

## Research Article

# EXAMINING THE CONTENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXTBOOK IN THE CONTEXT OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Received 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024; Accepted 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024; Published online 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the content of the 11th-grade English textbook to find out whether the ideology of Mangilik Yel (Eternal Land) is reflected in the textbook. Primarily, the study outlines the seven values of Mangilik Yel and scrutinizes one unit of the English textbook Aspect published under the principles of the updated curriculum. In analyzing the English textbook, the author concentrates on the key concepts of the unit; including its theme, objectives, activities and tasks, and language elements. Ultimately, the study reveals a discrepancy between the ideology and the content of the textbook(s).

**Keywords:** Mangilik Yel (Eternal land), Aspect, language objectives, content analysis.

### INTRODUCTION

The main target of the updated curriculum is to implement 7 immutable values of "MangilikYel" through the educational system in Kazakhstan as given below.

1. The independence of Kazakhstan
2. National unity, peace and harmony
3. A secular society with high spirituality
4. Economic growth based on industrialization and innovation
5. Universal Labor Society
6. Common history, culture and language
7. National security and its engagement in addressing global and regional issues

Therefore, one of the tools for implementing ideas of "MangilikYel (Eternal Land)" is undeniably textbook materials and units. Patriotism, national consciousness, and national spirit are the key concepts of the program "MangilikYel" that lead the youth of Kazakhstan to high personal and professional achievements and be citizens of the world. However, the texts given in the book do not match the expectations of the program in the sense that the socio-cultural context is inadequate and implicit. That's why the content is the weakest part of the unit. The study attempts to analyze one unit (Unit 7) from the book "Aspect for Kazakhstan" recommended for 11th-grade learners. The book is published by the Express publishing house under the principles of the updated curriculum in Kazakhstan. The topic of the unit is "Reading for Pleasure".

**Author of the book:** Jenny Dooley, Bob Obee.

As we know reading is one of the most effective ways of personal improvement and progress. It is developed through multiple resources at different stages of a human being's development. One of them is school thresholds where learners are encouraged to know renowned people's biographies and their masterpieces as well. Therefore, the contribution of materials is tremendous for

implementing this acquisition process and developing learners' language and cognitive thinking skills. Moreover, providing individuals with diverse information, more precisely genres of fiction and non-fiction is another priority in encouraging and stimulating learners' interests in reading and making them think about abstract and concrete concepts.

Apart from that reading for pleasure is considered as one of the key features of the updated curriculum that focuses on developing creative thinking skills through genres of fiction and non-fiction and broadening individuals' horizons about the universe. Therefore, tasks completed under this topic are required to be demonstrated in a creative way (reports, reviews, or articles for a school newspaper, presentations, posters, leaflets, collages, comics, blogs, podcasts, advertisements, play scripts, games, films, logbooks) and stimulate learners to produce unique accomplishments. Hence, my target of choosing this topic is evident, to what extent does the unit of the book help develop learners' language and cognitive skills? Simultaneously, I have attempted to analyze the content of the unit in that sense, if there is a match between the values of "MangilikYel" and units being used under the principles of the updated curriculum.

### Theme:

The unit is called Reading for pleasure and it focuses on Genres of Fiction.

It is known that 11th-grade learners' are mature enough to discuss about abstract and concrete concepts eloquently. Therefore, they can be offered various topics in different genres. The topic "Reading for pleasure" is interesting and relevant in the sense that learners become familiar with genres of fiction (fantasy, horror, drama, romance, science fiction, and adventure) through masterpieces of well-known authors and take an opportunity to develop their critical and creative thinking skills through the ideas that they convey through their works. For this reason, each work is unique and useful for establishing learners' notions and developing their horizons. Similarly, this topic is quite appropriate to their age category, as they are in between the period of adolescence which makes them think about real and unreal things happening in life. According to the extracts given from well-known authors' works in the module, it is easy to

notice curricular links between the subjects of literature, art, and theatre. However, the topic does not have real-world significance.

### Objectives:

Lesson objectives are identified taking into consideration vocabulary, use of English(grammar), and language skills separately for the entire unit at the beginning of the module. Therefore, it is appropriate to list each of them and analyze the convergence between the objectives and their implementation throughout the unit.

*The unit covers* genres of fiction, figurative language, parts of a story, title analysis, and character analysis. Genres of fiction are demonstrated by the following well-known writers and their masterpieces; Jack London (The Sea Wolf), Jane Austen (Pride and Prejudice), Robert Louis Stevenson (Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde), JRR Tolkien (The Fellowship of the Ring), Ray Bradbury (Fahrenheit 451), Harper Lee (To Kill a Mockingbird).

*Figurative language* is discussed and explained by alliteration, assonance, metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole.

*Title analysis.* Jack London's Sea Wolf is asked to analyze through the words associated with "Sea" and "Wolf" in the graphic organizer.

*Character analysis.* Venn diagram is used to analyze the characters of Van Weyden and Larsen Wolf and relevant texts are provided for that. Learners are also appealed to understand the terms "protagonist" and "antagonist". In addition, learners are asked to write character analysis to Humphrey Van Weyden.

*Reading.* Learners are asked to read the biography of Jack London and answer some concept-checking questions related to his biography. Write a summary for the novel "The Sea Wolf", and T/F questions based on the novel. Multiple choice questions are related to the conversation between Humphrey Van Weyden and Wolf Larsen. In this context, Humphrey Van Weyden is a narrator and a talking person to Wolf Larsen about the topic "Value of Life". Learners are asked to write a character essay by analyzing the character of Humphrey Van Weyden. The review is discussed by the writer's work "The See Wolf" and his likes and dislikes about this masterpiece.

*Use of English.* Learners are required to know all forms of present and past simple.

*Listening.* Learners are asked to listen to the lecture and complete a Venn diagram. A single task is not given to listening. *Speaking.* Evaluating and commenting on the views of others.

*Writing.* A summary of an article, an essay, a film review.

The summary has to be written for the novel "The Sea Wolf" by taking into consideration characters, main events, and conflict. According to an essay, learners are asked to analyze Humphrey Van Weyden's characters. To make a review of the film, learners are recommended to watch a film about "The Sea Wolf"(1941) based on the novel.

### Activities and tasks

If we take a close look at the activities and tasks, it is easy to notice that contextualization is not observed. In my understanding, contextualization is a concept related to local-based materials that give specific notions through tasks and activities. However, tasks are interesting in the sense that learners become familiar with the works of outstanding writers and improve their language and creative thinking skills. In addition, tasks and activities are not divided into sub-sections, and the entire unit is demonstrated through 16 exercises. The tasks are engaging, and make learners think more, and understand the ideas in deep by working with graphic organizers, CCQ, multiple choice questions, and types of writing. The

meaningfulness of the activities and tasks is that learners are introduced to genres of fiction in different context-based texts. Similarly, learners overcome learning difficulties through critical and creative thinking skills. Even though the tasks and activities coincide in terms of language and learning skills, they do not discuss local and culture-based information. As the curriculum aims at developing national consciousness through a local-based context, these requirements need to be implemented through the tasks and activities of the unit. Authenticity of materials provides learners with natural and real text-based language. However, it does not help to improve learners' natural and real language outcomes. In addition, there is a variety of activities. All these activities and tasks give learners opportunities to work in groups/pairs and interact with each other to decide on learning obstacles together and establish collaborative learning. Warm-up activity is supported by giving notions about reading for pleasure through genres of fiction. Closing activities are quite understandable and the whole unit is reviewed by comparing the content of the film and the novel.

### Listening

Listening is not supported by any kind of activities or tasks.

### Speaking

Classroom interaction is effective if tasks and activities are driven by mutual interaction between learners and the teacher. In this sense, activities given in the unit are encouraged to develop both types of interactions. For instance; Learners are asked to fill three columns from the talk between Humphrey Van Weyden and Wolf Larsen by demonstrating their characters, main event, place, and conflict between them. Apart from that working with the Venn diagram, title analysis on the topic of "The Sea Wolf", comparing the film "The Sea Wolf" with the novel, discussion about figurative language, and defining genres of fiction through renowned writers' works are driven to develop learner-learner and learner-teacher interactions. It is easy to notice from the above-mentioned tasks, that language output is only developed through text-based exposure. Whereas, materials are more helpful if they make learners express language output through real-life experience. Therefore, it is hard to say that materials will help to deal with unpredictable spoken discourse, as the tasks have more text-based input which does not have a direct relationship with the real-life world. In addition, title analysis and character analysis tasks are not structured well and learners are not given clear instructions.

### Reading

One of the important parts of the unit is reading which introduces learners to genres of fiction through different works of outstanding writers. Each extract of the text given in the unit has a specific purpose of developing learners' reading comprehension and serves to enhance insights about sub-skills of reading. By defining genres of fiction (fantasy, horror, drama, romance, science fiction, adventure) through small extracts from well-known writers' works, learners develop insights about skimming and predict the main idea of the lesson. Subsequent parts of the unit are developed through the renowned writer Jack London and his masterpieces. Similarly, learners are asked to answer the CCQs about Jack London's biography using scanning. Furthermore, defining T/F sentences based on the novel "The Sea Wolf" makes learners read the text in detail to understand the relationship between ideas. In addition, learners develop their inferential reading skills by giving answers to abstract questions based on the talk about the "Value of life" between Humphrey Van Weyden and Wolf Larsen and learners deduce meanings of unfamiliar words(sacredness, value, devour, mock, intrinsically etc) from the talk simultaneously. On the grounds of the

topic of "Wolf Larsen" learners improve their intensive reading and understand the language of character through this text.

Taking into consideration above mentioned facts, it is known, that there is a variety of tasks and activities related to texts in the unit. The purpose of each task and activity is unique and informative by providing learners with extensive reading and interest in the sense that they are driven to develop learners both cognitively and affectively. The length of the texts is quite adequate for 11th-grade learners level, it covers between the words 200 - 335. However, texts are not supported with pre-reading questions, conversely, comprehension questions are given after the texts. Moreover, texts given for developing reading are associated with speaking and writing skills.

### Writing

As we know, writing is one of the most difficult skills among others skills in terms of specific instructions, logical sequence, and demonstrating ideas explicitly. The book has some tasks for improving learners' writing skills. For example: Learners are asked to write a summary after reading the novel "The Wolf Larsen". There is an exercise to work with a graphic organizer taking into account; defining characters, main events, and conflict throughout the novel. Similarly, this exercise is suggested as an instruction for writing the summary. However, it seems to me that specific instructions about how to write a summary should be included to equip learners' further understanding of summary writing. The same situation is repeated with essay writing. Learners are asked to write a discussion essay about the character of Humphrey Van Weyden after being familiar with the text about "Wolf Larsen". However, specific instructions about the character essay are not provided in the unit. Apart from that, learners are asked to write a film review by comparing the content of the novel. In this case, how the film is analyzed is also implicit and instructions are not available and it is difficult to find instructions or rules about paragraphing. Hence, paragraphing is taught inadequately. Taking into account the tasks given above for writing, it is easy to notice a variety of different writing purposes. According to the lesson objectives, the use of English is based on developing learners' accuracy by using present and past forms throughout the unit. There is an exercise where learners have to write a summary by using present and past forms on the topic "The Sea Wolf", but clear instructions and practical exercises before writing the summary are not available. Thus, learners are only asked to write a summary, an essay, and a review. Apart from that, language resources such as punctuation, spelling, and layout are not given attention and learners are not encouraged to edit and review each other's written works.

## LANGUAGE ELEMENTS

### Vocabulary

Texts given in the unit are quite useful for improving learners' vocabulary. However, unfamiliar words that learners may face difficulties with are not given below the texts with their definitions. There is a glossary about the theory of figurative language (alliteration, assonance, metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole). Whereas, acquiring vocabulary through different ways is not considered in the unit.

### Grammar

There is only one task for grammar and it needs to be improved in the sense of providing instructions on present and past forms and more practical tasks/activities that learners can benefit from developing

their capabilities of using grammar based on all forms of present and past simple.

### Pronunciation

Specific tasks and activities are not present to teach pronunciation.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the unit analysis, it is obvious that language input is given through authentic materials from well-known authors' works and there is a variety of tasks and activities. As the unit is called "reading for pleasure", learners are well-informed about various types of texts. To develop speaking learners are encouraged to express their opinions through graphic organizers, but the tasks are text-based and do not lend themselves to real-world communication. Writing is developed through summary, essay, and review writing throughout the unit, but instructions on how to write these types of works need to be structured well and explicitly. One of the weakest parts of the unit is listening as the unit does not have a well-developed listening task. Apart from that learners are not encouraged to learn vocabulary through various productive ways. In addition, learners are asked to work on all forms of present and past simple, but the unit does not provide practical exercises for applying the tense form in real-world contexts. Another essential part of the unit that has to be mentioned is the socio-cultural context, which does not consider the requirements of the updated curriculum. Therefore, while the objectives of the unit have been achieved through the reading texts, the other parts of the unit need to be developed further under the principles of the program of "Mangilik Yel (Eternal Land)".

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