

Semantic Ambiguity in the Use of 'Konteks' in Merdeka Curriculum Textbooks: Implications for Learning Outcomes and Pedagogical Strategies

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates errors in interpreting the word “konteks” (context) and its equivalents in the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks used in Indonesian Language, Civic Education, and English Language subjects. These errors arise from semantic ambiguity and inaccuracies in usage, which can affect students' understanding and hinder their learning outcomes. The objective of this study is to identify patterns and potential sources of misinterpretation to ensure the language in textbooks aligns with the learning objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. A qualitative approach with a comparative method was used to analyze the meaning and impact of the word “konteks” and its equivalents across different subjects. Data were collected through documentation, both from explicit and implicit uses of the words in texts and illustrations, followed by descriptive content analysis based on Miles et al.'s interactive model. Validity and reliability were ensured through triangulation, expert validation, and adherence to ethical guidelines. The study found that misinterpretations of “konteks” caused students difficulty in comprehending the material, especially in recognizing its meaning in different academic and social contexts. These errors resulted in fragmented understanding and hindered the achievement of learning outcomes. Accurate understanding of key terms, such as “konteks”, is essential for effective learning. Errors in interpretation disrupt cognitive processes, affecting students' ability to develop complex, analytical skills as intended by the Merdeka Curriculum. To address these ambiguities, teachers should implement clarifying exercises and context-based discussions, while textbook evaluations must include precise guidelines for words with multiple meanings, and supported by illustrative examples.

Keywords: merdeka curriculum, semantic analysis, textbooks.

ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini mengkaji kesalahan dalam penafsiran kata “konteks” dan padanannya dalam buku teks Kurikulum Merdeka yang digunakan pada mata pelajaran Bahasa Indonesia, Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan (PKN), dan Bahasa Inggris. Kesalahan ini timbul akibat ambiguitas semantik dan ketidakakuratan dalam penggunaan yang dapat mempengaruhi pemahaman siswa dan menghambat pencapaian hasil belajar mereka. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan sumber potensi kesalahan tafsir untuk memastikan bahasa yang digunakan dalam buku teks selaras dengan tujuan pembelajaran Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode komparatif untuk menganalisis makna dan dampak dari kata “konteks” dan

padanannya pada berbagai mata pelajaran. Data dikumpulkan melalui dokumentasi dengan mencatat penggunaan kata tersebut secara eksplisit dan implisit dalam teks dan ilustrasi, yang kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif menggunakan model interaktif yang dikemukakan oleh Miles & Huberman. Validitas dan reliabilitas penelitian dijamin melalui triangulasi, validasi oleh ahli, dan kepatuhan terhadap pedoman etika. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kesalahan penafsiran kata “konteks” menyebabkan kesulitan bagi siswa dalam memahami materi, terutama dalam mengenali maknanya pada berbagai konteks akademis dan sosial. Kesalahan ini mengakibatkan pemahaman yang terfragmentasi dan menghambat pencapaian hasil belajar. Pemahaman yang akurat terhadap kata kunci seperti “konteks” sangat penting untuk pembelajaran yang efektif. Kesalahan dalam penafsiran mengganggu proses kognitif, yang mempengaruhi kemampuan siswa untuk mengembangkan keterampilan analitis yang kompleks seperti yang diharapkan dalam Kurikulum Merdeka. Guna mengatasi ambiguitas ini, guru perlu melaksanakan latihan klarifikasi dan diskusi berbasis konteks, sementara evaluasi buku teks harus mencakup pedoman yang tepat dalam penggunaan istilah yang memiliki banyak makna, dan didukung oleh contoh ilustratif.

Kata Kunci: analisis semantik, buku teks, kurikulum merdeka.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in education, serving as the primary medium through which knowledge is transmitted. However, the inconsistent meaning of words in a language often leads to misunderstandings, particularly if the context is not properly understood (Sayer, 2013). This phenomenon underscores the complexity of words, which may carry multiple meanings depending on their usage (Ansori, 2021). Misinterpretation of these meanings by both speakers and readers can result in conceptual confusion, especially in educational settings. From an educational perspective, such misunderstandings can significantly affect students' comprehension of learning materials, as inaccurate word interpretations may alter the intended meaning (Maison & Wahyuni, 2021).

A prominent example is the word “konteks” (context) in Indonesian, which has several equivalent terms such as framework, conditions, background, environment, and situation. Each of these equivalents carries its own nuanced meaning, and their correct usage depends on the communicative purpose and specific context. According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI), the word “konteks” (context) can adapt to various conditions, adding layers of complexity. These variations increase the potential for misinterpretation, particularly in education, where precision in language is crucial for effective learning.

Research highlights that failing to align equivalent words with the right context can lead to misunderstandings. For example, Haug & Ødegaard (2014) found that inappropriate word choices in teaching materials can confuse students, particularly those grasping basic concepts. For instance, substituting “konteks” (context) with *kondisi* (condition) or *latar belakang* (background) without clear explanation can create ambiguity, resulting in students misunderstanding the material's core message. This issue is exacerbated when it manifests in

textbooks—primary resources for classroom learning—where accurate word choice is critical for conveying concepts (Petrović & Antić, 2021).

Textbooks hold a central role in formal education, serving as the main reference for both students and teachers. Errors or inaccuracies in word use can significantly impact students' conceptual understanding (Merisuo-Storm, 2016). Without proper context, students may struggle to interpret words accurately, hindering their comprehension and learning outcomes (Allen, 2023). Teachers, who rely on textbooks to guide their instruction, may also face challenges explaining material when language is ambiguous or confusing (Abraham et al., 1992). This difficulty can result in ineffective teaching and an inability to meet curriculum objectives (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020).

The Merdeka Curriculum, designed to develop student competencies holistically, underscores the importance of clear and precise language. This curriculum empowers schools to customize learning processes to meet students' needs, adopting a contextual and competency-based methodology. However, inconsistencies or ambiguities in terminology, such as "*konteks*" (context), can hinder comprehension for both students and educators, impacting the effectiveness of the learning process (Sun & Li, 2021). Misinterpretation of words in textbooks can prevent the curriculum from fulfilling its role as a tool for shaping student competencies, thereby compromising educational quality.

Failure to meet learning outcomes due to language-related issues can also impede students' understanding and application of knowledge in relevant contexts (Filgona et al., 2020). Several studies demonstrate that mismatches between teaching materials and learning outcomes hinder students' ability to develop critical and analytical thinking skills (Abrami et al., 2015; Hehakaya & Pollatu, 2022; Setyowati et al., 2018). Consequently, students may struggle to grasp complex concepts, limiting their academic development and competence (Yusrina et al., 2021). This limitation can also affect their readiness to face real-world challenges, which require accurate contextual interpretation (Brundiers et al., 2010).

This study focuses on the word "*konteks*" (context) and its equivalents in Merdeka Curriculum textbooks, examining their impact on learning outcomes. This research provides a detailed linguistic analysis to align language use with educational objectives, contributing to the enhancement of open materials. By addressing a rarely discussed yet crucial topic, this study aims to identify patterns and potential sources of misinterpretation, ensuring that the language used in textbooks aligns with the learning objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings are expected to guide more precise language use in educational materials, ultimately improving student comprehension and facilitating the attainment of intended learning outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a comparative study method to analyze the meaning and impact of the word "*konteks*" (context) and

its equivalents in educational textbooks. The comparative method is particularly suitable for this research because it allows for a systematic comparison of word usage across different subjects and learning phases, thereby highlighting inconsistencies or ambiguities that may affect students' comprehension and learning outcomes. By comparing how "*konteks*" (context) and its equivalents—*kerangka* (framework), *kondisi* (conditions), *latar belakang* (background), *lingkungan* (environment), and *situasi* (situation)—are used in different contexts, the study aims to identify patterns and potential sources of misinterpretation, ensuring that the language used in textbooks aligns with the learning objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The data sources comprise secondary data from Merdeka Curriculum textbooks in the subjects of Indonesian Language, Civic Education (PKN), and English Language across all learning phases. These subjects were selected because they represent core areas where language precision is critical for developing students' understanding and critical thinking skills. Indonesian Language textbooks provide a direct context for examining linguistic nuances, while Civic Education offers insights into the use of language in ethical and societal contexts. The inclusion of English textbooks allows for cross-linguistic analysis, highlighting how language inconsistencies may manifest across different subjects. Examining these subjects across all phases ensures a comprehensive understanding of how contextual language evolves with student development.

Data collection was conducted through the documentation method. The researcher meticulously noted occurrences of the word "*konteks*" (context) and its equivalents, both explicit and implicit, in the teaching materials. Explicit appearances were identified within the textual content, while implicit occurrences were analyzed through images and illustrations. For instance, an illustration depicting a historical event might implicitly convey *latar belakang* (background) without explicitly stating it. Such visuals were evaluated to determine how they contribute to the contextual understanding of the material and whether they align with the textual meaning.

The study employed descriptive content analysis, guided by the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction began with the systematic assessment of each occurrence of "*konteks*" (context) and its equivalents, categorizing them based on their explicit or implicit presence. The reduced data were then displayed in organized matrices, allowing for comparative analysis across subjects and phases. The final stage involved drawing conclusions by evaluating how each word's meaning aligns with the learning outcomes outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum. Specific criteria included semantic accuracy, contextual relevance, and consistency with curriculum objectives.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, the study employed several techniques. Triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing findings with multiple data sources, including different textbooks and educational phases. Expert validation was sought to assess the accuracy of the contextual analysis,

particularly in relation to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) definitions. The study adhered to ethical guidelines by maintaining objectivity in data interpretation and ensuring transparency in the research process. All sources were properly cited, and potential biases were mitigated through expert reviews. The researcher maintained a neutral stance throughout the analysis, focusing solely on the linguistic and educational implications of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis in this study was conducted to identify the frequency of occurrence of the word “konteks” (context) and its equivalents: *kerangka* (framework), *kondisi* (conditions), *latar belakang* (background), *lingkungan* (environment), and *situasi* (situation), in the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks in three subjects, namely Indonesian Language, Civic Education (PKN), and English Language. Data were collected from all learning phases that included the mention of the word “konteks” (context) both explicitly and implicitly. In addition, the analysis was also conducted to assess the level of misinterpretation of the word “konteks” (context) and its equivalents, which may appear in the use of the word in teaching materials. The study's results revealed a small percentage of misinterpretations of words, potentially leading to interpretations that do not align with the actual context.

Table 1 displays the findings of a study that looked at how often the word “konteks” (context) and its translations appeared in the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks for three subjects: Indonesian Language, Civic Education (PKN), and English Language. It also shows how many mistakes were found in how the words were interpreted. The Civics subject had the highest total occurrence of the word “konteks” (context) and its equivalents, with 2,652 instances, and a 2% interpretation error rate (53 cases), according to the displayed data. Meanwhile, English showed the highest percentage of errors in interpretation, which was 4% (34 cases out of a total of 863 occurrences), followed by Indonesian with 3%, or 47 cases out of 1,582 occurrences.

Table 1. Frequency of Occurrence and Misinterpretation

Subject	Explicit	Implicit	Total	Misinterpretation Number	Number of Misinterpretation (%)
Indonesian Language (Bahasa Indonesia)	538	1.044	1.582	47	3%
Civic Education (PKN)	1.482	1.170	2.652	53	2%

English Language (Bahasa Inggris)	213	650	863	34	4%
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Source: Processed by Author (2024)

This study reveals ambiguity in the use of the word "*konteks*" (context) and its equivalents, leading to interpretations that may not align with the curriculum's intent. This ambiguity has the potential to hinder students from understanding the concept of the material clearly and accurately, which ultimately impacts the effectiveness of learning (Kaplan et al., 2014; Rector et al., 2013). Uncertainty in word meanings can lead students to misunderstand the material's context, disrupting or preventing optimal achievement of the Merdeka Curriculum's designed learning outcomes. This inaccuracy in the meaning of words not only disrupts students' understanding of one material but also has the potential to hinder holistic learning achievements (Kaplan et al., 2018).

Table 2. Examples of Explicit Misinterpretations of Words


Subject	Words	Sentences Quotes	Discussion of Misinterpretation
Indonesian Language (Phase D Grade VII)	<i>Situasi</i> (Situation)	" <i>Makanan-makanan Nusantara tersebut tercipta dan dipengaruhi oleh situasi alam, budaya, sejarah, ekonomi, hingga politik pangan setiap daerah.</i> " "These Indonesian foods were created and influenced by the natural, cultural, historical, economic and food political situations of each region."	The use of the word " <i>situasi</i> " (situation) is inappropriate because in this context what is being conveyed is the "state or condition" of nature, culture, history, economy, and food politics. The word " <i>situasi</i> " (situation) more often refers to a temporary state, not a broader and more complex environmental condition as intended. This error can make students understand as if what is meant is a state that can change quickly, when in fact the actual context is influences that are more permanent or long-lasting.
Civic Education	<i>Latar Belakang</i> (Background)	" <i>Selain mempelajari latar belakang dan</i> "	The word " <i>latar belakang</i> " (background) in this sentence is not entirely



(Phase D Grade IX)		<p><i>kepakaran pemberi informasi pada media sosial, kalian juga perlu memilah informasi yang bersifat faktual dan opini."</i></p> <p>"In addition to studying the background and expertise of the information providers on social media, you also need to sort out factual information and opinions."</p>	<p>appropriate because it refers to "the aspect or identity of the person giving the information." "Latar belakang" (background) is generally used to refer to history or origin, but in this context it refers to the identity or quality of the person giving the information that is relevant to assessing the credibility of the information. This misinterpretation can lead students to misunderstand that "latar belakang" (background) always means the personal aspect of the person giving the information, when in fact what is relevant here is the person giving the information's knowledge or expertise.</p>
English Language (Phase F Grade XI)	Konteks (Context)	<p>"But depending on the context, the organizers have a variety of uses. One of them is for showing sequences."</p> <p>"Namun, tergantung pada konteksnya, pengatur memiliki berbagai kegunaan. Salah satunya adalah untuk menunjukkan urutan."</p>	<p>The word "context" (<i>konteks</i>) in this sentence is unclear. "Context" (<i>konteks</i>) here is ambiguous because it does not explain the specific context in question, whether it is related to time, sequence, or use in an activity. This ambiguity can cause students to understand that all types of contexts can be applied here, when what is intended to be explained is the use of organizers in a more focused context, for example for the sequence of activities.</p>

Source: Processed by Author (2024)

Referring to the analysis results shown in Table 2, it can be seen that the misinterpretation of the word "*konteks*" (context) and its equivalents in these three subjects has the potential to cause ambiguity that hinders students' understanding. For example, in the Civics subject, the word "*situasi*" (situation) used to describe natural, cultural, historical, and economic conditions is considered inappropriate because the context of the sentence requires a word that better describes a permanent condition or broader state. Meanwhile, in the Indonesian language subject, the word "*latar belakang*" (background) is used to explain the identity or expertise of the information provider, but in this context it is more appropriate to use the word "profile" or "credibility aspect" of the information provider so that students understand the relevant meaning. In English, the word "*konteks*" (context) lacks sufficient explanation of its specific context, leading to ambiguity in its application. This inaccurate choice of words can trigger misinterpretation in understanding the role of the organizer being explained, especially for students who still associate "*konteks*" (context) with various conditions in general. Even a small ambiguity can hinder the achievement of learning objectives if students fail to fully comprehend the material. Therefore, textbooks should emphasize precision in word choice to ensure optimal learning outcomes (Okeeffe, 2013).

Table 3. Examples of Implicit Word Meaning Errors

Subject	Picture	Meaning of Words	Discussion of Misinterpretation
Indonesian Language (Phase D Grade IX)		<i>Konteks</i> (Context)	In the picture showing the evolution of communication, there are various " <i>konteks</i> " (context) that students can potentially misinterpret as the specific situations of communication in each era, without considering that the context here should refer to changes in the social and technological environment that change the way of communicating. Too narrow a meaning of " <i>konteks</i> " (context) can hinder the understanding of the

			overall changes in the communication process.
Civic Education (Phase B Class III)		Lingkungan (environment)	The picture shows a child discussing with parents, where "lingkungan" (environment) in this context should mean the social environment in the family. However, misinterpretation can occur if students understand the environment only as a place or physical. Inaccuracy in understanding "lingkungan" (environment) as a social factor can limit students' views on the role of the family in the formation of social values and ethics.
English Language (Phase B Grade IV)		Konteks (Context)	The dialogue in this picture teaches students how to use the word "context" (konteks) to describe the state or explanation of physical space, but this can be confusing if students think that "context" (konteks) always refers to a physical place or condition only. This can limit students' understanding that "context" (konteks) can also mean the background or situation in communication or narrative.

Source: Processed by Author (2024)

This study discovered not only explicit but also implicit misinterpretations. Table 3's results demonstrate that each image presents a unique context for specific words, which students may misinterpret. The image in the Indonesian language subject shows the evolution of communication with the meaning of "*konteks*" (context) which should be broader. Students may understand context in a narrower sense, even though it means overall changes influenced by social and technological factors. The second image in the Civics subject illustrates the concept of "*lingkungan*" (environment) within the context of the family, highlighting the potential for misinterpretation as merely a physical place rather than a social environment that encompasses relationships and transmitted values. Lastly, the image in the English subject illustrates the use of "*konteks*" (context) in a dialogue about the room, but a narrow understanding may limit students' perceptions "*konteks*" (context) as a physical condition only. These three misinterpretations show that ambiguity in the use of words or lack of clarification of context can affect students' holistic understanding and potentially hinder the achievement of deeper learning objectives (Cartwright et al., 2022).

Discussion

The research findings highlight significant variations in the interpretation of the word "*konteks*" (context) and its equivalents across Merdeka Curriculum textbooks in Indonesian Language, Civic Education (PKN), and English subjects. These discrepancies in meaning, both explicit and implicit, are quantitatively detailed in Table 1, Table 2 shows implicit errors, while Table 3 reveals explicit errors. For instance, in Indonesian Language textbooks, the word "*situasi*" (situation) is used to describe factors influencing Indonesian food culture, such as nature, history, and economy. However, "*situasi*" (situation) typically refers to temporary conditions, which may mislead students into thinking that cultural and historical influences are short-term rather than enduring. This misinterpretation could hinder students' understanding of Indonesia's structured socio-cultural development. Since the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes comprehensive information analysis, such misunderstandings may obstruct students' ability to grasp the long-term impact of cultural and historical factors (Andini et al., 2024).

Similarly, the narrow interpretation of "*konteks*" (context) in the evolution of communication can cause students to misidentify it as specific situations rather than broader social and technological changes. This limitation impairs their ability to analyze how societal shifts influence communication, a critical skill for achieving the curriculum's goals of deep analysis and critical thinking (Solihati & Hikmat, 2018). Enhancing students' understanding of "*konteks*" (context) in a broader sense can foster more comprehensive thinking, not just about communication but also about broader societal changes. Moreover, in Civic Education textbooks, errors in using "*latar belakang*" (background) and "*lingkungan*" (environment) can lead to confusion. Students may interpret "*latar belakang*" (background) as a personal aspect of an information source, affecting their ability to assess credibility, or they might view "*lingkungan*" (environment) solely as a physical

environment, missing its broader social implications. These inaccuracies can hinder students from developing a nuanced understanding of citizenship values, which the Merdeka Curriculum aims to instill through critical reflection and contextual analysis (Cholifah & Faelasup, 2024; Yusup & Jannah, 2021). Accurate terminology is essential for fostering students' critical thinking and ethical understanding, enabling them to assess information objectively and recognize the family's role in shaping character and social values (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, 2018). In English textbooks, ambiguity in the use of "*konteks*" (context) can similarly lead to confusion. For example, without a clear explanation of whether "*konteks*" (context) refers to temporal, sequential, or situational contexts, students might apply it too broadly or inappropriately, hindering their ability to meet learning objectives. This aligns with previous research showing that misinterpretation of basic terminology negatively impacts learning outcomes, particularly in applying concepts across diverse scenarios (Entwistle & Smith, 2002; Fauth et al., 2019).

Additionally, the fourth-grade students' use of the word "*konteks*" (context) restricts its definition to physical aspects or spatial conditions, potentially limiting their comprehension of the concept. Students may struggle to comprehend context as a setting or situation in communication or narrative, a crucial skill in language learning, if they perceive it solely as the description of space or physical conditions. This limitation of understanding is contrary to the learning outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum, which expects students to be able to identify context in communication and discourse more flexibly. Farrell & Jacobs (2010) emphasize that holistic word comprehension is crucial for language learning. Therefore, improving how "*konteks*" (context) is explained in textbooks can help students understand and apply it more effectively in various communication contexts. Misinterpretations, as noted by Rahmawati et al. (2022) and Cervetti et al. (2023), lead to gaps between classroom learning and real-world application, impacting students' critical literacy and problem-solving abilities. This is particularly relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum's goals of fostering analytical and critical skills (Tan, 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, cognitive psychology explains how misinterpretations affect learning. When students process inaccurate information, such as an incorrect understanding of "*konteks*" (context), it becomes stored in long-term memory, forming a flawed foundation for future learning (Eysenck & Keane, 2020). Teachers play a critical role in identifying and correcting these misinterpretations to align students' understanding with curriculum objectives (Chew & Cerbin, 2021). The study's findings suggest that textbook terminology must align with academic standards like those set by the KBBI to avoid ambiguity and ensure accurate learning. This research contributes to educational theory by emphasizing the importance of precise language in achieving holistic learning outcomes. Curriculum designers and textbook authors can use these insights to refine educational materials, focusing on linguistic accuracy to support the Merdeka Curriculum's contextual and practical learning goals. Expanding the study

to other textbooks or curricula, incorporating more examples, and suggesting pedagogical strategies for teachers could further enhance understanding and application.

CONCLUSION

Based on the overall results of this study, errors in interpreting the word “konteks” (context) and its equivalents within the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks—particularly in Indonesian Language, Civic Education (PKN), and English Language subjects—can be attributed to semantic ambiguity and contextual inaccuracies. These errors directly hinder students' ability to meet specific learning outcomes, such as developing critical thinking skills and comprehensive understanding, which are central goals of the curriculum. Misinterpretations obstruct students' ability to accurately grasp the meaning of “konteks” (context) in academic and social situations, thereby complicating their cognitive processing and affecting long-term learning outcomes. This aligns with cognitive psychology theories that emphasize the critical role of accurate comprehension in effective learning that inconsistencies in understanding can lead to fragmented knowledge, preventing the development of more complex analytical skills. Therefore, enhancing the clarity and consistency of key terms in textbooks is crucial for fostering deeper student understanding, promoting better real-world application of learned concepts, and achieving broader educational objectives.

From a practical perspective, addressing these issues necessitates actionable strategies for teachers, such as implementing clarifying exercises and facilitating context-based discussions to mitigate ambiguities. Additionally, comprehensive textbook evaluations should include guidelines for the precise use of terms with multiple meanings. For instance, textbook authors could incorporate illustrative examples and detailed definitions of “konteks” (context) to reduce misinterpretation. Policymakers and educational authorities must also prioritize teacher training programs that equip educators to navigate linguistic ambiguities effectively. Such initiatives will ensure that the content in Merdeka Curriculum textbooks aligns with intended learning outcomes, ultimately improving educational quality and fostering students' analytical abilities. These measures underscore the need for a holistic approach that integrates cognitive psychology principles into curriculum design, ensuring that educational materials support coherent and effective knowledge acquisition.

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