



A Textbook Evaluation of 500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know

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Abstract

This study evaluates the *500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know* textbook used at Maahad Tahfiz Baitul Ehsan Maluri, Kuala Lumpur, using McDonough, Shaw, and Tomlinson's evaluation criteria. Using qualitative content analysis, the study found that the book met 14 out of 18 criteria. Its strengths include clear vocabulary organization, relevant illustrations, attractive visuals, and structured progression that supports vocabulary learning. However, the book lacks methodological explanation and a teacher's guide. Overall, the book is suitable as a supplementary resource for beginner learners, though future textbooks should provide better teacher support materials.

Keywords: Learning Material Analysis; Vocabulary Book; 500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengevaluasi buku *500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know* berdasarkan kriteria McDonough, Shaw, dan Tomlinson. Dengan analisis isi kualitatif, hasil menunjukkan buku memenuhi 14 dari 18 kriteria. Kelebihannya meliputi penyajian kosakata yang jelas, ilustrasi menarik, dan materi yang mendukung pembelajaran pemula. Namun, buku ini belum memiliki penjelasan metodologi dan panduan guru. Secara umum, buku ini layak digunakan sebagai sumber belajar tambahan bagi pembelajar pemula.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Materi Pembelajaran, Buku Kosakata, 500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know

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INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, English has become a universal language vital for communication in business, science, technology, and education. Proficiency in English provides individuals with access to global knowledge and opportunities (Rose et al., 2022). Consequently, many countries, including Malaysia, have integrated English into their educational systems to support academic achievement and career readiness (Yacob et al., 2022).

In Malaysia, English functions as a prominent second language, especially in schools (Malik & Devi, 2025). The government continues to promote English language education to prepare students for international competition (Zainuddin et al., 2019). However, in religious-based institutions such as Maahad Tahfiz Baitul Ehsan Maluri Kuala Lumpur, English is given less focus due to the curriculum's emphasis on Qur'anic memorization.

Based on the researcher's 25-day School Field Program at Maahad Tahfiz Baitul Ehsan, it was observed that English learning received minimal attention, which contributed to students' low English proficiency. This limited exposure may hinder their ability to pursue higher education or careers where English skills are often essential. To address this, selecting high-quality and engaging learning materials becomes crucial in supporting English language development, especially in environments with constrained instructional time (Fauzi, 2019).

Learning materials, as noted by Richards and Rodgers (2001), facilitate subject learning, while Tomlinson (2011a) expands the definition to include textbooks, digital media, and real-life aids. Graves (2000) emphasizes that these materials may be designed specifically for the classroom or adapted from real life to support students' acquisition of knowledge and skills. In vocabulary learning specifically, Graves (2016) defines vocabulary books as tools that help learners acquire and use new words through definitions, examples, and exercises. Nation (2001) sees them as systematic means to expand vocabulary, and Schmitt (2019) highlights their role in focused instruction.

Textbook evaluation is essential to determine whether learning materials meet learners' needs and support effective language learning. Two evaluation frameworks were used in this study. First, Tomlinson (2011) proposes principles for evaluating language learning materials, emphasizing that effective materials

should create impact, engage learners emotionally and cognitively, build learner confidence, provide authentic language input, encourage meaningful communication, accommodate different learning styles, and offer appropriate feedback. These principles serve as indicators of material quality and learning effectiveness.

Second, McDonough and Shaw (2013) provide a practical framework for textbook evaluation consisting of fourteen criteria, including the suitability of the target audience, learners' proficiency level, teaching context, lesson organization, visual presentation, cultural appropriateness, and support for different learning styles. Together, Tomlinson's principles and McDonough and Shaw's criteria provide a comprehensive basis for evaluating both the pedagogical quality and practical suitability of a textbook.

One textbook currently used at Maahad Tahfiz Baitul Ehsan is *500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know*, a bilingual English–Malay book aimed at beginners. However, there has been no systematic evaluation to determine its suitability for students who receive limited English instruction. While studies such as those by Subariyah (2014) and Fakhomah (2017) have assessed general English textbooks using Tomlinson's framework, research specifically analyzing vocabulary-focused materials in religious-based schools remains limited.

Therefore, this study applies evaluation frameworks from McDonough, Shaw, and Tomlinson to analyze whether the textbook meets the needs of learners at Maahad Tahfiz Baitul Ehsan. It focuses on the textbook's vocabulary presentation, organization, clarity of definitions, use of illustrations, level progression, and opportunities for independent learning. The findings aim to offer insights into the textbook's strengths and weaknesses and contribute to the improvement of English instruction in religious-based educational settings in Malaysia.

METHOD

This study, conducted in November 2024 at UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidimpuan, focused on the textbook *500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know* used at Maahad Tahfiz Baitul Ehsan, Kuala Lumpur. Using a

qualitative approach and content analysis method (Krippendorff, 2019; Lim, 2025), the research examined the textbook content to identify patterns and evaluate its quality. The primary data source was the 124-page bilingual (English-Malay) textbook written by Nor Yuslinda (2020), which consists of 23 vocabulary topics. The analysis covered all textbook components, including vocabulary lists, topic organization, illustrations and visual materials, page layout, and supporting features presented throughout the book. Secondary data were obtained from the textbook evaluation frameworks proposed by McDonough et al. (2013) and Tomlinson (2011), which served as the basis for evaluating the textbook.

The researcher analyzed visual elements and content organization using an 18-item “Yes” or “No” checklist (Subariyah, 2014) to assess alignment with textbook quality indicators, including user relevance, language presentation, and adaptability to learning styles.

Table 1. The Checklist Instrument

No.	Criteria	Yes	No
Book			
1	The intended audience		
2	The proficiency level		
3	The context in which the materials are to be used		
4	How the language has been presented and organized into teachable units/lessons		
5	The authors’ views on language and methodology		
6	Are the materials used as the main ‘course’ or to be supplementary to it?		
7	Is the teacher’s book in print and locally available?		
8	Is the layout or presentation clear or cluttered?		
9	The presentation of the skills and materials		
10	The grading and sequencing of the materials		
11	Does the material suit different learning styles so that it can motivate students and teachers alike		
12	Materials should provide the learners with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes		
Vocabulary			
13	Unique topics of vocabulary		
14	Culturally familiar vocabulary		
15	Relevant and Useful		
16	Is a vocabulary list/index included?		

17	What visible material does the book contain and is it actually integrated into the text?
18	Is the material not culturally biased or specific, and does it not represent minority groups and/or women in a negative way?

The thirteenth criterion, Unique Topics of Vocabulary, is based on Tomlinson's principle of creating impact. Culturally Familiar Vocabulary relates to helping learners feel at ease, while Relevant and Useful Vocabulary reflects the importance of perceived relevance. Only four of Tomlinson's indicators were used, as they best aligned with the study's focus. This selective approach allowed for deeper analysis and avoided less relevant elements.

To ensure data validity, the study used investigator and method triangulation (Flick, 2018), involving other researchers and expert input from English teachers, curriculum developers, and linguists. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model: data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). A checklist guided data filtering and summarizing, with results presented in narrative and tables. Conclusions were based on the data and relevant theories to assess the book's suitability for vocabulary learning.

RESULT

External Evaluation of 500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know

The book *500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know* offers quality content by presenting essential vocabulary and grammar components across 18 main and 5 bonus topics, including nouns, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and more. Its bilingual format (English-Malay) aids comprehension for beginner learners. However, it lacks a clearly stated language learning approach, which may require teachers or learners to seek additional guidance on how to best use it.

Structurally, the book is well-organized, progressing from basic to more complex concepts. This systematic flow supports gradual vocabulary mastery. Bonus sections like words about professions, emotions, and proverbs enhance its educational value, though the absence of a teacher's guide may limit its classroom application.

The language is simple and clear, with concise explanations and Malay translations, making it accessible to students. Vocabulary selections are practical and suited for everyday use, though the presentation style leans more toward lists than interactive, context-based learning. Visually, the book uses neat layouts and helpful illustrations to reinforce learning, supported by its bilingual design. Still, the actual impact of these visuals on vocabulary retention may need further evaluation, particularly for visual learners.

Overall, the book is a helpful vocabulary resource for students, providing structured content and practical word choices. It supports vocabulary learning in both academic and everyday contexts. However, its effectiveness could be enhanced by adding interactive strategies and a teacher's guide.

Internal Evaluation of 500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know

The research findings are based on the book *500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know* and analyzed using 18 evaluation indicators from McDonough, Shaw, and Tomlinson's theory. These indicators include the intended audience, proficiency level, usage context, organization of materials, author's methodology, role as core or supplementary material, availability of teacher's book, layout clarity, skills presentation, material sequencing, suitability for various learning styles, communicative purpose, unique and culturally familiar vocabulary, relevance, and inclusion of visual and vocabulary aids.

1. Intended Audience

The book clearly targets children aged 6–12, as shown in the title and confirmed by its publisher. Its visual design and content are suitable for young learners, making it an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition.

2. Proficiency Level

Designed for beginner-level learners, the book uses simple language and abundant visuals to support children's understanding.

3. Usage Context

The book is structured for vocabulary learning in classroom or self-study settings. The content focuses on words used in daily communication.

4. Organization of Materials

The book organizes content into teachable units, starting with basic parts

of speech and progressing systematically. Topics are clearly listed in the table of contents and build upon one another.

5. Author's View on Methodology

The book lacks a preface or notes explaining the authors' views on language learning or methodology, which can hinder understanding of its pedagogical foundation.

6. Core or Supplementary Material

At Maahad Tahfiz Baitul Ehsan, this book serves as supplementary material and is also used by students for independent learning.

7. Teacher's Book Availability

There is no accompanying teacher's book available in print or locally, as the student book is designed to be self-explanatory.

8. Layout Clarity

The book features a clear and structured layout. Vocabulary lists are well-organized in tables, and headings are bold and easy to follow. Visuals such as illustrations further enhance comprehension.

9. Presentation of Skills and Materials

The book presents materials consistently using tables, images, and example sentences appropriate for children, covering a variety of vocabulary categories and contexts.

10. Grading and Sequencing

Content progresses from simple to more complex topics, ensuring students build foundational knowledge before advancing.

11. Learning Styles

While effective for visual and reading/writing learners, the book lacks audio or hands-on activities, making it less inclusive for auditory and kinesthetic learners.

12. Communicative Purpose

Although it introduces vocabulary useful for daily communication and includes example sentences, the book lacks interactive exercises or tasks to apply language in real-life situations.

13. Unique Vocabulary Topics

The book includes distinctive sections such as proverbs and alternative

phrases for common expressions, enriching students' vocabulary beyond the basics.

14. Culturally Familiar Vocabulary

The content uses vocabulary, place names, and character names that are relevant to Malaysian students, increasing its relatability and cultural appropriateness.

15. Relevance and Usefulness

Most of the vocabulary is practical and applicable in daily life. The book supports the development of both spoken and written communication skills through diverse and meaningful word categories.

For a clearer understanding, the research results are summarized in the following table.

Table 2. The Presentation of the Research Results

Number of Criteria	500 Vocabularies, Words Kids Need to Know
1	The intended audience of the book is children
2	The proficiency level of the book is beginner-level
3	The material is used in daily communication, classroom learning or self-study context to improve vocabulary mastery
4	The language is presented logically and systematically, dividing vocabulary into manageable sections or themes
5	The author does not share the views on language and methodology
6	The material is the supplementary course
7	The teacher's book is not in print or locally available.
8	The vocabulary is presented in a clear and organized manner
9	The material is consistently structured and presented in a varied way
10	The content is arranged in a logical and

Number of Criteria	500 Vocabulary, Words Kids Need to Know
	progressive order
11	The material suits the visual and reading/ writing learning style, but not the auditory and kinesthetic
12	The book does not provide activities or communication-based exercises
13	There are several unique topics of the book, such as "The 50 Most Important English Proverbs" and "75 Other Ways to Say Phrases That You Use Everyday"
14	The vocabulary is familiar to students, including the names of objects, names of people and places that are often found in everyday life
15	The vocabulary is very relevant and useful for students because it is often used in real life situations
16	Vocabulary lists can be found on almost every page of the book
17	Visible material included illustrations and images
18	The material is inclusive, respectful, and appropriate for a diverse group of learners

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that the book meets 14 of the 18 indicators of the criteria of a good book. Therefore, the compatibility of the materials in the textbook with McDonough, Shaw, and Tomlinson's theory is:

Table 3. The Number of Fulfilled Criteria

No.	Criteria/ Indicator	Total
1	The number of criteria	18
2	Total of criteria fulfilled by the book	14

Percentage:

Total of criteria fulfilled by the textbook x 100%

The number of criteria

$$= \frac{14}{18} \times 100\%$$

$$= 78\%$$

So, the book 500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know meets 78% of McDonough, Shaw and Tomlinson theory.

Overall Strengths, Limitations, and Pedagogical Implications

The findings from both the external and internal evaluations indicate that 500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know is a generally suitable vocabulary resource for beginner learners. The book demonstrates several strengths that support vocabulary development. First, it provides a clear and systematic organization of content, progressing from basic to more advanced vocabulary topics. Second, its bilingual format (English-Malay) facilitates comprehension and makes vocabulary learning more accessible for young learners. Third, the book includes relevant illustrations, clear layouts, and practical vocabulary items that are frequently used in daily communication. In addition, unique sections such as proverbs and alternative expressions enrich learners' vocabulary knowledge beyond basic word lists. These strengths contributed to the book fulfilling 14 out of 18 evaluation criteria, representing 78% compatibility with the evaluation framework.

Despite these strengths, several limitations were identified. The book does not explain the author's views on language learning or teaching methodology, making it difficult for teachers and learners to understand the pedagogical principles underlying the material. Furthermore, no teacher's guide is available to support classroom implementation. The book also lacks communicative and interactive activities that would allow learners to practice vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Although it effectively supports visual and reading/writing learners, it provides limited opportunities for auditory and kinesthetic learning styles.

From a pedagogical perspective, the book can function effectively as a supplementary vocabulary resource in both classroom and self-study contexts. Teachers may use it to introduce and reinforce vocabulary knowledge, while providing additional communicative activities, games, discussions, role plays, and contextualized exercises to enhance language use. Future editions of the book would benefit from including methodological guidance, a teacher's handbook, and more interactive learning tasks to support diverse learning styles and promote communicative competence. Therefore, while the book serves as a valuable resource for vocabulary acquisition, supplementary instructional support is necessary to maximize its educational effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

In line with the study's objectives, the findings are further examined through the lens of established textbook evaluation theories to provide deeper insight. The first indicator examined is the intended audience. The book clearly targets children, which aligns with Sheldon's (1988) view that a good textbook should define its users, ensuring that the content and teaching approach are appropriate for the learners. The second indicator is proficiency level. Although not explicitly stated, the book is designed for beginners, which corresponds with Greene & Petty's (1975) assertion that textbooks must match learners' language abilities to maintain motivation and comprehension.

The third aspect is the context of use. The book includes content relevant to real-life communication and classroom settings, supporting Surtikanti's (2020) argument that textbooks should reflect authentic language use. In terms of language presentation and organization, the vocabulary is arranged thematically and systematically, making it accessible and easy to follow—an approach that aligns with Sheldon's (1988) principle of structured textbook design.

However, the book does not explicitly state the author's views on language or teaching methodology. According to Sheldon (1988), such guidance is essential as it influences how the material is delivered and understood by both teachers and students. Serving as a supplementary resource, the book meets 11 out of 14 criteria for a good textbook, offering vocabulary lists along with parts of

speech, proverbs, and common phrases to enrich students' vocabulary knowledge.

Despite these strengths, the absence of a teacher's book is a notable limitation. As Sheldon (1988) points out, support materials such as teacher guides and answer keys are crucial for enhancing interactivity and instructional structure. The book consistently presents vocabulary lists, aligning with Ur's (2009) guideline that effective vocabulary explanation is a hallmark of a quality textbook.

Visual aids, such as illustrations, are also present and help facilitate comprehension, particularly for visual learners, meeting Ur's (2009) criteria for appropriate visual support. Furthermore, the book demonstrates cultural inclusivity, showing no bias or discriminatory content, which supports the views of Sheldon (1988) and Surtikanti (2020) on fairness and cultural respect in textbooks.

In terms of grading and sequencing, the material progresses from simple to more complex vocabulary, consistent with the views of Sheldon (1988) and Ur (2009) that logical sequencing fosters gradual knowledge development. However, while the book caters to visual and reading/writing learning styles, it lacks content for auditory and kinesthetic learners. As noted by Cunningsworth (1995), a good textbook should address various learning preferences to effectively meet the needs of diverse students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that *500 Vocabulary Words Kids Need to Know* is a good vocabulary book, as it meets 14 out of 18 textbook criteria proposed by McDonough, Shaw, and Tomlinson. It is suitable for beginners, presents material clearly, and supports the learning process. However, some weaknesses remain, such as the absence of the authors' views on language and teaching methods, the lack of a teacher's guide, limited attention to different learning styles, and a shortage of communicative activities. In terms of vocabulary presentation, the book provides a clear list supported by engaging illustrations that aid comprehension. The vocabulary is relevant and appropriate

for beginner students, although it could be improved by including more contextual and communicative activities that encourage real-life language use.

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