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STUDENTS' NEED FOR TASK-BASED LEARNING MATERIAL TO IMPROVE RECEPTIVE SKILLS IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

The *Merdeka* curriculum offers flexibility; therefore, the teacher could design the necessary learning experience in the English classroom. The curriculum is implemented by adjusting the learning process to the students' learning needs. Teachers have the opportunity to design learning materials for use in teaching activities. However, among the four language skills, students have difficulty understanding listening and reading materials. This study aimed to analyze students' needs for task-based learning materials in junior high school regarding receptive skills. The learning material is intended to be a supplementary book to the official provided textbook. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design. The participants were 86 grade VII students at SMP Negeri 3 Ampek Angkek, West Sumatra. The data were collected through a 20-item questionnaire. Those were classified into students' perceptions of existing learning materials and students' needs for task-based receptive learning materials. The findings revealed that the existing textbook is insufficient in providing listening and reading materials. Therefore, 61% of the students needed task-based learning materials, which are believed to improve their listening and reading skills. This study was the initial stage in developing task-based learning materials that align with the principles of the *Merdeka* curriculum and enhance students' receptive English skills.

Keywords: *Merdeka* Curriculum, Receptive Skills, Task-Based Learning Materials

INTRODUCTION

The *Merdeka* Curriculum has been implemented in Indonesia since 2021. This curriculum focuses on meaningful learning experiences, student autonomy, and English communicative competence. It emphasizes a student-centered method of teaching (Haq, 2024). Moreover, the *Merdeka* Curriculum is based on the principles of constructivist learning theory. The theory suggests that learning is an active process in which students construct knowledge through their interaction with learning activities, resources, and social situations rather than passively receiving of information (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Therefore, it is expected that classroom will involve students in active exploration, processing, and application of knowledge in meaningful contexts.

English learning outcomes in junior high school in the Merdeka Curriculum are based on the curriculum and refers to the Common European Framework of Reference for

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Languages (CEFR) which is a standard accepted in the world to measure language skills. The target for students of junior high schools is the level of proficiency A2 (Kemdikdasmen, 2025). In Phase D students are expected to be able to read different types of texts and identify main ideas in texts on familiar topics. These competency expectations emphasize the significance of language skill development in English teaching.

Language skills are the basis for language learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills help learners comprehend information, communicate ideas clearly and interact effectively with others (Kemdikdasmen, 2025; Sadiku, 2015). These skills are important for language learning, for cognitive skill development and for improving the communication competence (Zalli, 2024). Also, each language skill is interrelated. It is important to learn the four basic language skills because students use more than one skill in the communication process, these skills affect each other (Meldia & Melani, 2022).

Listening and reading are language skills that help learners comprehend information, increase vocabulary, recognize grammatical patterns, and understand sentence structures. All of them are important for the optimal language development (Nation, 2013). Active engagement is very important in listening and reading skills. Students need to understand linguistic signals, infer meaning, predict information, and relate new and pre-existing knowledge (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). Enhancement of these skills improves communication and language production (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018).

Ellis (2003) highlighted the significance of input in second language acquisition. Students can successfully use language when they understand its meaning. Moreover, listening is the most important skill for successful communication (Ali, 2022). From a reading perspective, communicative principles assign an equal role to reading skills and other skills. Reading involves readers in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon, 2018). Through listening and reading, students should be exposed to English in real-world situations, which enables them to use the language in daily life.

To facilitate listening and reading activities in the classroom, teachers need to provide adequate learning materials. The government already provides an English textbook for use in the learning process. However, teachers are also allowed to design learning materials that are relevant to students' needs and contextual realities (Darmawan et al., 2024). Through this flexibility, teachers are encouraged to adopt, adapt, or create learning materials, as the availability of learning materials in teaching and learning is very important (Erlina et al., 2023).

Teachers could choose various learning materials based on the students' needs. One of the learning material designs is implementing task-based language teaching. Task-based language teaching is a language teaching approach that emphasizes meaningful communication and the use of real-life situations. According to (Prabhu, 1987), students acquired language more successfully through meaningful language use rather than through isolated grammar instruction. Similarly, (Ellis, 2003) argued that language is better learned when students participate in communicative activities which resemble real social interaction.

Before implementing task-based language teaching, it is important to understand what a task is. A task can be broadly defined as any piece of work undertaken in everyday life

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(Long, 2000) or as an activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome by processing language through comprehension, manipulation and interaction (Nunan, 2004). Besides, Ellis (2003) defined the tasks as work plans which instruct the learners to use language pragmatically in an effort to achieve communicative ends. Task-based language teaching has been informed by a number of important principles. Willis (1996) suggests providing students with rich and comprehensible input, giving them opportunities for authentic communication, motivating them with meaningful goals and focusing on language forms after communication has taken place.

Meanwhile, seven principles of task-based language teaching were suggested by (Nunan, 2004). Scaffolding, task dependency, recycling, active learning, integration of form and meaning, and reproduction are those. The tasks are organized in a progressive way from simple to difficult helping students to move easily from understanding language to using it creatively and autonomously. These principles ensure that students are given enough support while becoming independent in their use of English. The principles of task-based language teaching in material development allow teachers to produce student-centred learning activities that promote communicative competence, active involvement and learner autonomy (Tomlinson, 2023; Nunan, 2004).

Developing learning materials should follow a systematic procedure. According to Tomlinson (2023), materials development refers to any activity undertaken by writers, teachers, or students to provide sources of language input and facilitate language learning. Effective materials should expose students to meaningful language use and provide opportunities for communication. The process begins with identifying students' needs. Needs analysis in the development of learning materials is the systematic investigation of needs to optimize language teaching and learning (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016). This analysis is used to identify problems, and the researcher will then find appropriate solutions or actions to address them. Analyzing learning needs is the first step in solving problems related to learning materials (Syafitri et al., 2023).

Borg & Gall (2003) introduced several systematic steps for developing learning materials to ensure the product is valid and effective. The first step is research and information collecting, which involves needs analysis to identify problems in the learning process. In addition, this research is part of the defined stage of research and development with a 4D model about developing Task-based learning material. The next stage will be initiated once students' needs are understood. The following stages will be designing the learning materials by selecting appropriate topics, texts, and tasks that promote authentic language use. The third stage is learning materials development**,** which involves creating learning activities, instructions, and supporting resources, such as visuals and audio. Finally, the learning material will be disseminated to the related parties.

There are several previous studies on the implementation of task-based learning materials. Agustin et al., (2021)created further task-based listening materials by using audiovisual materials for descriptive text. Their study indicated that the students' issues in listening were caused by uninteresting texts and lack of interesting learning materials. The developed materials with animated videos and task-based materials could support students' motivation, engagement and listening development.

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Apriliah (2016) conducted research on improving students' reading skills by using Task-Based Language Teaching through classroom action research. Increases in students' reading scores were associated with the implementation of tasks related to students' real-life experiences that supported comprehension, engagement, and motivation.

Another relevant study was done by Siregar (2020). He developed supplementary task-based English reading materials for the seventh-grade students, particularly on descriptive texts. The developed materials included schema development, controlled practice, authentic activities, and reflection. The results showed that task-based supplementary materials could fulfill students' learning needs and improve reading comprehension and engagement.

Based on the literature above, the study aimed to investigate students' existing difficulties in understanding spoken and written English in the current textbook, as well as their expectations regarding the supporting learning materials. The findings provided a needs-based foundation for designing task-based learning materials aligned with the objectives of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to identify students' needs for task-based learning materials to enhance listening and reading skills in descriptive texts within the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The study involved 86 Grade VII students at SMP Negeri 3 Ampek Angkek in West Sumatra during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were selected using a total sampling technique, considering the relevance of the learning context to the research objectives.

Data were collected using a closed ended questionnaire with five Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was designed according to the framework of target needs and learning needs by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) and the principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT). The questionnaire was used to identify students' difficulties with the existing learning material and preferences for the proposed learning materials. Questionnaires are useful for collecting standardized information about language learners' perceptions and attitudes (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010).

The questionnaires were administered directly in the classroom after students received explanations of the research purpose and completion procedures. The data were analyzed using the mean score to identify response patterns and dominant learning needs. Descriptive statistics were used because the study aimed to summarize students' perceptions and establish priorities for material development. The results were used as the guideline for the design of task-based learning materials during the Define stage of the R&D model.

RESULTS

Students' Perception of Existing English Learning Material

The following table shows the results of one of the two major aspects: students' perceptions of existing English learning materials.

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Table 1. Students' responses toward existing learning materials

Indicator	Mean Score
Availability of sufficient learning materials	2.21
Learning materials for class and self-study	2.34
Use of multiple learning resources	2.17
Various resources improve understanding	3.92
Availability of audio/video	1.71
Reading texts appropriate to students' level	2.15
Listening and reading exercises improve understanding	2.14
Contextual tasks	1.89
Tasks are arranged from easy to difficult	2.61
Clear task instructions	1.73
Tasks support real-life language use	1.93
Collaborative learning	3.37

The results of the students' questionnaire revealed that the overall mean score was 2.35 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating that students generally tended toward disagreement with the statements regarding the availability, quality, and implementation of existing English learning materials. This finding suggests that the learning materials currently used by students do not fully accommodate their learning needs.

Regarding the availability of sufficient learning materials, materials for classroom activities and self-study, and the use of multiple learning resources, relatively low scores indicate that students tended to disagree that the existing materials were sufficient, supported both classroom learning and independent study, or provided access to a variety of learning resources. Students require more comprehensive materials for use during teacher-guided activities and for individual practice outside the classroom.

The availability of audio and video resources received the lowest mean score. This result indicates that students generally disagreed that audio and video resources were adequately available in their existing learning materials. The finding is particularly relevant to the development of materials intended to enhance listening and reading skills. A similar concern emerged regarding the appropriateness of reading texts for students' proficiency levels. Students disagree that the reading texts in their existing materials were appropriate for their learning levels. This finding highlights the importance of selecting and adapting texts according to students' vocabulary knowledge, reading abilities, and developmental needs.

The indicator of listening and reading exercises that improve understanding reflects that students did not generally perceive the existing exercises as sufficiently supportive of their comprehension development. The findings indicate a need for more varied and purposeful receptive-skill activities. The results revealed concerns about contextual tasks and the clarity of task instructions. Contextual tasks and clear task instructions received a low score. Students generally disagreed that the existing materials sufficiently connected

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learning tasks with meaningful contexts or provided clear instructions. The low score for instructional clarity is especially important because students who are still developing their English proficiency experience difficulty completing activities when instructions contain unfamiliar vocabulary or complicated sentence structures.

Furthermore, the arrangement of tasks from easy to difficult obtained a mean score below the neutral midpoint of 3.00. Students did not clearly perceive that increasing levels of difficulty consistently organized the existing materials. Progression can help students build confidence and systematically develop their receptive skills. Within the task-based learning framework, students could begin with vocabulary recognition and the identification of explicitly stated information before progressing to tasks requiring them to combine information and report their findings.

The statement "Various learning resources improve understanding" obtained the highest mean score among the twelve indicators, indicating a positive perception of the contribution of varied learning resources to students' understanding. This finding provides strong evidence that students recognize the potential benefits of learning materials that incorporate diverse resources.

Collaborative learning also received a positive response, indicating that students agreed it was relevant to their learning experience. It suggests that students showed some openness to collaborative activities. Pair and group tasks could therefore be incorporated into the proposed materials. Furthermore, the results of the indicator concerning whether tasks support real-life language use indicate that students disagreed that the existing tasks sufficiently connected English learning to practical situations. This finding emphasizes the need to make learning activities more meaningful and relevant to students' daily lives.

Overall, the questionnaire findings provide an empirical basis for developing task-based learning materials that integrate listening and reading activities, familiar descriptive text topics, varied learning resources, clear instructions, and gradually sequenced tasks. The materials should also support both teachers guided classroom activities and independent learning. Through these design features, the proposed product is expected to respond more directly to students identified needs and provide a more structured and meaningful learning experience.

Students' Responses to Their Need for Task-Based Learning Material

Table 2 presents the results of the questionnaire on students' needs for task-based receptive-skill materials. The questionnaire looks at eight different areas. These areas include how students prefer to and how they feel about task-based materials.

Table 2. Students' needs towards task-based receptive skill materials

Indicators	Mean Score
Need for group-learning materials	4.17
Need for self-learning materials	4.23
Teacher scaffolding	4.41
Real-life language exposure	3.84

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Indicators	Mean Score
Interesting materials increase motivation	4.07
Materials improve receptive skills	3.73
Task-based materials ease understanding	3.64
Need for task-based material development	3.96

The results of the students' needs questionnaire revealed an overall mean score of 4.01 on a five-point Likert scale. Students generally agreed with the statements regarding their learning needs and preferences for English learning materials. Highest mean score was obtained by teacher scaffolding indicator. The findings suggest that students value teacher guidance and support in the learning process. The need for self-learning materials had the second-highest mean score. Students strongly agreed that they needed self-learning materials. This result indicates that students recognize the importance of having learning resources that they can use beyond teachers directed classroom activities.

The indicator concerning the need for group-learning materials obtained positive responses. Students strongly agree that group activities provide opportunities to exchange information, compare their understanding of texts, discuss answers, and work together to achieve a shared task outcome. The indicator of interesting materials can increase motivation, highlighting the importance of presenting learning content in ways that attract students' attention and encourage active participation.

The response to the indicator on real-life language exposure indicates that students generally value opportunities to encounter English in meaningful, familiar contexts. The proposed materials should therefore connect descriptive texts with situations that students can recognize from their everyday experiences. Regarding the indicator of whether learning materials improve receptive skills, students strongly agreed that the materials improved their listening and reading skills. Although this was the second-lowest mean score among the eight indicators, the overall response remained positive. The result suggests that students recognize the potential contribution of learning materials to receptive-skill development.

The indicator concerning whether task-based materials make learning easier to understand obtained the lowest mean score. This finding indicates that students generally viewed task-based materials positively, although a considerable proportion remained uncertain about their contribution to understanding. The need for task-based material development indicates strong support for creating such materials. This finding is particularly relevant to the study's purpose, which aims to develop materials that enhance students' receptive skills through meaningful tasks. The result suggests that students are generally receptive to the proposed development.

In general, the needs analysis showed that students preferred learning materials with teacher scaffolding, independent learning opportunities, collaborative activities, engaging content and meaningful language use. In particular, the high scores on teacher scaffolding and self-learning materials suggest that students need resources that support both guided instruction and independent practice. In contrast, the positive responses concerning group

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learning, motivation and task-based material development show that collaborative and entertaining activities should be included in the proposed product.

The results of this study offer a strong empirical justification for the creation of task-based learning materials for Grade VII students. The suggested materials should integrate listening and reading activities in familiar descriptive text environments, give explicit, sequenced directions, use audiovisual materials, and include a variety of activities to promote active understanding. The materials can be designed to address the needs identified in the questionnaire and support a more meaningful and structured English learning experience within the Merdeka Curriculum by combining teacher guidance with collaborative and independent learning opportunities.

Most students strongly agreed that they need learning materials that support collaborative learning and independent study. Students also stressed that teachers need to provide examples before giving tasks, noting that students still need clear scaffolding and guidance during learning activities. Also, students strongly agreed that the more interesting and engaging the materials of learning, the more they are motivated to learn. Students believed that learning materials should help them understand how English is used in real-life communication and should improve their listening and reading abilities through meaningful tasks. Importantly, the majority of students agreed that task-based learning materials are easier to understand and that there is a strong need from 71% students to develop task-based instructional materials.

DISCUSSION

The needs analysis revealed a gap between the learning support provided by the existing English textbook and the learning materials required by Grade VII students to develop their receptive skills. Results suggest that limited supplementary resources, insufficient multimedia support and lack of contextualized tasks limit students' opportunities to engage with descriptive texts beyond conventional reading and comprehension exercises. This limitation is particularly important for learners who are still developing their vocabulary knowledge and comprehension strategies. The results therefore suggest the need for supplementary materials which include listening and reading activities in familiar contexts, provide structured guidance and include purposeful tasks.

This need can be justified in terms of task-based language teaching (TBLT) principles which are concerned with the use of language to achieve meaningful goals. Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004) claim that communicative tasks offer chances for learners to use language for a purpose and to link classroom activities with real-life communication. Similarly, Willis & Willis (2007) stresses the importance of tasks that involve real use of language in which learners are involved in understanding and conveying meaning. In this sense, students' preference for contextualized and interactive materials shows that instruction in the receptive skills should go beyond answering isolated comprehension questions.

The results also point to the importance of matching task design to student proficiency and providing adequate instructional support. The preference for teacher scaffolding indicates that students need assistance to succeed in tasks that require the interpretation of spoken and written information. This need can be understood through Vygotsky (1978)

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sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and guided assistance in learning.

Collaborative learning emerged as another important consideration in the development of the materials. The value of this is not only in allowing students to do activities in groups, but collaboration can provide opportunities to negotiate meaning, to compare interpretations, and to clarify information from spoken and written texts. This rationale is in line with cooperative learning theory developed by Johnson & Johnson (1999) which stresses the importance of organized cooperation in learning. It also align with the discussion of Saefullah & Said (2025) on the focus of the Merdeka Curriculum on active participation, collaboration and learner agency.

The need for audio resources and contextualized reading texts identified points to the need to develop receptive abilities through complementary and not isolated learning experiences. Brown & Abeywickrama (2019) point out the importance of proper input and assessment techniques in language acquisition, and research on multimedia and text-based materials has demonstrated their potential to improve receptive skills and learner engagement (Nurdin et al., 2024; Durriyah et al., 2024).

The findings are particularly significant to the Merdeka Curriculum which highlights learner-centered instruction, contextual learning, and the development of learner autonomy (BSKAP, 2024). Furthermore, the expressed needs of the students suggest that the implementation of these principles involves not only adopting a student-centered orientation in the classroom but also providing instructional materials that translate curriculum objectives into achievable learning experiences. Task-based materials can provide this link, organizing learning around purposeful activities, providing appropriate scaffolding, and allowing students to demonstrate their understanding through task outcomes. This interpretation is consistent with Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004) accounts of meaningful language learning and with studies examining task-based and learner-centered approaches in the context of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Mudinillah et al., 2024; Idris et al., 2026).

The principal contribution of this research is therefore the analysis of students identified needs into a structured design for receptive-skill learning materials. Not only does it provide supplementary texts alone, but the developed product also combines listening and reading activities on descriptive texts within a task-based framework. This integration offers a practical way to connect TBLT principles with the instructional demands of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

The findings have implications for instructional material development, classroom practice, and teacher support. It is important to design materials around learners identified needs rather than relying exclusively on textbook availability. For receptive-skill instruction, this means integrating listening and reading texts. The developed materials offer a structured resource to support teachers in facilitating the class.

Finally, the implications should be interpreted in relation to the scope of the research. The needs analysis establishes the relevance of the proposed design to students expressed preferences and learning needs. At the same time, the product's findings on practicality and effectiveness provide additional evidence regarding its implementation and learning

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outcomes. Together, these findings support the potential of structured, task-based materials to contribute to receptive-skill instruction under the *Merdeka Curriculum*, without implying that the same design will yield identical results across schools, proficiency levels, or learning contexts.

CONCLUSION

Teachers play an essential role in creating meaningful learning experiences by selecting, adapting, and developing instructional materials that respond to students' needs. Teachers are expected to facilitate learning through creative, innovative, and adaptive instructional practices (Paniagua & Istance, 2018). The findings of this study indicate that students need English learning materials that provide contextualized activities, collaborative learning opportunities, multimedia resources, and appropriate instructional support to develop their listening and reading skills. These needs align with the principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes meaningful language use, purposeful tasks, and learner engagement (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). By translating these principles into structured learning activities, task-based materials can facilitate mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences within the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

The results provide an empirical basis for the design of supplementary materials that integrate activities of listening and reading, familiar contexts, collaborative tasks, multimedia resources, and scaffolding of teacher-guided and independent learning. This study provides practical implications for English teachers, curriculum developers, and instructional material designers in aligning task-based learning with the learner-centered and contextual direction of the Merdeka Curriculum. This research contributes to the field as it translates students expressed needs into specific considerations for instructional material development. Rather than merely assuming the availability of a textbook alone is sufficient to support receptive-skill learning.

Finally, the findings provide a context-specific basis for the development of task-based learning materials which are responsive to the students' needs and promote receptive-skill instruction in the Merdeka Curriculum. Future research can provide a stronger evidence base for the educational value of task-based materials by combining evidence-based material design with iterative development, broader field testing and objective assessments of learning outcomes, allowing for responsible adaptation in other English-language learning contexts.

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