

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The 21st century presents new challenges for education, particularly in preparing students to function effectively in an increasingly interconnected, digital, and competitive world. In this context, the mastery of 21st century skills, commonly known as the 4Cs which are critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration that has become a central focus of modern education (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; P21, 2019). These competencies are not only essential for professional success but also for lifelong learning, problem-solving, and active citizenship. Language education, especially English as a Foreign Language (EFL), plays a crucial role in developing these competencies, as language learning inherently involves communication, expression of ideas, and collaboration (Richards, 2015).

In English language learning, the integration of 21st century skills play a vital role in shaping learners' communicative competence and cognitive development. Critical thinking allows students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information meaningfully rather than merely memorizing linguistic forms (Halpern, 2014). It encourages learners to question ideas, consider multiple perspectives, and construct logical

arguments in English, which are essential for authentic communication. Meanwhile, creativity enables learners to generate original ideas and express them in diverse linguistic forms, fostering more engaging and meaningful use of the language (Nunan, 2015). Both skills are interdependent: creativity often stems from critical evaluation, while critical thinking refines creative expression. In writing tasks, these skills are manifested when learners develop unique ideas, organize them coherently, and use language innovatively to convey meaning.

Furthermore, in EFL contexts like Indonesia, the cultivation of critical and creative thinking through writing is especially important, as it transforms writing from a mechanical, grammar-focused activity into a process of exploration and expression (Chojimah & Rinekso, 2020). Through writing, students engage in deeper reflection, problem-solving, and decision-making activities that align with the *higher-order thinking skills* (HOTS) demanded in the 21st century. Therefore, English teachers and textbook developers must design tasks that challenge learners to think critically and creatively, such as project-based writing, argumentative essays, and reflective compositions. When effectively implemented, writing tasks become not only a medium for language practice but also a platform for developing the cognitive and creative capacities central to 21st century education (Richards, 2015; Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

One of the newly introduced textbooks, *Work in Progress Grade X*, was developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to align with the

Merdeka Curriculum. It is designed to encourage learner autonomy, creativity, and real-world communication. This textbook, serves as one of the main teaching materials developed under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This curriculum emphasizes competency-based learning that integrates 21st century skills which are critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (4C) as essential components of the learning process. Unlike the previous *2013 Curriculum*, which tended to be more teacher-centered and form-focused, the *Merdeka Curriculum* promotes learner autonomy, contextualized tasks, and active engagement in problem-solving and creative production (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). As such, *Work in Progress* is designed to help students not only acquire linguistic knowledge but also develop the cognitive, creative, and communicative competencies needed in the 21st century global context.

However, as a relatively new textbook, *Work in Progress* has not yet been widely examined in terms of how effectively it embodies these competencies within its language tasks. In particular, writing tasks play a crucial role in facilitating higher-order thinking and creative expression two central pillars of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Despite this, preliminary observations suggest that many writing activities in the textbook remain focused on structural accuracy and guided composition, offering limited opportunities for students to think critically or produce original ideas. This condition highlights the need for a systematic investigation of how the textbook represents 21st century skills, especially in its writing sections.

Analyzing this representation is essential not only to evaluate the alignment between the textbook content and curriculum goals but also to provide insights for improving English textbook design that genuinely supports the development of 21st century competencies among Indonesian learners.

Nevertheless, preliminary observations conducted on the *Work in Progress Grade X* English textbook indicate that the writing tasks provided throughout the chapters still largely focus on controlled and guided practices. Many activities require students to perform tasks such as completing missing parts of sentences, rewriting model texts, or following highly structured templates.

Task 5

Think and Take Notes

Think about the last sports event you watched. Write a short note about the situation using the following questions to guide you.

- What sports event did you go to/watch?
- When was it?
- Where did you watch it?
- Who did you watch it with?
- What do you think about the spectators and the game?

Figure 1. 1 : Guided Narrative Prompts

Use Your Words

Research about your favorite athlete. Write your description about the athlete by completing the following sentences. You can use the words from your Vocabulary Box in Task 1.

1. _____ or as we usually call (him/her) as _____ is my favorite _____.
2. He/She was born in _____ on _____.
3. _____ has a/an _____ body with the height of _____ centimeters and weight _____ kilogram.
4. His/Her skin color is _____ with a _____ face and _____ smile.
5. He/She has _____ eyes and the color is _____.

Figure 1. 2 : Fill the blanks

There are many writing activities in the textbook emphasizing linguistic correctness rather than learning that encourages reflection, innovation, and collaboration. While these tasks support foundational writing skills, they provide limited opportunities for learners to engage in higher-order thinking processes such as analyzing, evaluating, or generating original ideas (creating). Writing activities that could potentially foster creativity, such as descriptive or narrative compositions, are often constrained by narrow prompts or rigid instructions, leaving minimal room for independent idea development or creative expression. This situation reveals a potential gap between curriculum expectations and the actual representation of 21st century skills within the writing tasks of the textbook.

Several previous studies have examined 21st century skills in English textbooks, but most of them focused on *reading* or *speaking* activities (e.g., Rinekso, 2020; Wulandari & Hidayat, 2021; Gunawan et al., 2022). Little attention has been given to the writing component, which serves as a key medium for cultivating higher-order cognitive and creative abilities. Moreover, to date, there is a lack of specific research that investigates how the *Work in Progress Grade X* textbook representing the new *Merdeka Curriculum* integrates 21st century skills into its writing sections. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how the textbook represents the four-core 21st century skills (4Cs) within its writing tasks.

By conducting a qualitative content analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of whether the writing tasks in *Work in Progress Grade X* align with the goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum* and effectively promote critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. The findings are expected to contribute to improving the design and evaluation of English language textbooks in Indonesia, ensuring they better support 21st century learning outcomes.

1.2 The Problems of the Study

Based on the background description, the problems of the study are:

1. What form of writing tasks types in the English Textbook entitled *Work in Progress Grade X*?
2. How are 21st century skills represented in the writing tasks in the English Textbook entitled *Work in Progress Grade X*?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

Based on the problems of the study, the objectives of the study:

1. To analyzed the forms of writing tasks types in the English textbook *Work in Progress Grade X*.
2. To described how 21st century skills are represented in the writing tasks of the English textbook entitled *Work in Progress Grade X*

1.4 The Scope of the Study

This study is limited to analyzing the representation of 21st century skills particularly critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration in the writing tasks of the English textbook *Work in Progress*

Grade X published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) as part of the *Merdeka Curriculum* implementation. The analysis focuses only on the writing section that provided in the textbook, including both individual and collaborative writing activities, task instructions, and accompanying examples or model.

The study does not examine other language skills such as listening, speaking, or reading, nor does it evaluate classroom implementation, teacher practices, or students' performance. Instead, it employs a qualitative content analysis approach to identify and describe how the 4C of 21st century skills are represented and integrated within the writing tasks. The analysis is guided by the framework of 21st century skills proposed by Trilling and Fadel (2009), focusing on indicators that reflect higher-order thinking, originality of ideas, communicative, collaboration and problem-solving in written expression.

By narrowing the scope to textual analysis of the writing components in *Work in Progress* Grade X, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how the textbook supports the development of 21st century competencies expected in the *Merdeka Curriculum*, while recognizing that its findings are limited to the content of the textbook itself and do not generalize to teaching practices or other educational materials.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide meaningful contributions both theoretically and practically to the development of English language teaching and textbook evaluation within the framework of 21st century education, particularly in the Indonesian context under the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the body of research concerning the integration of 21st century skills in English language learning materials. By focusing on the representation of these skills in writing tasks, this study bridges the gap between general theories of 21st century competencies (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019) and their practical realization in English language pedagogy.

Furthermore, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how writing as one of the most cognitively demanding language skills that can serve as a platform for developing higher-order thinking and creative expression among learners (Nunan, 2015; Halpern, 2014). Writing not only reflects language proficiency but also promotes intellectual engagement through reasoning, evaluation, and idea generation. By analyzing *Work in Progress Grade X* as a newly developed textbook for the *Merdeka Curriculum*, this study provides theoretical insight into how government-endorsed learning materials represent the educational shift toward 21st century learning. Hence, the findings are expected to expand conceptual

discussions on how EFL materials can effectively embody critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration as core learning outcomes.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

Practically, the study is expected to benefit several groups within the educational context:

- **For English teachers**

The findings can serve as guidance to better understand how 21st century skills are embedded within the writing tasks in *Work in Progress Grade X*. Teachers can use the results to design supplementary activities, adapt textbook materials, and implement instructional strategies that enhance students' communication, collaboration, critical and creative thinking through writing.

- **For textbook developers and material writers**

This research provides empirical evidence on how writing tasks can be structured to foster deeper learning. The analysis highlights aspects of the textbook that successfully promote higher-order skills, as well as areas that may require improvement, thus serving as a reference for designing future English textbooks aligned with 21st century learning objectives.

- **For curriculum designers and policymakers**

The findings offer valuable feedback regarding the alignment between the *Merdeka Curriculum's* expectations and the actual content

of the *Work in Progress* textbook. This insight is crucial for ensuring that national textbooks truly support the curriculum's goal of nurturing critical, creative, and autonomous learners in the global era.

- **For future researchers**

This study serves as a foundation for further exploration of 21st century skill representation in other language textbooks, levels, or skills (such as speaking, reading, and listening). It also opens opportunities for comparative studies between local and international textbooks or between different educational curricula.

Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in its potential to strengthen the connection between curriculum intentions and textbook implementation. By critically analyzing the extent to which *Work in Progress Grade X* reflects the spirit of 21st century education, this research contributes to improving English language teaching practices and the overall quality of learning materials used in Indonesian classrooms.