

An Analysis of 21st-Century Skills Representation in The Indonesian EFL Textbooks for Seventh Graders

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Article History

Received : April 07th, 2026

Revised : April 20th, 2026

Accepted : May 16th, 2026

Abstract: The integration of 21st-century skills into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks is increasingly important to help students meet the challenges of global communication, technological developments, and the demands of modern education. The purpose of this study was to identify the 21st-century skills represented in the seventh-grade EFL textbooks English for Nusantara and English in Mind, how they are represented, and the differences in their representation. This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design with content analysis based on the Partnership for 21st-Century Learning (P21) framework. Data were collected through documentation techniques by identifying textbook content, such as tasks, activities, texts, visual representations, and instructions, that reflected the 12 21st-century skills. Data analysis was conducted through coding, frequency, and percentage calculations, comparative analysis, and descriptive interpretation. The findings indicate that both textbooks cover all twelve skills, but with different emphases. Critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, media literacy, and information literacy were dominant in both textbooks. In contrast, life and career skills such as flexibility and adaptability, leadership and responsibility, productivity and accountability, and initiative and self-direction were minimally represented. This study concludes that English for Nusantara emphasizes structured and directed learning, while English in Mind encourages a more communicative, collaborative, and interactive learning experience.

Keywords: 21st-century skills, content analysis, EFL textbooks, English for Nusantara, English in Mind

INTRODUCTION

The integration of 21st-century skills into English language teaching has become a priority worldwide, as education systems aim to prepare students for the complex social, technological, and communication demands of the modern education. Many scholars and organizations agree that 21st-century skills are crucial for preparing students to face real-world challenges. As stated by the OECD (2018), these skills foster global competence and intercultural awareness traits that are increasingly important in an increasingly connected world. Similarly, Wagner (2008) notes that employers increasingly emphasize these skills, making them essential for career success and meaningful social contribution. In addition, Voogt and Roblin (2012) emphasize that learning in the 21st century is not only about what students know but also about how they apply their knowledge in dynamic and changing environments.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the integration of 21st-century skills into learning materials is crucial, as English learning today encompasses far more than just mastery of language forms and grammatical knowledge. Trilling and Fadel (2009) argue that language learning in the 21st century must also foster critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and literacy skills needed for participating in an increasingly global world. Furthermore, many educational scholars emphasize that learners need opportunities to apply knowledge in authentic and meaningful contexts. In this regard, Saavedra and Opfer (2012) explain that integrating 21st-century skills into learning content enables learners not only to acquire academic knowledge but also to apply it in practical, real-world situations. Therefore, integrating these skills into EFL textbooks is important, as textbooks strongly influence students' opportunities to develop such competencies during classroom learning.

This issue is important because textbooks are often the primary source of learning activities, particularly in Indonesian junior high schools, where teachers rely heavily on predetermined materials. Richards (2001) emphasizes that textbooks are widely used in language teaching because they provide clear language content and opportunities for practice. In addition, Tomlinson (2012) argues that well-developed textbooks offer opportunities for language acquisition through interaction with groups or partners, autonomy, and active participation. However, if textbooks mainly focus on structured language practice without integrating broader 21st-century skills, students may have limited opportunities to develop problem-solving, teamwork, creativity, and digital literacy. As a result, English language learning will remain formal and non-competency-oriented.

In Indonesia, the urgency of adapting English language teaching to modern demands is reflected in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum marks a significant change in the Indonesian education system by encouraging a student-centered and flexible learning approach that prioritizes critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, and independent learning. This is supported by studies conducted by Irawati et al. (2022) and Ingtias et al. (2022), which highlight that the Merdeka Curriculum supports the integration of 21st-century skills into learning. Furthermore, Permendikbudristek (Regulation Number 5 of 2022 of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology) of the Republic of Indonesia, emphasizes the importance of skills such as communicating original ideas, performing creative actions and work, finding alternative solutions, analyzing problems and ideas, and arguing based on accurate data. Therefore, these skills must be integrated into learning materials and experiences to promote them in English language learning in Indonesia.

Previous studies have shown that many English textbooks still focus on basic language skills, rather than integrating more comprehensive 21st-century skills, particularly life and career skills and digital literacy. Cahyono & Widiati (2006) showed that in EFL education in Indonesia, many textbooks still focus on linguistic aspects such as grammar, reading comprehension, and vocabulary mastery, rather than encouraging analytical, evaluative, or problem-solving skills. As a result, textbooks and learning activities often

lack tasks that encourage students' critical thinking and reasoning skills. This shows that there is a gap between the curriculum objectives and the actual representations of 21st-century skills in learning materials.

Although previous studies have examined the presence of 21st-century skills in Indonesian EFL textbooks, comparative analysis of locally developed and internationally published English textbooks for junior high school level remains limited. Studies such as those by Rinekso (2021) and Wulandari and Hidayat (2020) have explored the 21st-century skills embedded in Indonesian EFL textbooks. Still, their focus was limited to specific skills or task types, rather than conducting comprehensive comparative evaluations across multiple textbook sources. Therefore, there is a lack of research that compares how 21st-century skills are represented in non-native written textbooks and internationally written textbooks used in teaching in Indonesia. This study fills this gap by comparing English for Nusantara, a textbook written by a non-native speaker, with English in Mind, a textbook written by a native English speaker adapted for Indonesian students. Using the P21 framework, this study systematically analyzes the representation of twelve categories of 21st-century skills, providing new insights into differences in pedagogical orientation and the balance of skills integration in Indonesian EFL materials.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, specifically the content analysis, to investigate the representation of 21st-century skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. Qualitative content analysis was used because the study focused on examining, categorizing, and interpreting textual and visual data contained in the textbooks. According to Moleong (2022), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by individuals descriptively through words and interpretations. In addition, content analysis enables researchers to analyze written documents and teaching materials systematically. This research was conducted through document analysis and textbook evaluation. The study analyzed two seventh-grade EFL textbooks used in Indonesian, English for Nusantara (written by a non-native speaker) and English in Mind (written by a native English speaker). These textbooks

were selected purposively because they represent textbooks written by non-native and native English-speaking authors and were deemed relevant to the analysis of 21st-century skills representation in EFL learning materials.

The research procedures were conducted through several stages. First, the researcher selected the textbooks to be analyzed. Second, the researcher carefully read and examined the contents of both textbooks to identify learning activities, instructions, dialogues, reading texts, projects, visual elements, and assessment tasks related to 21st-century skills. In the third stage, the researcher developed and used an analysis instrument based on the Partnership for 21st-Century Learning (P21) framework and the theories of Trilling and Fadel (2009). The identified data were then categorized according to the indicators of 21st-century skills. Finally, the collected data were organized and verified to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the findings. After the data had been collected and categorized, the researcher calculated the frequency and percentage of each 21st-century skill found in both textbooks. After calculating the

frequency and percentage, the researcher conducted a comparative analysis to identify similarities and differences in the representation of 21st-century skills between the two textbooks. The findings were then interpreted descriptively to explain how these skills were represented explicitly or implicitly in the textbook content.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of seventh-grade English textbooks, it was found that both English for Nusantara (EFN) and English in Mind (EIM) cover all twelve categories of 21st-century skills as outlined in the Partnership for 21st-Century Skills (P21) framework, identified through tasks, learning activities, reading texts, dialogues, images, and learning instructions across chapters. Each section where tasks, activities, or texts explicitly or implicitly reflect one or more 21st-century skills was recorded and categorized. As a result, the total frequencies presented in Table 1 represent the number of how often each skill appears in the textbook.

Table 1. The summary of task categorization and distribution of 21st-century skills

The 21 st -Century Skills	Tasks Distribution	
	English for Nusantara	English in Mind
Creativity and Innovation	27 (5.9%)	24 (6.7%)
Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving	98 (21.4%)	79 (22.0%)
Communication	68 (14.9%)	65 (18.1%)
Collaboration	37 (8.1%)	49 (13.7%)
Information Literacy	78 (17.1%)	34 (9.5%)
Media Literacy	87 (19.0%)	62 (17.3%)
ICT Literacy	40 (8.8%)	6 (1.7%)
Flexibility and Adaptability	-	4 (1.1%)
Initiative and Self-Direction	10 (2.2%)	20 (5.6%)
Social and Cross-Cultural Skills	7 (1.5%)	10 (2.8%)
Productivity and Accountability	2 (0.4%)	2 (0.6%)
Leadership and Responsibility	3 (0.7%)	4 (1.1%)
Total	457	359

As shown in Table 1, a total of 457 tasks were identified in English for Nusantara. Critical thinking and Problem-solving were the most frequently represented skills, with 98 (21.4%) occurrences, followed by Media literacy with 87 (19.0%) occurrences, Information literacy with 78 (17.1%) occurrences, and Communication skills with 68 (14.9%) occurrences. These skills are mostly integrated into highly structured learning activities, such as categorizing information, interpreting and analyzing texts or images, and practicing functional language use. Skills such as

Collaboration, Creativity and Innovation, and ICT literacy skills were moderately represented, while Life and Career skills, including Initiative and Self-direction, Social and Cross-Cultural skills, Leadership and Responsibility, Productivity and Accountability, and Flexibility and Adaptability, were rarely represented and typically portrayed in stories or pictures and reflection tasks.

Similarly, English in Mind recorded 359 representations of 21st-century skills. As summarized in Table 3, Critical Thinking and Problem-solving with 79 (22.0%) occurrences,

followed by Communication with 65 (18.1%) occurrences, Media literacy with 62 (17.3%) occurrences, and Collaboration with 49 (13.7%) were the most frequently represented skills. These skills were typically integrated through sentence completion or construction, real-life dialogues, collaborative speaking tasks, and visually supported learning tasks. Creativity and Innovation, Information literacy, and Initiative and Self-direction appeared moderately, often through creative writing, short research-based tasks and reflection tasks. Skills such as ICT literacy, Flexibility and Adaptability, Productivity and Accountability, and Leadership and Responsibility were only occasionally represented and integrated through short reading texts or contextual scenarios.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that both English for Nusantara and English in Mind address a range of 21st-century skills, although the number of skills covered varies significantly. This confirms that both textbooks for English as a Foreign Language recognize the importance of preparing learners to face the cognitive, communicative, and social demands of modern education. This aligns with Trilling and Fadel's (2009) argument that language learning in the 21st century encompasses not only mastery of linguistic forms but also critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and literacy skills, which are crucial for participating in a globalized world. Overall, both textbooks emphasize cognitive, communicative, and literacy skills, while life and career skills receive less attention. Both textbooks emphasized Learning and Innovation Skills as well as Information, Media, and Technology Skills, particularly critical thinking and problem solving, communication, information literacy, and media literacy. These skills were frequently represented through activities requiring learners to identify information, interpret texts and visuals, express opinions, discuss ideas, and respond to communicative tasks. This also reflects the fact that materials for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) continue to prioritize language comprehension over life, social, and career skills. These findings align with previous studies in the EFL context in Indonesia, which show that textbooks tend to prioritize language accuracy and literacy skills over broader life and professional

skills (Cahyono & Widiati, 2006; Gunawan et al., 2022).

Indonesian education policy emphasizes creativity, problem-solving, communication, and independent learning, which promotes a strong focus on critical thinking and literacy in "English for Nusantara". EFN focuses on structured, directed tasks aimed at identifying information, categorizing content, and interpreting text or visuals. While these tasks encourage comprehension accuracy and systematic thinking, they offer limited opportunities for learners' autonomy or decision-making. In contrast, "English in Mind" takes a more communicative and student-centered pedagogical approach. The textbook encourages interaction and personal expression through open-ended speaking tasks, role-playing, group discussions, and visually supported tasks. Previous studies align with this approach, showing that international textbooks for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tend to offer more opportunities for authentic interaction and independent learning through communicative tasks (Selti et al., 2019).

One of the most striking findings is the lack of flexibility and adaptability in EFN and the low representation in the EIM. According to the P21 framework, adaptability and flexibility are crucial for learners to respond effectively to new situations and challenges. The lack of these skills suggests that textbooks alone are insufficient to foster or fully address 21st-century skills in English language learning. This underscores the importance of teacher guidance and supplementary activities. Overall, the differences between English for Nusantara and English in Mind reflect different pedagogical approaches. The English for Nusantara textbook emphasizes structured literacy skills and analytical learning in accordance with national education standards, while English in Mind prioritizes communication skills, collaboration, creativity, and learner autonomy. These findings suggest that no single textbook can fully address all 21st-century skills. Therefore, selecting appropriate textbooks and adaptive teaching methods is crucial for the development of balanced skills in the EFL classroom.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examines the representation of 21st-century skills in seventh-grade English textbooks used in Indonesia,

English for Nusantara, and English in Mind. The results indicate that both textbooks integrated 21st-century skills, but the integration is uneven across skill categories. A comparative analysis of the two textbooks reveals that cognitive, communicative, and literacy skills are strongly emphasized in both. This reflects the fact that both textbooks align with the P21 framework and the national curriculum focus on critical thinking, communication, and information processing. However, life and career skills, particularly flexibility and adaptability, leadership, and productivity, receive less attention, indicating that neither textbook fully integrates 21st-century skills. These findings suggest that although textbook design plays a crucial role in classroom practice, comprehensive development of 21st-century skills cannot rely solely on textbooks. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to enrich textbook-based instruction with additional activities that foster student learning autonomy, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. The differences in pedagogical approaches in textbooks written by native and non-native English speakers underscore the need to develop more balanced 21st-century skills materials. Future research could expand this study by examining other grade levels, incorporating classroom observations, or exploring teacher and student perspectives to better understand how 21st-century skills are applied in real-life learning contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express her sincere gratitude to her advisors for their invaluable support, constructive feedback, and continuous support throughout the completion of this research and the preparation of this article. Their insightful suggestions and careful guidance have significantly contributed to the development of this study. Without their guidance and support, this research would not have been successfully accomplished.

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