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RECEPTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE VOCABULARY EXERCISES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXTBOOK

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ABSTRACT

English is becoming popular among teenagers, particularly on social media platforms. A strong vocabulary is crucial for effective use of languages. In the modern world, expanding one's vocabulary is crucial to learning a language, and this should begin in elementary school and continue through high school. English instruction heavily relies on textbooks. The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis to review the exercises. The findings show that there is more focus on exercises that help students understand vocabulary, rather than exercises that help them use it actively. This could be the reason why learners' proficiency in English is lacking. Therefore, in order to improve vocabulary comprehension and usage, educators and students must become more conscious and modify their teaching strategies. This study still has limitations in terms of data sources and time, and it is hoped that future studies will use new and more concrete methods.

Keywords: *English Secondary Textbooks, Productive Vocabulary, Receptive Vocabulary, Textbook Evaluation, Vocabulary Exercise*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is an important component of language that students must master (Brooks et al., 2023). Vocabulary is not only necessary when listening and reading, but also requires action in applying it, such as speaking and writing (Ali H., 2022). In recent years, the way vocabulary is taught in English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) learning has begun to change. In the past, vocabulary learning focused on memorizing words and their meanings, then repeating them over and over again. They did not focus much on the meaning of words in everyday use. However, there is now an approach that emphasizes the function and context of words. The first step is to understand that words are not just something to be memorized, but also have functions and are used differently in specific situations. Two types of vocabulary are important concepts: receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Productive vocabulary consists of words that students actively use when speaking and writing. This change is based on research on how people learn language and how the brain works. Receptive vocabulary refers to the set of words that a person understands when they hear or read them, even if they don’t actively use those words in speech or writing. This change is based on research on how people learn languages and how the brain works (Li & Jeong, 2020).

In vocabulary acquisition, textbooks are very important as the main tools in language teaching. Textbooks play an important role in what students learn and how they practise using the language. However, a common problem that often arises is the imbalance between receptive and productive vocabulary exercises in English textbooks. Both local and international textbooks generally focus more on receptive exercises, such as recognising the meaning of words, than exercises that involve using words in speaking or writing situations. As a result, learners' may have a large vocabulary yet struggle to use it in everyday conversation.

The number of words understood by students is usually greater than the number of words they use (Allen, 2023). Students will easily and confidently read English vocabulary. On the other hand, learners still struggle greatly when asked to practice speaking in front of the class or interacting with friends. This is because words are easier to understand than to use in

speech or writing (Anderson & Thibodeaux, 2024). If the gap between comprehending and using words worsens over time, especially as they go to higher levels, students may find it difficult to communicate in English. For secondary school students to improve their communication and comprehension skills, effective language instruction is essential (Normurodovna, 2025). Students' comprehension and analysis of how words are employed in everyday circumstances would deteriorate if this weren't done. These students' that improving one's vocabulary entails more than just learning a lot of unfamiliar words; it also entails knowing how to use such terms appropriately in conversation.

The difference between learning to understand a language and learning to use it becomes very clear in secondary school. The content of textbooks, which are the main tools for language teaching, needs to be considered carefully. This includes English textbooks in lower secondary school. Some research has discussed the importance of receptive and productive vocabularies in textbooks (Li & Hafner, 2022; Malmström et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Aliakbari et al. (2024) concluded that the C-test has a positive effect compared to multiple-choice tests on the development of EFL students' English writing skills, in a study of receptive and productive forms of vocabulary testing in English classrooms. Other research analysed a textbook for grade 9 and found that there were five types of reading activities, including one vocabulary activity (Dewantara et al., 2022). Then, Le Foll (2022) analysed English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks at the secondary school level used in France, Germany, and Spain, and found that the language in the texts, especially in the dialogue and instructions, differed significantly from natural English in the real world. Therefore, this study can be considered an initial study on this topic with the Merdeka Curriculum as its object. English textbooks in Indonesia cover all language skills, but most learning activities remain closed and limited to repetitive reading and writing exercises. Conversely, textbook content that exceeds the proportion also needs to be considered, especially that containing new vocabulary, which can confuse students.

In addition, research on receptive and productive vocabulary exercises in English textbooks at the secondary school level is important for several reasons. First, textbooks are the main material in the teaching and learning process, especially in Indonesia, where teachers still rely on textbooks in designing and implementing learning. Second, this research can also provide input to improve the quality of textbooks so that they are more in line with the communication, which demands the ability to use language actively, not just understand it. This study will present results that respond to the opinion that Indonesian textbooks have several obstacles that hinder the development of literacy, including the ability to think, create, and innovate in junior high school students (Winarni et al., 2022). In addition, the results of this study can provide input for curriculum developers and textbook authors to balance the proportion of receptive and productive vocabulary exercises. Thus, this study not only examines how many vocabulary words are introduced in textbooks, but also analyzes how these books facilitate the active use of vocabulary by students.

The main focus of this study is whether the vocabulary exercises in textbooks are balanced and in line with the principles of language acquisition. Analysis of English textbooks is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically (Erkir & Alkhaldi, 2025). Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of the relationship between receptive and productive vocabulary exercises in the context of textbook-based learning. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a basis for teachers and textbook authors to: (1) design vocabulary exercises that are balanced between receptive aspects (introduction to word meaning and form) and productive aspects (use in sentences, dialogues, and discourse); (2) develop textbook evaluations that consider the cognitive and communicative aspects of each exercise; and (3) support educational policies in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes critical, collaborative, and communicative thinking skills. Ultimately, this study aims to address the urgent need in language learning in secondary

schools, namely, to produce students who not only understand vocabulary but are also able to use it effectively in academic and social life. This study is based on the theory of analyzing the English for the Nusantara textbook for grade 8, with a focus on receptive and productive vocabulary exercises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In learning English as a foreign language, being able to remember and recognize vocabulary is a key part that helps determine how well someone can communicate (Namaziandoost et al., 2024). Learning vocabulary is very important in English because having enough words allows learners to create sentences that make sense. This vocabulary can be learned on your own or through school (Tahir et al., 2021). Vocabulary is important for language skills, which are split into two parts: receptive vocabulary, which means the words you can understand when you read or listen, and productive vocabulary, which means the words you can use when you speak or write. Knowing vocabulary well is really important in language learning because it is the base for all language skills, like speaking clearly, understanding better through reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

The *English for Nusantara Grade VIII* textbook (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022) is based on the Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses on learning that helps with using language in everyday situations. This book uses the Genre-Based Approach (GBA), which slowly mixes receptive and productive activities. The structure of the activities in this book usually has:

• Receptive Activities: Listening and Reading – giving material in the form of texts, dialogues, or new information

• Productive Activities: Speaking and Writing – encouraging students to use language by creating output based on the words they have learned.

• Additional Features: Word Box, Your Turn, Fun Time, and Enrichment – helping students learn vocabulary both when receiving and producing information.

The way these activities are arranged shows a step-by-step method called gradual vocabulary learning. Students first learn the form and meaning of words, then practice using them in written or spoken situations. This matches Teng & Xu's (2025) research, where students started by learning the form and meaning of words, and then practice them in more complex situations.

Schmitt & Schmitt (2020) found that learners have a bigger vocabulary for understanding information than for using words actively. Activities like reading and listening, which are for receiving information, are more common in learning materials. This shows that more active activities, like writing and speaking, should be included so students can use the vocabulary better. Khan & Din (2023) studied English textbooks used in junior high schools in Indonesia and found that most of the activities were still for receiving information, like reading and connecting words, while activities that involve producing language, like writing and speaking, were not well balanced. Febraningrum & Suroso (2023) looked into the *English for Nusantara Grade VII* textbook and studied other textbooks from the same series but at different levels. The difference was in the research goals. The study on Grade 7 aimed to show that the *English for Nusantara* textbook meets an average of 94% in the "Good" category, with objectives and approach (100%), language content (66.67%), skills (100%), topics (100%), methodology (100%), and practical considerations (100%). The study also found strengths and weaknesses in the textbook. They concluded that even though the book includes many types of exercises, there is still room for improvement in the variety of productive exercises.

The vocabulary exercises in the *English for Nusantara* textbook for Grade VIII are well-balanced, but they focus more on receptive skills than productive ones. Receptive activities, like listening and reading, are often presented through texts, dialogues, or new information. These help students understand vocabulary without actively using it. These exercises also use tools like Word Boxes, which show students how words look and what they mean through pictures or sounds. Productive activities, such as speaking and writing, let students use vocabulary in their own way. For example, in the Your Turn activity, students are asked to speak or write using the words they have learned. Fun Time and Enrichment activities make vocabulary practice more fun and realistic. The study found that receptive exercises appear more often, making up about 60-70% of the content compared to productive ones. This might make it harder for students to use vocabulary on their own. These results match the work of Birdsell (2023) and Newton & Nation (2020), who suggest that there should be more variety in productive exercises to create a better balance in learning vocabulary. This helps students not only learn words but also use them in real conversations.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis methods. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was to analyse the content of the English for Nusantara textbook for Grade VIII published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Damayanti et al., 2022), particularly in terms of the number and categories of receptive and productive vocabulary exercises. The content analysis method allows researchers to identify, classify, and count the types of vocabulary exercises in the book based on their linguistic functions. This helps in understanding the balance of language learning activities included in the English language teaching materials used in national junior high schools and *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*. Overall, this method supports the study's goal of providing descriptive findings that can help improve educational practices and curriculum development in teaching English.

The primary source of data for this study was the English textbook titled *"English for Nusantara"* for grade 8, which is widely used in national junior high schools (SMP) and *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) at the same grade level. The textbook is organized into multiple chapters, each containing learning units that cover a variety of topics aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. Each learning unit includes a range of activities, such as Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing, Word Box, Your Turn, Fun Time, and Enrichment. The data collection tool used was a content analysis sheet developed based on the theory of receptive and productive vocabulary. This sheet was used to categorize different types of exercises, the number of vocabulary words included, and the formats in which questions were presented. The *English for Nusantara* Grade 8 textbook was selected as the focus of the research because it directly relates to the study's topic, which examines vocabulary exercises within the context of English language learning. This includes both receptive skills, such as reading and listening to audio, and productive skills, such as speaking and writing, which are various forms of vocabulary practice. Researching a single textbook allowed for a more focused analysis and helped avoid drawing overly broad conclusions.

Data were collected through the following steps: 1. Identifying vocabulary activities by searching for and marking all activities that contain vocabulary learning or usage throughout

the book, from chapters 1 to 5; 2. Classifying the types of exercises into receptive and productive categories; 3. Recording the frequency by counting the number of exercises per category. This step was carried out after choosing the data source to make sure all the information full and correct before proceeding to more detailed work. In this study, a descriptive qualitative method was used along with some quantitative analysis to figure out the proportions. Data were analyzed through the following steps: 1. Confirming and verifying the marked vocabulary activities; 2. More detailed classification based on receptive and productive vocabulary theory, including subcategories, recording frequencies for pattern analysis, and descriptive interpretation and synthesis of results to illustrate the distribution; 3. Implications for the Merdeka curriculum. This stage was carried out after data collection is complete, as a second step to generate new insights from the data.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Based on a review of all eight units in the *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII textbook, it was found that vocabulary exercises are divided into two main groups, namely receptive vocabulary exercises and productive vocabulary exercises. This review covers all activities involving vocabulary introduction, comprehension, and application in listening, reading, speaking, and writing tasks, including the Word Box, Your Turn, and Enrichment sections. A comparison of the presentation of these two types of exercises shows a significant imbalance in proportion, with receptive exercises (65%) dominating over productive exercises (35%). This implies that the textbook tends to focus more on vocabulary comprehension (passive skills) than on developing students' ability to actively use vocabulary (active skills) in language production. The dominance of receptive exercises has important educational implications. Although vocabulary comprehension is an essential foundation, effective and functional language skills depend heavily on students' ability to automatically recall and use vocabulary in speaking and writing situations. The relatively small proportion of productive exercises carries the potential risk that students may have a broad passive vocabulary, for example, recognising vocabulary when presented with a text, but experience real difficulty in using it independently and effectively when they need to use the language. The imbalance indicates that the focus of textbooks tends to be greater on passive comprehension than on active skills in using vocabulary.

Vocabulary learning activities in the *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII textbook can be divided into two main categories, namely:

- Reactive Vocabulary Exercises

These exercises focus on students' ability to recognise and understand vocabulary. A distinctive feature is that students are not required to use the language actively, but only to understand the meaning, form, or context of the word. Examples of reactive exercises that are often found:

1. Matching words with pictures – students match words with pictures (Chapter 1, page 24, Celebrating Independence Day).
2. Listening and choosing the correct word – students listen to audio and choose the correct answer (Chapter 2, pages 72-74, Kindness Starts with Me).
3. Matching instructions with pictures – students match instructions with pictures (Chapter 3, page 126, Love Our World).
4. Completing story elements – students analyse texts (Chapter 5, pages 277-278, Embrace Yourself).
5. Word Box – introduction to a list of new keywords in each unit.

Receptive exercises such as these help students to know and understand a new vocabulary.

• Productive Vocabulary Exercises

These exercises require students to actively use vocabulary in speaking or writing contexts. Examples of productive exercises:

1. Writing tasks – writing descriptions about school, hobbies, or childhood memories using target vocabulary (All Chapters).
2. Speaking activities – creating short dialogues or conversations (All Chapters).
3. Your Turn – students write or speak using words from the Word Box to create new texts.
4. Enrichment Project – retell an incident (Chapter 4, page 201, No Littering).
5. Poster Making – make a poster according to the theme studied (Chapter 4, page 218)

Productive exercises such as these help students learn and use active vocabulary more effectively in real communication situations. Based on an analysis of the entire book's content, there are more receptive exercises than productive exercises throughout the book; there are 102 receptive exercises (65%), while there are only 54 productive exercises (35%).

Table 1. Grand Total Analysis Textbook "English for Nusantara 8th-grade"

Chapter	Total Exc.	Receptive		Productive	
Chapter 0	9	9	100%	0	0%
Chapter 1	31	22	71%	9	29%
Chapter 2	26	18	69%	8	31%
Chapter 3	30	17	57%	13	43%
Chapter 4	31	17	55%	14	45%
Chapter 5	29	19	66%	10	34%
TOTAL	**156**	**102**	**65%**	**54**	**35%**

The dominance of receptive exercises is particularly evident in the early part of each unit, which contains reading and listening activities. Meanwhile, productive exercises appear in the speaking, writing, and Your Turn sections at the end of each unit. The presentation of vocabulary exercises in the *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII textbook shows clear characteristics that distinguish between receptive and productive exercises, but with an uneven proportion. Receptive exercises, which aim to help students recognise and understand vocabulary passively, dominate the textbook.

This characteristic of receptive presentation is demonstrated through tasks that do not require active language output, but rather focus on understanding the meaning, form, or context of words. The dominant forms include activities such as matching words with pictures or definitions, listening and selecting or circling the correct word, matching instructions with relevant illustrations, and analysing the text provided to complete or identify missing story elements, where all these activities serve as a stage of introduction or confirmation of initial understanding. Structurally, receptive exercises are placed at the beginning of the listening and reading units, including the Word Box component. This type of exercise accounts for 65% (102 exercises) of the total. Productive presentation is realised through active tasks that require complete language output. This includes comprehensive writing tasks, such as describing the school environment, hobbies, or childhood memories, where students must apply target vocabulary into original sentences and paragraph structures. Meanwhile, a productive presentation involves communicative activities orally, such as creating dialogues or short conversations, allowing students to practise pronunciation and word usage interactively. Productive exercises require students to actively use vocabulary in real communication contexts. These exercises are presented through tasks that require output, such as writing descriptions or creating conversations, and generally appear in the Speaking, Writing, and Your Turn sections at the end of the unit. These productive exercises are only available in 35% (54 exercises). Although this book provides structural vocabulary exercises, the imbalance in the

proportion of exercises indicates that the textbook tends to focus more on passive comprehension than active vocabulary skills.

DISCUSSION

The analysis conducted on the characteristics and proportion of vocabulary exercises in the *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII textbook shows an important conclusion: there is a significant and measurable imbalance between the two main methods of vocabulary acquisition, namely the receptive and productive approaches, a finding that documents a content orientation that prioritises passive comprehension skills. Quantitatively, the results of the study clearly establish that exercises categorised as receptive dominate the overall content of the textbook, comprising 65% of the total vocabulary activities, or precisely 102 exercises; these receptive tasks—which take passive forms such as matching words with pictures or definitions, listening and selecting or circling the correct word, and analysing provided texts to complete or identify story elements—are fundamentally designed to facilitate students' ability to passively recognise and understand word meanings, serving as a stage of initial introduction and reinforcement of understanding. In contrast, productive exercises, which substantially require students to actively use new vocabulary that has been learned in the context of speaking or writing, only account for 35% or 54 exercises; these productive tasks involve real language output, such as writing a complete description of the school environment or hobbies, creating short dialogues or conversations, and completing project tasks found in the Speaking, Writing, and Your Turn sections, which are essential activities for achieving functional communicative competence. This 65:35 ratio, therefore, explicitly documents the textbook's much greater focus on passive vocabulary comprehension compared to active application, a result that must be seriously considered when assessing the efficacy of this material in fostering balanced communication skills, which is the primary goal of language learning.

This finding of imbalance is not isolated, but strongly aligns with issues that have long been identified in the literature on English textbook design, providing direct quantitative evidence to support the general observation that textbooks worldwide "tend to focus more on receptive exercises... than exercises involving the use of words in speaking or writing situations" (as stated in the introduction), thus empirically validating the pedagogical challenge posed where students "know many words but have difficulty using them in real communication." This phenomenon is theoretically explained by experts such as Ali (2022), who emphasises that while vocabulary is vital, it requires "action in applying it, such as speaking and writing," and confirmed by Anderson & Thibodeaux (2024), who explain that "understanding words is easier than using them in conversation or writing." With a ratio of 65% found, our study shows that textbooks systematically prioritise easier tasks (comprehension) over difficult but crucial tasks (use), thus quantitatively contributing to the understanding of the gap between receptive and productive skills that is a concern in the literature. Furthermore, this research provides the specific context and nuances needed in previous studies, such as Febraningrum & Suroso (2023), which analysed the English for Nusantara Grade 7 textbook and provided a generally positive evaluation, while our findings isolate measurable critical weaknesses in the language content of the Grade 8 textbook, namely the disproportionate allocation to active skills.

Moreover, these findings provide contextual information for comparison with studies such as Le Foll (2022), which observed that the language in European EFL textbooks often differs from natural English; the scarcity of productive tasks (only 35%) in the book we analysed indicates that it may inadvertently limit students' opportunities to engage in natural, reality-based language production, which may hinder the transition of vocabulary from passive memory to active use.

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focused and quantitative approach, becoming the first research to successfully establish a definite proportion of 65% to 35% of receptive versus productive vocabulary exercises in this specific series of Merdeka Curriculum textbooks. moving beyond general qualitative reviews to provide empirical data that directly addresses the debate regarding the balance between passive knowledge and active skill development. The significance of this study is enormous, both theoretically and practically, especially in the context of Indonesian education. Theoretically, this study expands our understanding of the relationship between receptive and productive exercises by providing a real case study that validates the theory of the gap between these two skills in textbook-based learning. Practically, these findings are crucial given that textbooks are still the "main material" and teachers in Indonesia are still very “dependent on textbooks in designing and implementing learning” (Acar, 2020). This imbalance directly challenges the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary school level, which requires "improving students' communication skills" (Normurodovna, 2025), as effective communication skills are highly dependent on productive abilities, which are undertrained. This 65:35 finding also supports the argument that current textbooks can be a "barrier to literacy development," particularly the ability to create and innovate among students, which are higher-order cognitive skills closely linked to productive language use.

As a contribution, the results of this study provide a solid basis for education stakeholders to take corrective action; for textbook authors and curriculum developers, the 65:35 ratio serves as a clear benchmark, urging them to redesign vocabulary exercises to be more balanced between receptive (recognition) and productive (use in discourse, dialogue, and speech) aspects, so that the material is more in line with the principles of communicative language teaching. For teachers, this data is an important diagnostic tool, encouraging them to proactively supplement existing material with additional productive activities, aiming to bridge the 35% gap, and thereby mitigating the risk of students simply “reading English vocabulary easily and confidently” but then experiencing significant difficulty when “asked to practise speaking in front of the class.” For policymakers, this data can be used to inform and guide education policy in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, ensuring that future evaluation and textbook procurement prioritise a more equitable distribution between opportunities for receptive and productive skill development, ultimately aiming to address the urgent need in language learning in secondary schools, namely to produce students who not only understand vocabulary, but are also able to use it effectively in academic and social settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there is a significant imbalance between receptive and productive vocabulary exercises in the *English for Nusantara* Grade VIII textbook. Of the 156 exercises analyzed, approximately 65% are receptive in nature, aiming to help students understand, recognize, and identify words or phrases through reading, listening, or controlled responses, while only 35% focus on productive use. Productive exercises are designed to enable learners to actively use vocabulary in speaking and writing. This imbalance suggests that the textbook provides limited opportunities for students to meaningfully “interact” with vocabulary in communicative contexts.

This gap poses a challenge for many learners, as students generally possess stronger receptive than productive vocabulary knowledge. If left unaddressed, this disparity is likely to widen, particularly given that many English textbooks in Indonesia continue to emphasize comprehension-based activities, especially reading comprehension. As a result, students often resort to memorizing words without sufficient opportunities to apply them in authentic situations. Effective vocabulary learning should integrate both receptive and productive

dimensions, ensuring that vocabulary knowledge extends beyond meaning recognition to active, contextualized use. Therefore, the lack of productive exercises in textbooks becomes the next pedagogical challenge.

To address the aforementioned issue, teachers are encouraged to supplement textbook materials with additional activities such as vocabulary-based games, spontaneous speaking exercises, paragraph writing, or activity-based projects, which can help learners become more familiar with vocabulary being produced. In addition, the integration of technology, such as online conversation platforms or student-generated digital media, may further enhance productive output. Although the *English for Nusantara* textbook includes productive components in sections such as "Your Turn" and "Enrichment," the quantity and variety of these activities remain insufficient to foster sustained productive skills. Accordingly, future textbook revisions should aim to achieve a more balanced distribution of receptive and productive exercises, particularly in introducing new vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. Students should not only comprehend them at the literal level, but also develop confidence in using them in their academic and everyday spoken and written communication.

This study provides theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the results clarify the relationship between receptive and productive vocabulary exercises in textbook-based learning. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a reference for teachers, textbook authors, and curriculum developers in evaluating and improving English teaching materials in secondary school level. Teachers can use this research to design better activities that improve students' productive skills, while textbook authors and policymakers are align materials more relevant to the demands of 21st-century communication.

Briefly, effective vocabulary learning requires a balance between knowledge of meaning and usage. Students must be able to identify words when speaking with others and use them themselves when speaking. When students are supported through balanced and contextual guidance, the gap between vocabulary comprehension and usage can be reduced, and ultimately leading to students' improved English language skills proficiency.

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