

Is It Making the Grade? A Review of Cambridge Global English 4 for Primary Learners

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Abstract

English textbooks play a vital role in supporting effective learning aligned with students' needs and curricular demands. This study aims to evaluate the Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's Book using Cunningsworth's (1995) textbook evaluation framework. The analysis employs a document-based approach, assessing eight aspects: objectives and approach, design and organization, linguistic content, skills, topics, methodology, teacher's guide, and curriculum relevance. Findings reveal that the textbook adopts a communicative, competency-based approach integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing through age-appropriate, real-world themes. The content is well-structured, visually engaging, and features contextualized grammar and vocabulary supported by illustrations. It also encourages global awareness, critical thinking, and creativity, in line with the Kurikulum Merdeka's emphasis on learner autonomy and holistic development. However, the textbook lacks representation of Indonesian culture and provides limited vocabulary development in areas such as synonyms, antonyms, and word families. In conclusion, despite minor shortcomings, the textbook remains a comprehensive and valuable resource for teaching English in Indonesian elementary schools.

Keywords: Cambridge Global English, textbook evaluation, Kurikulum Merdeka.

Abstrak

Buku ajar bahasa Inggris memiliki peran penting dalam mendukung pembelajaran yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan siswa dan tuntutan kurikulum. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's Book berdasarkan kriteria evaluasi buku ajar dari Cunningsworth (1995). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis dokumen dengan mengacu pada delapan aspek evaluasi, termasuk tujuan dan pendekatan, desain, isi linguistik, keterampilan berbahasa, topik, metodologi, buku guru, serta kesesuaian kurikulum. Hasil evaluasi menunjukkan bahwa buku ini mengadopsi pendekatan komunikatif berbasis kompetensi dengan integrasi keterampilan menyimak, berbicara, membaca, dan menulis dalam konteks tematik yang relevan. Buku ini dirancang secara menarik, mengusung nilai global, dan mendorong berpikir kritis serta kreativitas, namun masih kurang dalam representasi budaya lokal dan pendalaman aspek kosakata. Secara keseluruhan, Cambridge Global English 4 merupakan sumber pembelajaran yang komprehensif dan selaras dengan prinsip Kurikulum Merdeka untuk digunakan di sekolah dasar Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Cambridge Global English, evaluasi buku ajar, Kurikulum Merdeka.



INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are an essential part of any learning process since they are the main means used to deliver the curriculum (Pavešić & Cankar, 2022). They provide structured and organized materials that help teachers and students achieve educational goals effectively. Moreover, textbooks are flexible instructional materials which aid in many approaches of teaching, thus providing guarantee to learning and broadening students' comprehension of different subjects (Chisunum & Nwadiokwu, 2024). Indeed, the systematic nature of textbooks renders them fundamental to the academic achievement and motivation of learners (Li & Wang, 2024).

In terms of learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia, textbooks are very crucial for helping students get the required language skills (Ayu, 2020). It is the ability to speak English that determines one's access to higher learning, career opportunities, and other socio-economic activities which is a key emphasis in the national curriculum (Zein, 2020). These demands require that all textbooks be produced at a particular academic standard which corresponds with the set learning outcomes for the students. An organized textbook helps students understand the content and actively participate in class, making class more productive (Li & Wang, 2024). However, these textbooks will not be effective unless they are suitable with the changes that have been made recently to the Indonesian education system in order to serve the students better.

Merdeka Curriculum, a major educational reform aimed at increasing flexibility and improving the quality of education in Indonesia, is perhaps one of the most remarkable changes in the past few years (Pakpahan et al., 2023). Merdeka Curriculum features a student-centered structure, a sharp contrast with past curricula that focused on rigid frameworks, with an emphasis on project-based learning, character building, and mastery of critical skills (Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022). This development has far-reaching impacts in the methodologies of teaching and learning, including textbooks. Merdeka Curriculum's focus on local relevance and personalization drives the creation of resources that respond to the specific contexts and needs of students.

Textbook design and usage have shifted significantly since the adoption of Merdeka Curriculum. Instructional materials have undergone transformations aimed at enhancing interaction and engagement with learners to facilitate development of higher-order thinking, communication, and creativity (Li & Wang, 2024). Furthermore, incorporation of digital formats of textbooks together with non-textbook resources is encouraged to enhance the dynamism and inclusiveness of the curriculum. These developments necessitate greater flexibility in curriculum implementation so that prescribed textbooks meet the required standards to aid the students' learning and reach their educational objectives.

To fully comprehend these shifts, it is vital to understand how English textbooks are aligned with the concepts of Merdeka Curriculum. The textbooks should also adhere to the appealing and appropriate materials, as well as to the curriculum's focus on individualized learning and competencies development. These criteria outline the minimum conditions set for the textbooks, while educators and curriculum designers strive toward optimizing provided learning materials in terms of students' academic performance.

This study intends to examine the Cambridge Global English Activity Book 4 within the scope of Merdeka Curriculum. More specifically, it analyzes the textbook's appropriateness for fourth-grade learners in Indonesia in terms of their content, organization, and the objectives of the curriculum. Evaluating the extent to which this textbook facilitates the achievement of learning objectives will help the teachers and curriculum designers to develop appropriate educational materials which provide greater support to learners in a changing environment.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research approach to evaluate the alignment of the Cambridge Global English Activity Book 4 with the Merdeka Curriculum for fourth-grade elementary students in Indonesia. This approach was chosen to allow an in-depth analysis of the textbook's content in relation to the educational context and the guiding principles of the national curriculum (Creswell, 2014).

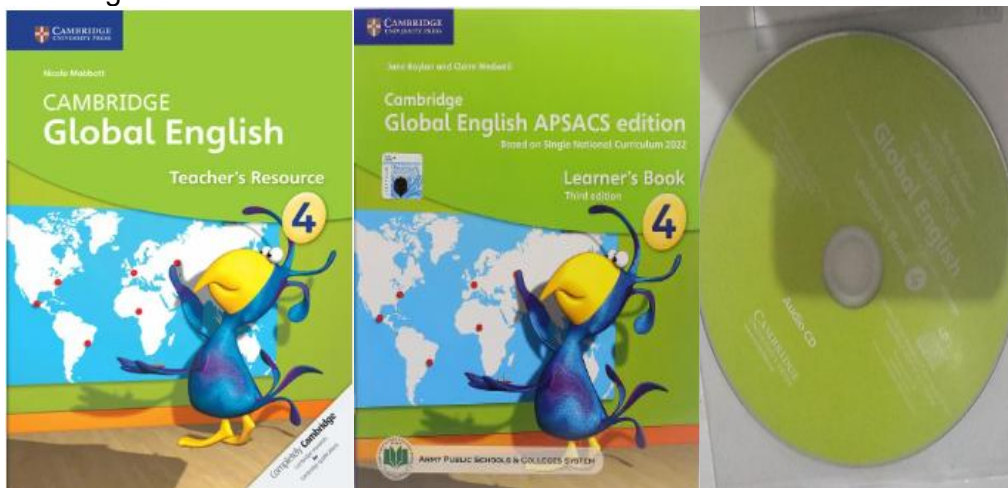
The object of this study was the Cambridge Global English Activity Book 4, authored by Jane Boylan and Claire Medwell, and published by Cambridge University Press. The study examined all chapters of the textbook to ensure a comprehensive and representative evaluation. The research was conducted in 2025 as part of an effort to assess English learning materials relevant to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level in Indonesia.

Data were collected through document analysis of the textbook's entire content, including units, activities, and material presentation. The study used Cunningsworth's (1995) textbook evaluation criteria as the main framework, covering eight essential components: aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topics, methodology, teacher's guide, and practical considerations.

The data were analyzed using the Interactive Model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This method enabled a systematic and comprehensive evaluation of the textbook's strengths and weaknesses to support effective English language instruction in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.

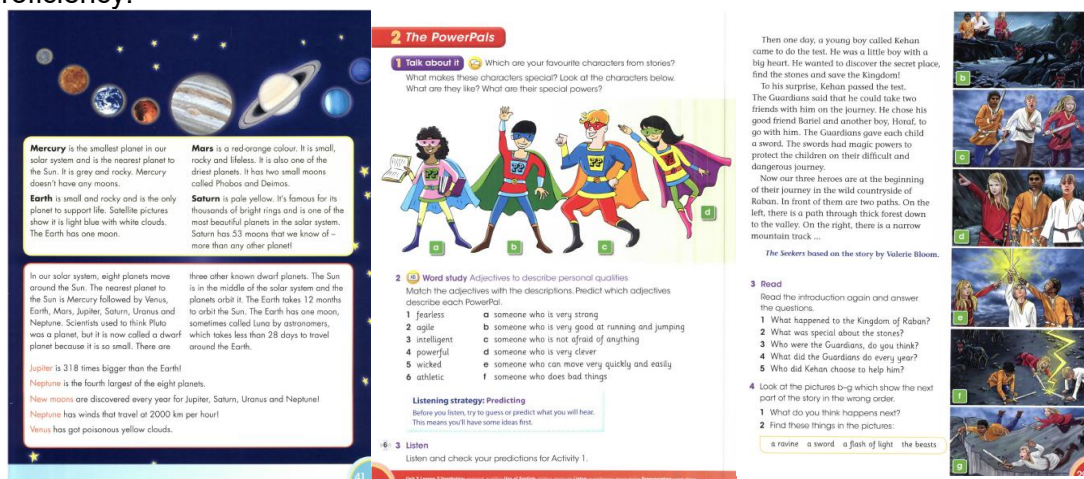
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's textbook aims to improve students' proficiency in English using a communicative and student-centered methodology, emphasizing the four essential skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. A organized and systematic curriculum enables learners to utilize English confidently in various real-life situations. The book offers appropriate topics and engaging activities—such as readings, conversations, and project-based tasks—that encourage active engagement and enhance the enjoyment of learning. It also includes critical and creative thinking by engaging tasks that enhance students' analytical and problem-solving abilities. The integration of cross-cultural subjects enhances global understanding. The textbook is designed to accommodate traditional, mixed, and online learning, providing a versatile package that includes a student's book, teacher's handbook, and multimedia resources. Educators possess organized lesson plans and supplementary activities, allowing them to provide effective and significant instruction in line with 21st-century educational goals.



Picture 1. Student's book, teacher's handbook, and multimedia resources.

The Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's textbook is thoughtfully divided into thematic units that connect with students' experiences and interests, offering relevant contexts for language learning. Each unit follows to a specific sequence, starting with learning objectives, essential vocabulary, and a variety of activities including group discussions, individual assignments, and interactive games, all intended to be accommodating to many learning styles and promote collaboration, critical thinking, and independent learning. The textbook includes both formative and summative tests to evaluate progress and identify learning gaps. In line with the Merdeka Curriculum, it fosters active learning and student autonomy. Visual aids such as pictures, charts, and diagrams facilitate understanding, while the gradual increase in complexity across courses ensures a seamless and efficient advancement in students' language proficiency.



Picture 2. Visual of The Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's

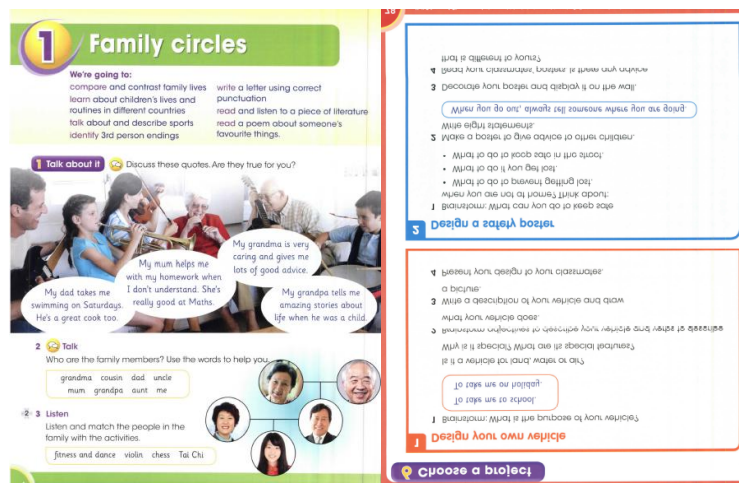
The textbook provides well-structured language content, particularly in its presentation of grammar and vocabulary. Grammar is introduced progressively, beginning with fundamental concepts such as the present simple tense and gradually advancing to more complex structures like the future form. This incremental approach ensures that students can build upon prior knowledge while deepening their understanding of the language. Meanwhile, the vocabulary is thematically organized, making it more meaningful and contextually relevant. Words are introduced through relatable situations, which not only aid comprehension but also reinforce grammar usage and encourage active language use. The vocabulary load is appropriate for Grade 4 learners and is often supported by illustrations or visual cues. This aligns with Clark and Paivio's (1991) Dual Coding Theory, which emphasizes the benefits of combining verbal and visual elements to enhance vocabulary retention—particularly effective for young learners who benefit from associating words with images for improved recall.

The textbook also provides comprehensive instruction in the four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening activities are integrated into each unit and correlate with the unit's themes and vocabulary, with the objective of enhancing comprehension, detail recognition, and contextual understanding. These exercises are augmented by visual aids and audio materials provided on CD, thereby boosting engagement and efficacy—consistent with the findings of Namaziandost and Nasri (2019) on the advantages of audiovisual support in EFL

contexts. Speaking skills are similarly prioritized through organized and imaginative exercises, such as dialogues and role-plays that enhance fluency and confidence. These strategies provide students for authentic communication, consistent with Jayanti's (2022) research, which emphasizes that role-play enhances communication, problem-solving, and self-confidence in young learners. The reading sections offer a balanced assortment of fiction and nonfiction materials, exposing students to many genres and writing styles. The texts are accompanied by questions that address both literal understanding and deeper analysis, fostering critical engagement—reinforcing Ward et al.'s (2019) research indicating that thematic pairing enhances motivation and comprehension. Lastly, writing proficiency is cultivated through scaffolded activities, writing strategies, and tools such as "Language Detective," which assist students in progressing from formulating basic sentences to composing brief, personal narratives. The book facilitates creativity and self-expression while efficiently developing core writing abilities.

The textbook covers several subjects such as nature, culture, holidays, food, transportation, family, and stories relevant to young learners. Each unit carefully integrates language acquisition with practical and inventive activities. In Unit 1 (Family Circles), students utilize visual tools to examine family trees and relationships, whereas in Unit 6 (School Lunch), they create confections and read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2010) state that effective materials must offer meaningful and significant content to engage learners' interest and promote their language development. The book contains innovative and engaging tasks for language development. Students illustrate eco-houses in Unit 4 (Homes) and create road safety signs in Unit 5 (Getting Around). Moreover, creative activity like superhero illustration, comic strip layout, and holiday itinerary formulation enable students to utilize language in significant contexts. These strategies maintain student engagement and foster inventiveness, critical thinking, and practical language application (Abdala, 2024).

Despite its educational advantages, the textbook is primarily shaped by Western cultural and social norms due to its authorship by foreign writers. Unit 7 (Australia) and Unit 2 (Stories) present Western themes, narratives, and imagery that may not engage with Indonesian students. The textbook advocates for gender equality and incorporates some representation of ethnic and occupational diversity; however, it insufficiently addresses essential Indonesian cultural aspects, including local traditions like Eid al-Fitri and Independence Day, as well as the extensive diversity of ethnic groups, such as the Javanese and Batak. The limited cultural inclusion is crucial because, as Alshenqeeti (2019) the lack of local culture representation in educational resources might impede students' involvement and their capacity to connect meaningfully with the learning material. The findings indicate that more incorporation of Indonesian cultural contexts would improve the textbook's relevance and efficacy for its target learners.



Picture 3. The topics in The Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's

The Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's textbook employs a communicative and integrated skills approach that prioritizes active language use in significant contexts. It offers several text formats to facilitate real interaction, encouraging students to study characters, participate in cultural discussions, and express ideas. The book synthesizes listening, speaking, reading, and writing via interrelated assignments, including home descriptions, role-playing, and personal experience narratives, all of which enhance fluency and confidence. The textbook emphasizes practical application and cultural awareness by presenting global themes and fostering international understanding, including insights into many countries' cultures, family structures, and daily routines (Liu et al., 2023). Although it promotes cross-cultural communication, it is deficient in content that represents Indonesian culture, which could augment students' sense of identity and render the material more locally relevant (Hasnah et al., 2024).

This book is an essential resource for the Learner's Book, including detailed lesson plans, explicit learning objectives, and sequential teaching instructions that correspond with the primary textbook. It offers practical teaching strategies, differentiation techniques for diverse classes, and recommendations for enrichment activities. The book contains assessment guidelines, including rubrics, checklists, answer keys, audio transcripts, and recommendations for utilizing multimedia resources, rendering it a valuable asset for lesson preparation in traditional, mixed, and online learning contexts. It is offered in a high-quality printed edition starting at IDR 300,000, as well as in more economical second-hand copies priced between IDR 50,000 and 120,000. It is additionally available online in PDF format. The textbook is aesthetically pleasing, featuring vibrant graphics that complement each activity, so augmenting engagement and understanding—an essential attribute for young learners, as emphasized by Zhu and Yang (2023), who underscore the significance of visuals in developing seeing skills. The book, accompanied by a CD for auditory exercises, necessitates supplementary instruments such as audio players or access to a language laboratory. The book's considerate design, visual supports, and multiple activity formats render it accessible to a wide range of learners, including individuals with special needs. The textbook enhances accessibility by providing supplemental resources such as digital materials and audio-visual aids, along with teacher training support to assist educators in delivering successful and interesting courses.

The Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's Book effectively aligns with the key principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in fostering student autonomy and self-directed learning. It promotes learner engagement in their education by interactive and project-based activities, enabling exploration of subjects aligned with their interests and personal pace (Nayak et al., 2024). The textbook promotes holistic development by

merging language skills with the enhancement of students' social and emotional growth through collaborative activities, discussions, and practical applications that cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and effective communication. The book links language acquisition to real-world situations, promoting student participation by relating classroom activities to their setting, thus fostering cultural awareness and social responsibility.

However, the textbook also presents many disadvantages. A significant issue is the absence of local cultural elements, as the predominant themes and graphics are Western-centric, thereby diminishing relatability and cultural relevance for Indonesian students. Furthermore, although the textbook presents vocabulary thematically and visually, it fails to thoroughly explore vocabulary development strategies, such as the instruction of synonyms, antonyms, or word families (Cunningsworth, 1995), which are crucial for broadening learners' lexical repertoire and facilitating more accurate and expressive language use.

CONCLUSION

The review of Cambridge Global English 4 Learner's Book indicates that the textbook effectively meets the eight essential criteria established by Cunningsworth: aims and approaches, design and organization, content, language, skills, topics, methodology, teacher support, and practical considerations. The analysis indicates that the book is systematically organized, educationally effective, and consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching. It defines explicit learning objectives, a logical sequence of content, and a balanced incorporation of the four language skills essential for young learners. Moreover, it embodies the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum by fostering student autonomy, contextualized learning, and adaptability. Cambridge Global English 4 is an exemplary resource for teaching English in Indonesian elementary schools, especially for fourth-grade kids, as it promotes language growth and encourages student engagement and autonomous learning.

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