

## Chapter 8

# Bridging the Gap between Textbooks and Authentic Learning: Reimagining English Language Materials Development

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### A. THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE

English language textbooks are very important in the way lessons are taught, especially if they have clear content, language examples, and activities for teachers and students alike. Also, textbooks can become detached from real learning when they are too grammar-based, on topics, and set exercises. This is what occurs when the materials do not connect the language with the students' own experiences, with real life, with ethical issues or with opportunities for reflection. This problem is even more pressing in schools that aim to turn pupils into expert language users and critical, responsible citizens. In exchange, we need a new view of textbooks not just as vehicles of language but also as bridges between language knowledge and real-life experiences, critical thinking, ethical understanding, and meaningful action (Omodan & Addam, 2022; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

This chapter introduces a new approach to the production of English language materials based on the 5D Thinking Essentials: analytical thinking (logical examination), analogical thinking (meaningful comparison), critical thinking (evaluating ideas and arguments), meditative thinking (deep thought) and moral thinking (ethical judgment). The method is based on a Qur'anic way of understanding and uses the concepts of *tafakkur* (contemplating creation and signs), *tadabbur* (deeply understanding meanings) and '*amal* (acting purposefully on the basis of understanding) to guide the design of more real and meaningful English materials. This points to the need for language activities not to be seen as separate tasks but for materials to help students interpret situations, connect ideas, question assumptions, reflect on meaning, and consider the implications of their knowledge and decisions. Textbooks can thus be sites of meaning-making, connecting language learning with thinking, reflection, and ethical growth.

The system is also based on the ideas of Said Nursi, who stressed the unification of reason, revelation, and reflection during the course of learning (Nursi, 2008, 2009). Nursi's concept of *ma'na-i harfi* or 'indicative meaning,' refers to the idea of things not being ends in themselves but signs of deep understanding (Nursi, 2007). If we transpose this view to the material in the English language, we are forced to ask what the textbooks for students contain. Texts, images, conversations, problems, and real-life situations can be more than language practice. They can be opportunities for inquiry, reflection, and ethical thought. So, better English materials mean going beyond the mechanical repetition of textbook facts to creating learning experiences that combine language, context, thinking, values, and purposeful action. This framework allows flexible and feasible development of English materials to support real, holistic, and meaningful learning.

## **B. THE PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**

The 5D Thinking Model is a *tawhidi* educational model that combines scientific learning and Islamic spirituality (Aydin, 2021). The model adds a fifth dimension of metaphysics to the four

dimensions of reality so that creation can be related to its Creator. The scientific ideas in the model are not to be seen as knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but as divine signs (*ayat*) for contemplation and application in daily life. The model helps students to develop their intellect and character strengths such as humility, empathy and perseverance through five related domains of thinking, namely analytical, analogical, critical, meditative and moral thinking (Aydin, 2021; Alowais, 2024).

### **Step 1: Explore (Analytical Thinking)**

Science and secularism are embedded in this context (Alowais, 2024). Discover the wonderful facts of the universe. Analytical thinking is the ability to systematically and critically examine information, break it apart, identify patterns, links, assumptions, and meanings, and draw appropriate explanations. Analytical thinking is one of the higher-order cognitive skills in education that allows the learners to move from the surface to the deeper level of interpretation, evaluation, and problem-solving (Kwangmuang et al., 2024).

The Explore section helps students learn English by exploring topics that connect language to knowledge of the world around them. It contains different English materials taught in school, such as text genres, vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, speaking, writing, and other language skills. The materials are presented in context so that students can see how English is used to communicate ideas, describe phenomena, tell stories, provide information, and express opinions. A major part of this section is the Fascinating Facts, which provides intriguing and scientifically accurate information related to the lesson topic. These facts are intended to arouse students' curiosity, enrich their vocabulary and knowledge and make them think beyond language learning. The Explore section adds to the attractiveness, importance, and relevance of learning to students' everyday lives when English content is combined with real-world awareness and scientific events.

## **Step 2: Compare (Analogical Thinking)**

Compare uses a wealth of English resources to teach students to think analogically, to discover similarities, differences, relationships and connections between familiar ideas and new ones. This section can be used for other language activities instead of one topic/text. They are vocabulary, grammar, reading, speaking and writing and different types of text. Students ought to be encouraged to compare and contrast, to use familiar examples to help them understand new concepts, and to express their ideas in English. The 5D Thinking approach allows students to connect natural phenomena to human-made objects, helping them to forge meaningful links between science and their daily lives (Alowais, 2024). The students can improve their English proficiency, extend their understanding and develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills by combining new knowledge with previous knowledge (Kao, 2014) through various activities (Nor et al., 2026).

## **Step 3: Question (Critical Thinking)**

In the Critical Thinking section, students will be challenged to think deeply, ask meaningful questions, and assess ideas through a variety of English materials taught in school. This section can be used for reading texts, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing and other language activities where students are directed to analyze information, express opinions, give reasons and support their answers with English. Students are asked to think about questions that explore the relationship between the natural world and human-made creations, and to consider whether events happen by chance or through intention, knowledge and purpose (Alowais, 2024) in the 5D Thinking approach. Students enhance their ability to convey critical ideas in English and connect language acquisition with relevant real-world comprehension (Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014) by engaging in reflective questions that necessitate higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, as outlined in Bloom's taxonomy.

#### **Step 4: Connect (Meditative Thinking)**

The Connect section fosters students' reflective thinking by engaging them in considering the more profound meaning and interconnectedness of what they learn from diverse English materials encountered in school. This section can be used in reading texts, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing and other language activities, encouraging students to connect language learning to their personal experiences, the natural world and wider life values. The students are taught to recognize through the 5D Thinking approach that everything in the universe is interrelated and that all things work with a purpose, which leads them to contemplate the Creator and His Divine attributes through the signs (*ayat*) that exist in creation (Alowais, 2024). Reflection prompts, ecosystem connections and an introduction to Divine Names (Asmaul Husna) encourage students to reflect on the relationship between knowledge and faith, gratitude and responsibility. By means of these significant links students increase their knowledge of English while developing reflective consciousness, mindfulness and appreciation of the wisdom and purpose embedded in creation (Kumar & Downey, 2018).

#### **Step 5: Appreciate (Moral Thinking)**

The Appreciate section aims to promote students' moral thinking to appreciate knowledge, creation and positive character through different English materials in school. This section can be used in reading texts, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing and other language activities by guiding learners to understand the benefit and purpose of what they are learning and to relate it to their daily lives. The 5D Thinking method aims to guide students to view Allah's creation as a gift, to contemplate the advantages and human dependence on it, and to cultivate thankfulness and responsibility towards nature (Alowais, 2024). Appreciation activities can be in the form of guided questions, Qur'anic verses, hadith, prayers and character lessons which enable students to connect English learning to values such as gratitude (*shukr*), trust in Allah (*tawakkul*), kindness, cooperation, perseverance and environmental management. Thus, the students practice to express the ideas and values in English, and at the

same time, they develop the moral awareness and better appreciation of Allah's blessing in creation (Sinaga et al., 2022).

The 5D Thinking Essentials approach promises a way forward for the development of ELT materials which integrate language learning with critical thinking, ethical awareness and spiritual reflection. Teachers can provide learning experiences that develop students' language competence and foster reflective, responsible, and value-oriented learners by integrating five dimensions in English lessons (Alowais, 2024; Sinaga et al., 2022).

### **C. THE FUTURE DIRECTION**

Language materials are important for the development of students' language skills, and for their individual values and qualities. The value of language is because it is a tool for people to think, behave and socialize in society (Sinaga et al, 2022). Thus, English teaching materials could be developed to develop ethical awareness, social responsibility and character development, together with teaching language skills (Hasbi, 2023). Zabidi et al. (2020) 5D Thinking Essentials is a new framework that can help ELT materials to go beyond linguistic skills development to deeper meaning-making, critical reasoning and character formation. The five dimensions (*Explore, Compare, Question, Connect and Appreciate*) can be applied to ELT materials in an effort to offer a more holistic experience of linking language competence with reflective and ethical consciousness.

There are many pedagogical reasons for including 5D Thinking Essentials in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials. First, it makes the language learning based on the students' real-life experience, scientific knowledge and spiritual reflection by connecting the English content with them. Therefore, learning becomes more contextual and engaging (Alowais, 2024). Students should learn the purpose and values underlying the language they use, rather than learning vocabulary, grammar or text genres in isolation. This method gives students the opportunity to develop higher order thinking abilities through activities which make them explore,

compare, question, connect and appreciate (Bloom, 1956; Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014). This enables students to develop their English abilities by evaluating information, presenting opinions and considering ethical issues. The other advantage is the integration of character education with language teaching. The 5D Thinking framework enhances students' values of gratitude, responsibility, empathy, perseverance and responsibility toward the environment as well as their linguistic competence (Alowais, 2024). This is consonant with the larger purpose of education which is not simply cognitive achievement but also moral and social development. Through the use of reflective questions, authentic context and values discussions, ELT materials can foster students' ethical awareness and, consequently, create responsible students who use language positively in their communities (Sinaga et al., 2022).

Yet, despite these advantages, there are some challenges to implementing the 5D Thinking Essentials in ELT. The preparation of materials that will combine language aims with scientific, ethical and spiritual aspects without damaging the quality of the language teaching is another problem for teachers. Development of such materials should be carefully planned, creative and have good knowledge of curriculum objectives and principles of 5D Thinking framework (Zabidi et al., 2020). Teachers need enough professional development opportunities to be able to engage in a discussion about critical and reflective thinking regarding achieving relevant language learning outcomes (Wahyuningsih et al., 2026). Besides, contextual factors such as students' English proficiency, classroom time and teaching resources may also influence the implementation of 5D Thinking. Reflective and critical tasks may be difficult for students with low levels of English language proficiency. Teachers need to provide appropriate scaffolding, e.g., vocabulary support, guided questions, collaborative activities (Hasbi, 2026b). Hence, the success of the implementation depends on the well-designed teaching materials and instructional strategies to balance language development, character building, and meaningful reflection (Alowais, 2024; Zabidi et al., 2020).

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