, and transferable, remains largely untapped.

In this context, textbooks hold a central place in shaping pedagogical practices in Indonesian classrooms. As the primary teaching tool, textbooks not only guide instructional content but also significantly influence the types of learning experiences that students encounter (Mithans & Grmek, 2020). Unfortunately, much of the research points to the limited capacity of textbooks to promote 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking and collaboration. Hasnah et al. (2024), for example, found that EFL textbooks used in Indonesian schools rarely include tasks that foster deep

reflection, argumentation, or interactive learning. Similarly, Soe & Eto (2022) highlighted that the dominant pedagogy in Asian EFL contexts is heavily influenced by examination culture, which reinforces shallow learning by prioritizing memorization and correctness over reasoning and creativity.

Against this backdrop, the decision to investigate the Wider World 2 textbook emerges as both relevant and necessary. Wider World 2, published by Pearson and the BBC, is widely adopted in Indonesian junior high schools, particularly in international and bilingual settings. It is marketed as a modern, communicative, and engaging textbook that integrates multimedia resources, thematic units, and diverse skills practice (Pearson, 2017). Despite these promising features, there is currently limited empirical research assessing whether the textbook's writing activities genuinely align with the demands of deep learning, especially in nurturing critical thinking and collaborative competencies. This represents a significant research gap, as textbooks that appear innovative on the surface may still fall back on traditional task designs that do not promote meaningful student engagement.

Previous studies provide important insights that underscore the importance of this investigation. For instance, Abbas & Fathira (2022) demonstrated that collaborative writing tasks not only improve students' linguistic accuracy but also foster creativity, reflection, and teamwork, all essential components of deep learning. Similarly, Barrot (2022) emphasized that writing activities that require students to express opinions, analyzing information, and engaging in peer feedback contribute significantly to the development of critical thinking in EFL contexts. Additionally,

studies by Murtiningsih & Komalasari (2017) and Listiana et al. (2023) have shown that collaborative and inquiry-based learning can enhance both student motivation and cognitive engagement, leading to improved academic outcomes and interpersonal skills.

Consequently, there is a need for a systematic content analysis to critically evaluate how textbook writing activities translate theoretical communicative frameworks into pedagogical practice. In the Indonesian context, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasizes the development of 21st-century competencies. However, many studies still evaluate textbooks using traditional social interaction lenses. There is a pressing need to analyze textbooks through the Deep Learning framework proposed by Fullan (2018), which moves beyond simple interaction toward mutual accountability and logical reasoning.

While previous studies have looked at textbooks through general 21st-century lenses, there is a lack of research using the Deep Learning framework to see if the activities actually build deep engagement or just simple interaction. This study identifies a Theoretical Gap (Theory Application Void Gap), as certain research issues require the application of specific theories to generate deeper insights (Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015; Miles, 2017). This study seeks to fill this gap by conducting a qualitative content analysis of the writing activities in *Wider World 2*. Specifically, this study evaluates how these writing activities foster collaboration and critical thinking as deep competencies to prepare students for complex, real-world challenges, addressing

what Robinson, Saldanha, & McKoy (2011) and Miles (2017) describe as the need for evaluating research findings through more specialized and contemporary frameworks.

1.2 Research Question

1. How is collaboration skill represented in the writing activities of the *Wider World 2* textbook in relation to Deep Learning principles?
2. How is critical thinking skill represented in the writing activities of the *Wider World 2* textbook in relation to Deep Learning principles?
3. To what extent do the writing activities in *Wider World 2* align with the curriculum's learning objectives for Grade 7 writing instruction?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

1. To analyze the representation of collaboration skills in the writing activities of the *Wider World 2* textbook in relation to Deep Learning principles.
2. To describe how critical thinking skills are represented in the writing activities of the *Wider World 2* textbook within the framework of Deep Learning principles.
3. To **assess** the extent to which the writing activities in *Wider World 2* align with the curriculum's learning objectives for Grade 7 writing instruction.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study seeks to explain the writing exercises in the “Wider World 2” English textbook, which is widely utilized by Grade 7 students in SMP Labschool Jakarta. The decision to focus only on writing is based on the judgment that textbooks act as a primary pedagogical tool in shaping how a curriculum is delivered. As Richards (2015) emphasizes, textbooks serve as an essential vehicle for providing language input and classroom practice, making them the most stable source for analysis. Therefore, this study does not include other language skills such as listening, speaking, or reading, even when these skills are integrated alongside writing tasks.

The research employs a deep learning approach, focusing on collaboration and critical thinking skills as the overall study framework. The objective is to evaluate whether and how the textbook facilitates these two skills, which is crucial given the global shift that demands learners to move beyond rote learning toward 21st-century competencies, a necessity (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The research is influenced by several limitations. Firstly, it is a study of textbook material; therefore, it does not involve classroom observation or student feedback. This creates a boundary between the 'intended' content and the actual 'implemented' practice. This distinction is vital because a teacher's mediation can significantly alter how a textbook task is actually perceived and carried out by students (Cunningsworth, 1995). Secondly, the study is based on a single textbook, “Wider World 2,” which could limit how much the findings can be generalized to other Indonesian English textbooks or worldwide.

Lastly, the measurement of deep learning skills is interpretative and researcher-judgment reliant based on given proxies of collaboration and critical thinking. This interpretative nature is aligned with Fullan and Quinn's (2016) view that assessing deep learning requires a qualitative understanding of how students engage with complex tasks rather than just quantitative metrics. Finally, the scope of this study is limited to selected units of the textbook. Only Units 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 were analyzed, as these units contain explicit writing sections. This selective focus was strategically intended to ensure methodological precision, allowing for a deeper alignment between the data source and the analytical lens of Fullan et al.'s (2018) Deep Learning Framework.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of English language education, particularly in the area of textbook evaluation and skills-based language instruction.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the literature on deep learning in EFL by applying the Deep Learning Framework specifically teamwork and critical thinking—to textbook examination. It also shows how global education frameworks, such as Fullan et al.'s (2018) 6Cs Framework, can be utilized to assess writing exercises in English textbooks, improving our understanding of how 21st-century abilities are integrated into formal educational resources.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

- a. Provides English teachers with insights into selecting or adapting writing activities that foster collaboration and critical thinking, particularly in *Wider World 2*.
- b. Offers textbook authors and instructional designers guidance for aligning writing tasks with deep learning principles to support students' cognitive and interpersonal development.
- c. Assists curriculum developers and policymakers in understanding the alignment between commercial textbooks and the Kurikulum Merdeka's goals for active, competency-based learning.

Serves as a reference for future researchers exploring textbook evaluation, writing instruction, or the implementation of deep learning frameworks in EFL contexts. This study may provide useful insights for English teachers in selecting or adapting writing activities that encourage collaboration and critical thinking, particularly when using textbooks such as *Wider World 2*

1.6 State of The Art

In recent years, educational research has showed a significant shift from traditional skill-based instructions. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that 21st-century education must move beyond the general identification of skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, toward structured

frameworks that integrate cognitive, social, and character dimensions. At the conceptual level, much existing research continues to rely on the P21 framework and its emphasis on the 4Cs. While this framework remains widely accepted, fewer studies adopt Fullan's (2018) Deep Learning framework, which expands these competencies into the 6Cs and foregrounds meaningful, real-world learning experiences. The latest academic discussions suggest that education must move beyond surface-level skill representation toward deeper cognitive engagement and social interaction. In this regard, Fullan's model represents a conceptual advancement because it provides a more comprehensive lens for examining how educational materials support complex learning processes rather than merely displaying skill labels.

Despite this theoretical advancement, many educational materials, including English textbooks, are still commonly evaluated at a macro level, focusing on curriculum alignment or the overall distribution of skills. From a methodological perspective, recent textbook studies frequently analyze entire units or general content patterns, with limited attention to the internal structure of specific language skills. Writing instruction, in particular, is often treated as an individual cognitive activity, even though contemporary pedagogy increasingly emphasizes collaboration, critical dialogue, and shared problem-solving within the writing process. Current developments in the field highlight the need for more focused qualitative analyses that explore how instructions, task sequencing, and interaction patterns foster synergy between collaboration and critical thinking. This reveals a methodological gap in

examining how deep learning competencies are operationalized within specific textbook activities.

Therefore, the present study positions itself within the most current developments in educational theory by applying the Deep Learning (6Cs) framework as a contemporary analytical lens. It advances existing knowledge both conceptually and methodologically: conceptually, by moving beyond the dominant 4Cs orientation toward a more comprehensive deep learning perspective; and methodologically, by conducting a granular qualitative content analysis of writing tasks. By focusing on how activities are structured to promote the integration of collaboration and critical thinking rather than merely identifying skill presence, this research contributes to a more refined understanding of how textbook materials can support deep, interactive, and transformative learning aligned with ongoing educational reforms.

