EXPLORING 8TH GRADE STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS ON INTERCULTURAL-BASED SPEAKING MATERIALS TO PRACTICE LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND PEACE EDUCATION IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This study explored 8th-grade students' expectations regarding English speaking materials integrated with intercultural content and peace education within the Merdeka Curriculum. The research aimed to examine how these materials support both linguistic development and the promotion of tolerance, empathy, and cultural understanding. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving 60 eighth-grade students from Jembrana, a culturally diverse area. Results indicated that students valued vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation exercises but identified a significant gap in materials that address peace education, conflict resolution, and respect for differing perspectives. Additionally, students expressed a desire for innovative, engaging speaking activities and contextually relevant materials that reflect both local and global cultures. These findings suggest that current textbooks fall short of students' expectations for building intercultural competence and peaceful communication skills. The study's insights offer essential considerations for enhancing English speaking materials to better meet students' linguistic and cultural needs, preparing them for meaningful intercultural interactions in diverse environments.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, intercultural competency has emerged as a vital component of English language acquisition, particularly for young learners in diverse educational settings. As classrooms become increasingly multicultural, the ability of students to navigate and understand various cultural contexts is essential for effective communication. Brown (2001)emphasizes that grasping the culture associated with a target language is crucial for meaningful language learning, especially in junior high school settings where students are actively shaping their linguistic and cultural identities. This underscores the significance of addressing students' expectations regarding English speaking materials, as their educational experiences are profoundly influenced by their cultural backgrounds and the diversity present in their classrooms.

Recent research highlights a strong correlation between intercultural education and improved language learning outcomes. Deardorff (2009) notes that incorporating intercultural materials into the curriculum can significantly enhance students' intercultural communication skills. Furthermore, research indicates that students with high intercultural competence are better able to manage conflicts peacefully. Spitzberg & Changnon (2009) found that individuals who are culturally competent can diffuse tensions and promote peaceful dialogue. In culturally diverse classrooms, such as those in Indonesia, students have the unique opportunity to engage with peers from various backgrounds, fostering a deeper understanding of global perspectives. Interventions like intercultural discussion programs have proven effective in post-conflict societies by encouraging mutual respect and reconciliation (Clarke et al., 2019). This engagement not only develops their ability to communicate across cultural boundaries but is also supported by technological advancements, including virtual exchanges and collaborative online projects (Godwin-Jones, 2017).

Within the Indonesian context, integrating intercultural competence and peace education into English instruction is especially significant for junior high school students. Given Indonesia's rich cultural diversity, educational approaches that promote intercultural understanding and peaceful coexistence are essential. Research shows that applying the educational values and principles of Pancasila can enhance the effectiveness of peace and intercultural education initiatives (Arumsari, 2023). By basing intercultural learning experiences on the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and social justice, students are better

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equipped to navigate complex cultural dynamics and contribute to conflict resolution efforts (Stephan, 2000). Additionally, the integration of Pancasila values enhances students' sense of national identity and belonging, promoting social cohesion in diverse communities (Smith-Hefner, 2009). The Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes learner-centered and contextually relevant education, provides a robust framework for incorporating these vital components into classroom instruction (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This curriculum encourages students to navigate cultural differences while promoting values of tolerance, empathy, and social responsibility key aspects of peace education that are particularly important for learners as they develop critical social skills.

Despite these curricular initiatives, significant challenges persist in addressing the specific needs and expectations of students in English speaking materials. Existing resources often neglect intercultural themes and primarily focus on basic communication skills, overlooking deeper linguistic structures and cultural contexts. Research indicates that speaking tasks in Indonesian classrooms frequently fail to encompass these crucial elements, thereby limiting students' ability to communicate effectively in diverse settings and hindering the development of intercultural understanding (Cheng & Tsai, 2013).

The complexities of managing religious and ethnic diversity in Indonesian classrooms further highlight the need for effective peace education. In regions with histories of conflict, such as Poso Regency in Central Sulawesi, educational initiatives focused on tolerance and interfaith dialogue are critical (Mashuri et al., 2022). However, translating these programs into long-term cultural understanding and tolerance remains a challenge, particularly for younger learners.

In light of these gaps in current speaking materials, this research aims to explore and develop English speaking resources for students that align with their expectations while integrating intercultural competence, linguistic features, and peace education. By focusing on these key areas, the study seeks to enhance students' learning experiences and equip them with the necessary skills for effective communication in diverse, multicultural environments. Understanding students' expectations is crucial for creating engaging materials that foster a sense of belonging and respect for diversity among junior high school students. This study is guided by the central research question:

1. What are students' expectations for English speaking materials?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Speaking

Speaking is a fundamental skill in language acquisition, serving as a vital tool for effective communication across various social, educational, and professional contexts, particularly in intercultural settings. It is through speaking that individuals express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions, making it an essential component of interaction. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that speaking is not merely the ability to produce language; it also encompasses the ability to process information while communicating. This dual aspect of speaking underscores its complexity and the importance of developing this skill, especially among junior high school students who are navigating new social dynamics and cultural contexts.

For junior high school students, mastering speaking skills involves a concentrated focus on several key components: pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Clear pronunciation is critical, as it ensures that students are understood by their peers and teachers, thereby facilitating effective communication. Mispronunciation can lead to misunderstandings and hinder the flow of conversation, making it essential for learners to practice and refine this aspect of their speech (Harmer 2007;Harahap et al. 2015).

In addition to pronunciation, a solid understanding of grammar is indispensable, as it provides the structural foundation for language. Mastery of grammatical rules enables students to form sentences correctly and express their ideas with clarity and precision, helping them avoid common pitfalls in communication and enhancing their confidence when speaking (Harmer, 2007). Fluency is another critical component that contributes to effective speaking, allowing students to speak smoothly and confidently without frequent pauses or hesitations. This aspect is particularly important in everyday conversations, where fluent students can engage in discussions with ease, making their interactions more dynamic and enjoyable (Kusumawardani & Mardiyani, 2018). This fluency also encourages students to take risks in their language use, ultimately leading to greater proficiency.

Furthermore, expanding vocabulary is essential for effective communication; a rich vocabulary enables students to articulate their thoughts more precisely, engage in meaningful discussions, and convey nuanced ideas. The ability to choose the right words enhances their overall communicative competence and fosters a deeper connection with others (Alqahtani, 2015). Lastly, comprehension plays a crucial role in the speaking process, involving understanding what others are saying and responding appropriately. This

ability helps students engage in dialogues and build connections across different cultural backgrounds. Good comprehension skills not only facilitate communication but also promote active listening, allowing students to engage thoughtfully in conversations.

Interculturalism in Education

Interculturalism has become increasingly significant in English education, recognized as essential for fostering language skills and cultural awareness among students. Researchers argue for the integration of intercultural elements into language teaching, emphasizing the need to develop students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Galante (2015) highlights that language education should validate students' diverse cultural identities, moving beyond grammar and vocabulary to include effective communication across cultures. By incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into lessons, teachers can create inclusive environments that enhance language skills and understanding of different cultures.

Additionally, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) emphasize the importance of integrating intercultural tasks into the curriculum, allowing students to engage with cultural content and reflect on their experiences. This approach not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also prepares students for real-world interactions across cultural boundaries. Dervin & Gross (2016) further argue for diverse and context-specific strategies in intercultural education, which address broader issues of equity and inclusivity. Their work underscores the importance of adapting teaching methods to the unique cultural contexts of students, aligning with the goals of peace education.

Peace Education

Peace education has been defined in various ways, reflecting its purpose and characteristics. Arikan (2009) emphasizes the relationship between peace education and foreign language teaching, suggesting that language education should consider individuals' roles within their social and natural environments. In this context, English teachers can create meaningful learning experiences by integrating grammar instruction with environmental peace education activities, which raise students' awareness of global issues. Moreover, integrating peace education into English language teaching can enhance students' intercultural competencies. Research indicates that peace education fosters empathy, respect, and cooperation among students, contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious learning environment (Salomon, 2011). By contextualizing language instruction within peace education frameworks, educators can help students develop the skills needed to navigate cultural differences and work collaboratively toward common goals. This holistic approach aligns with students' expectations for intercultural-based speaking materials, as they seek opportunities to practice linguistic features while engaging in meaningful dialogues about peace and cultural understanding.

However, while some English textbooks acknowledge peace education, they often focus more on environmental topics. Research shows that many Asian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks cover environmental education extensively, while areas such as human rights, gender education, and socio-economic issues are less represented (Pratama & Yuliati, 2016). This indicates a gap in promoting peace education through language materials. By incorporating diverse global issues into textbooks, educators can enhance students' awareness and foster social transformation toward non-violence. Gebregeorgis 2017) highlights the importance of multilingual and multicultural content in promoting mutual respect and harmony among students, aiming to help learners appreciate diversity, reduce biases and fears, and cultivate the ability to collaborate with individuals from various backgrounds. By introducing students to different cultures, peace education contributes to replacing a culture of conflict with one of peace.

METHOD
Research Design and Setting

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to capture a complete picture of students' expectations and experiences with English-speaking materials. Following Creswell's (2014) framework, this approach involves analyzing quantitative and qualitative data separately and then comparing results to identify relationships. The research was conducted at a junior high school in Jembrana, an area known for its cultural diversity. This setting is ideal for exploring intercultural dynamics in language learning, as the student population reflects a range of cultural backgrounds.

Participant

The study involved 60 eighth-grade students in Jembrana. This sample was chosen to offer a balanced view of students' experiences with the English curriculum and their preferences for new materials. Focusing on this specific grade level allowed for an in-depth examination of students' needs within the targeted educational stage.

Instrument

Participants will complete two paper-based questionnaires, each consisting of 17 statements designed to assess their current experiences with the English textbook and evaluate their expectations for the upcoming English book. Both questionnaires will utilize a five-point Likert scale for responses. This structured approach facilitates efficient data collection and enhances accessibility for respondents, increasing response rates and ensuring accurate reflections of their experiences.

Method of Data Collection and Data Analysis

The questionnaires were administered during regular class sessions, ensuring that all students completed them under similar conditions to limit external influences. This process allowed for immediate clarification of any questions, supporting the accuracy of responses. Once collected, the data was organized for quantitative analysis using SPSS software to ensure a systematic approach.

The quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS to calculate descriptive statistics, including the mean, median, and mode, with results organized in tables to highlight trends in students' experiences and expectations. This analysis provided a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in current materials, as well as features students desire in future resources. The results were then synthesized to identify patterns and themes, allowing for an insightful comparison of students' current experiences with their expectations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Tabel 1. Table of results of Student's Experience to current English books

No	Aspect	Mean	Median	Mode
1	The book contains vocabulary exercises that support speaking skills.	3.83	4.00	4
2	The book contains grammar exercises that support speaking skills.	3.77	4.00	4
3	The book contains pronunciation exercises that support speaking skills.	3.68	4.00	4
4	The book contains conversation expression exercises that support speaking skills.	3.40	4.00	4
5	The book contains individual speaking activities that require critical thinking.	3.55	4.00	4
6	The book contains pair speaking activities that require critical thinking.	3.25	3.00	4
7	The book contains innovative speaking activities.	3.55	4.00	4
8	The book contains engaging speaking activities.	3.83	4.00	4
9	The book contains contextual materials on Indonesian life and culture in English.	3.22	3.00	3
10	The book contains contextual materials on local culture in English.	3.02	3.00	3
11	The book contains contextual materials on Indonesian life and culture outside Bali in English.	3.10	3.00	4

No	Aspect			
12	The book contains contextual materials on international life and culture in English.	3.27	3.00	3
13	The book contains contextual materials from English-speaking countries in English.	3.30	3.00	4
14	The book contains materials that teach peace education.	2.87	3.00	2
15	The book contains materials that teach conflict resolution during speaking debates.	2.85	3.00	2
16	The book contains materials that teach respect for differing opinions during speaking.	3.12	3.00	4
17	The book contains materials that teach respect for differences in life and culture.	2.90	3.00	2

Based on the results from Table 1, which summarizes students' experiences with their current English books, several key findings emerge regarding the effectiveness and relevance of the materials provided. The highest-rated aspects are vocabulary (mean = 3.83) and grammar exercises (mean = 3.77), indicating strong support for speaking skills, suggesting that students find these exercises valuable for enhancing their language proficiency. Pronunciation exercises (mean = 3.68) and conversation expression exercises (mean = 3.40) also received favourable ratings, implying that students feel these components are beneficial for improving their speaking abilities. Furthermore, individual speaking activities that require critical thinking (mean = 3.55) are perceived positively, while pair speaking activities (mean = 3.25) are rated lower, suggesting a preference for solo tasks that encourage deeper thought.

Both innovative and engaging speaking activities received good scores (mean = 3.55 and 3.83, respectively), indicating that students value creativity and engagement in their speaking exercises, which may enhance their motivation and interest. However, the lowest ratings were given to contextual materials related to Indonesian life and culture (mean = 3.22) and local culture (mean = 3.02), highlighting a potential gap in the curriculum as students may not find the materials relevant to their cultural context. Contextual materials on international life and culture (mean = 3.27) and materials from English-speaking countries (mean = 3.30) received moderate ratings, indicating a need for improvement to enhance students' global perspectives.

Moreover, materials that teach peace education (mean = 2.87) and conflict resolution during speaking debates (mean = 2.85) received the lowest scores overall, suggesting a significant gap in the curriculum regarding essential life skills and values that are important for fostering understanding and respect among students. Interestingly, materials that teach respect for differing opinions during speaking (mean = 3.12) received a slightly better rating compared to other aspects related to respect and conflict resolution; however, the overall ratings for respect for differences in life and culture (mean = 2.90) were still low. This indicates a need for improvement in addressing these social issues within the curriculum. Overall, while students appreciate vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation exercises, there is a pressing need to enhance contextual materials relevant to Indonesian culture and integrate peace education and conflict resolution strategies, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive English learning experience that not only supports linguistic skills but also fosters critical social values among students.

Tabel 2. Table of results of Student's Expectation for the next English books

No	Aspect	Mean	Median	Mode
1	Students want books that include vocabulary exercises in each unit to improve their speaking skills.	4.27	4.00	4
2	Students want books that include grammar exercises in each unit to support their speaking skills.	4.27	4.00	4
3	Students want books that offer pronunciation exercises in each unit to improve their speaking skills.	4.33	4.00	4
4	Students want books that include conversational expression exercises in each unit to facilitate speaking practice.	4.15	4.00	4
5	Students want books that feature individual speaking activities in each unit that encourage critical thinking.	4.13	4.00	4
6	Students want books that provide paired speaking activities in each unit that encourage critical thinking.	4.10	4.00	4

7	Students want books that include innovative speaking activities in each unit.	4.17	4.00	4
8	Students want books that present engaging speaking activities in each unit.	4.43	4.00	4
9	Students want books that contain contextual material about Indonesian life and culture in English in each unit.	4.00	4.00	4
10	Students want books that include contextual material about local life and culture in English in each unit.	4.10	4.00	4
11	Students want books that provide contextual material about life and culture outside Bali in English in each unit.	4.13	4.00	4
12	Students want books that feature contextual material about international life and culture in English in each unit.	4.12	4.00	4
13	Students want books that include contextual material about life and culture from English-speaking countries in each unit. Students want books that feature speech materials that teach peace education in each unit.	4.12	4.00	4
14	Students want books that provide speech materials that teach conflict resolution during speech debates in each unit.	4.33	4.00	4
15	Students want books that include speech materials that encourage respect for differing opinions during discussions in each unit.	4.28	4.00	4
16	Students want books that offer speech materials that foster respect for diversity in life and culture in each unit.	4.28	4.00	4
17	Students want books that include vocabulary exercises in each unit to improve their speaking skills.	4.33	4.00	4

Based on the results presented in Table 2, which reflects students' expectations for their English books, several notable insights emerge regarding the desired features of the materials. Students expressed a strong desire for vocabulary exercises that support speaking skills, as indicated by a high mean score of 4.27, reflecting their belief in the importance of vocabulary for effective communication. Similarly, students also seek grammar exercises that enhance speaking abilities (mean = 4.27) and pronunciation exercises (mean = 4.33), underscoring their recognition of the foundational elements necessary for successful language acquisition.

The demand for conversation expression exercises is also significant, with a mean score of 4.15, suggesting that students value practical language use in real-life situations. Furthermore, students express a preference for individual speaking activities that encourage critical thinking (mean = 4.13) and pair speaking activities that require similar engagement (mean = 4.10). This highlights a need for activities that stimulate deeper cognitive engagement and collaboration among peers.

Innovation and engagement in speaking activities are crucial for students, as reflected in the mean scores of 4.17 and 4.43, respectively. These scores indicate a strong expectation for creative and interesting speaking exercises that capture students' interest and motivation. Additionally, students express the importance of contextual materials that reflect Indonesian life and culture (mean = 4.00) and local culture (mean = 4.10), highlighting their desire for content that resonates with their lived experiences and enhances cultural relevance in their learning.

Moreover, the desire for contextual materials that extend beyond local culture to include broader Indonesian experiences (mean = 4.13) and international contexts (mean = 4.12) demonstrates students' aspirations for a more global perspective in their education. Students also highly value materials that incorporate peace education (mean = 4.33) and conflict resolution strategies during speaking activities (mean = 4.28). The emphasis on teaching respect for differing opinions (mean = 4.28) and appreciation for cultural differences (mean = 4.33) indicates a strong expectation for the curriculum to foster understanding and acceptance in a diverse world.

In summary, students have articulated clear expectations for their English books, emphasizing the need for vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation exercises that support speaking skills, along with innovative and engaging activities. Additionally, there is a strong desire for contextual materials that reflect both local and broader cultural experiences, alongside a focus on peace education and respect for diversity. Meeting these expectations will be essential for developing a more effective and relevant English language curriculum that resonates with students and prepares them for meaningful communication in diverse contexts.

Discussion

The analysis of students' experiences with their current English books reveals both strengths and areas for improvement that are critical for enhancing the effectiveness of the curriculum. Students express high satisfaction with vocabulary and grammar exercises, indicating that these foundational elements significantly contribute to their speaking skills. Additionally, pronunciation exercises and conversation expression activities are regarded as valuable for improving their spoken language. However, students identified a significant gap in the relevance of contextual materials, particularly those related to Indonesian life and culture, which received notably lower ratings. This suggests that students desire learning resources that resonate with their cultural experiences and local contexts. Furthermore, the low scores for materials addressing peace education and conflict resolution highlight a critical need for the inclusion of social values and essential life skills within the curriculum.

In contrast, students' expectations for future English books are clear, as they strongly advocate for the incorporation of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation exercises in every unit. The emphasis on innovative and engaging speaking activities underscores the importance of creativity in fostering student motivation. Additionally, students express a strong desire for materials that reflect both local and broader cultural contexts, along with a significant expectation for peace education and conflict resolution strategies. This holistic approach indicates that students seek a curriculum that not only enhances their linguistic abilities but also fosters critical social values, preparing them for effective communication in a diverse and interconnected world. Meeting these expectations is essential for developing a comprehensive English language curriculum that resonates with students and equips them with the necessary skills for meaningful interactions in their communities and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that while the current English-speaking materials effectively address essential linguistic skills, they fall short in integrating crucial elements of intercultural competence and peace education. Students have expressed clear expectations for materials that promote both language proficiency and social values, such as conflict resolution, respect for diversity, and intercultural understanding. These findings underscore the need for curriculum development that incorporates more innovative and contextually relevant speaking activities, ensuring materials resonate with students' experiences and cultural contexts.

Future developments in English speaking materials should emphasize the inclusion of empathy, tolerance, and peaceful communication alongside core linguistic skills like vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. By addressing these gaps, the curriculum can provide a more holistic learning experience, preparing junior high school students for meaningful communication in both local and global multicultural settings.

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