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Turn-Taking in Task Instructions of the Grade 7 English for Nusantara Textbook

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the types and characteristics of turn-taking embedded in the task instructions of the English for Nusantara Grade 7 textbook used under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum. Turn-taking, the way speakers alternate roles in interaction, is an important yet underexplored dimension of textbook task design in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, this study examines 301 task instructions drawn from Chapters 1 to 5 of the textbook. Each instruction was coded with Littlejohn's (2011) Task Analysis framework to determine whether it positions learners as initiators, responders, or passive participants. The findings show that Scripted Respond tasks dominate the dataset (65.8%), followed by Not Required tasks (18.3%) and Initiate tasks (15.9%). This distribution indicates that learners are predominantly positioned as reactive participants rather than active initiators of classroom talk. Initiate tasks are characterized by open-ended verbs such as discuss, ask, and create, while Scripted Respond tasks rely on controlled verbs such as answer, complete, and write. The chapter-level analysis shows that this pattern is consistent across all five chapters, with no clear progression toward more learner-centered interaction. The study concludes that the textbook's task instructions tend to maintain a structured, teacher-centered interactional pattern that offers limited opportunities for learners to initiate meaningful communication. These findings suggest that teachers, textbook writers, and curriculum developers need to give greater attention to designing task instructions that promote active learner participation and communicative competence.

Keywords: Turn-Taking; Task Instructions; Textbook Analysis; Classroom Interaction; Task Analysis

Introduction

Textbooks occupy a central place in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs because they provide much of the language input and practice that learners encounter in the classroom (Richards, 2009). In Indonesia, English for Nusantara is the textbook prescribed nationally for Grade 7 under the Merdeka Curriculum. It contains themed units, reading texts, and a wide range of tasks intended to help learners meet the competencies required by the curriculum. Because teachers, particularly in large classes or with limited training, tend to rely heavily on the textbook's written instructions when conducting lessons, the way these instructions are phrased has a direct influence on classroom discourse. An instruction that implicitly assumes the teacher leads most of the talk restricts students to following prescribed steps, whereas an instruction that invites free student talk opens more opportunities for learner output.

One aspect of classroom discourse that is closely tied to task instructions is turn-taking, the system by which speakers alternate their turns in interaction (Sacks et al., 1974). In educational settings, this often follows an Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) sequence, in which the teacher initiates, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Seedhouse (2010) argues that such patterns are not incidental but are shaped by pedagogical design, so the way a task is worded sends strong cues about who will initiate talk and who will merely respond. Littlejohn's (2011) task analysis framework makes this link explicit: every textbook task can be examined in terms of whether it requires learners to produce a scripted response to given prompts, to initiate their own language, or to take no direct interactive role at all. For instance, an instruction such as "Student A asks Student B about his weekend; Student B answers" positions learners as initiator and responder in turn, whereas an instruction that merely directs students to read silently places them in a passive role. These three possibilities correspond to the roles of responder, initiator, and passive participant, and they carry different implications for how much learners get to practice authentic, self-generated language.

Although several studies have examined the English for Nusantara textbook, most have focused on its thematic structure, language content, or general task types (e.g., I. Damayanti & Mukarto, 2024; Febraningrum & Suroso, 2023; Inayah et al., 2022), while none has specifically analyzed the turn-taking roles embedded in its task instructions. This gap matters because, if a textbook's instructions predominantly elicit teacher-led turns or pre-scripted student replies, opportunities for spontaneous student talk and the development of communicative competence may be constrained (Canale & Swain, 1980). Identifying the types of turn-taking implied by the instructions, and how they are distributed and characterized, is therefore an important first step toward understanding how the textbook may facilitate or hinder active learner participation.

Accordingly, this study aims (1) to identify the types of turn-taking employed in the task instructions of the English for Nusantara Grade 7 textbook, and (2) to describe the characteristics of each identified type. By addressing these aims, the study is expected to contribute to the theoretical understanding of textbook analysis and classroom interaction, and to offer practical insights for teachers, textbook writers, and curriculum developers who wish to design task instructions that better support learner-initiated, communicative interaction.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach with content analysis as the primary method, since the aim was to interpret the interactional roles implied by task instructions rather than to measure variables numerically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Content analysis is a systematic technique for examining documents by identifying patterns, categories, and meanings within texts (Stemler, 2001), and it is commonly applied to textbooks and instructional materials to uncover implicit pedagogical assumptions (Weninger, 2018). Because turn-taking roles such as initiator, responder, and passive participant are not explicitly labeled in the textbook, qualitative interpretation guided by Littlejohn's (2011) Level 2 Task Analysis framework was required to infer these roles from the instructional language.

The data source was English for Nusantara (2022), the official Grade 7 textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum, and the data consisted of all task instructions found in Chapters 1 to 5, collected through documentation study of the textbook. A total of 301 task instructions were identified and treated as the units of analysis, following Littlejohn's (2011, p.198) definition of a task as "any proposal contained within the materials for action to be undertaken by the learners." The main research instrument was the researcher, supported by a textbook analysis checklist and an observation guide developed from Littlejohn's (2011) framework, which directed attention to required learner actions, turn-taking roles, and interactional configurations (individual, pair, group, or whole-class work). Each instruction was coded into one of three categories: Initiate (open, self-generated response), Scripted Respond (predetermined or limited response), or Not Required (no spoken participation).

Data analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) procedure of data condensation and data display. Data condensation involved extracting all task instructions while excluding non-instructional text such as reading passages, vocabulary lists, and grammar explanations, then coding each instruction by its implied turn-taking role. The coded data were then displayed in tables showing the frequency and percentage distribution of each category, both overall and across chapters, to facilitate systematic interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Findings

A total of 301 task instructions extracted from Chapters 1 to 5 of English for Nusantara (2022) were analyzed and categorized into three turn-taking types: Initiate (open response) tasks that require learners to produce self-generated language such as asking questions or expressing opinions; Scripted Response tasks that require learners to give predetermined or limited responses such as answering questions or completing sentences; and Not Required tasks that do not involve spoken participation, such as silent reading or listening.

Overall Distribution of Turn-Taking Types

Table 1 and Figure 1 present the overall frequency and percentage distribution of the three turn-taking types identified in the dataset.

Table 1. Overall Distribution of Turn-Taking Types

Turn-Taking Type	Frequency	Percentage
Initiate	48	15.9%
Scripted Respond	198	65.8%
Not Required	55	18.3%
Total	301	100%

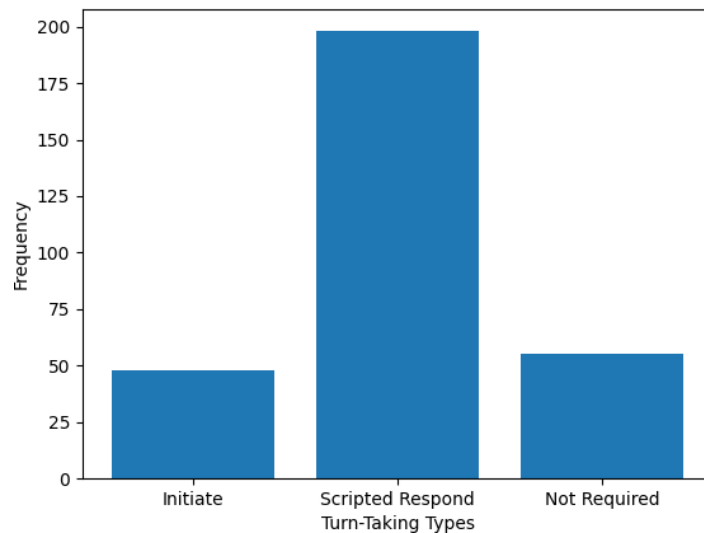


Figure 1. Overall Distribution of Turn-Taking Types

Scripted Respond tasks constitute the largest proportion of the dataset (65.8%), while Initiate tasks are comparatively limited (15.9%) and Not Required tasks account for 18.3% of all instructions. This distribution indicates a strong dominance of controlled-response activities: most instructions require learners to produce short, predetermined, or guided responses rather than to generate their own language, and opportunities for open-ended, learner-driven interaction are correspondingly limited. Overall, the textbook positions learners predominantly as responders rather than initiators, reflecting a reactive mode of participation that is explored further below.

Distribution of Turn-Taking Types Across Chapters

Table 2. Distribution of Turn-Taking Types Across Chapters

Chapter	Initiate f (%)	Scripted Respond f (%)	Not Required f (%)	Total
Chapter 1	8 (12.9%)	42 (67.7%)	12 (19.4%)	62
Chapter 2	10 (16.4%)	40 (65.6%)	11 (18.0%)	61
Chapter 3	9 (15.0%)	39 (65.0%)	12 (20.0%)	60
Chapter 4	12 (20.0%)	38 (63.3%)	10 (16.7%)	60
Chapter 5	9 (15.5%)	39 (67.2%)	10 (17.3%)	58
Total	48 (15.9%)	198 (65.8%)	55 (18.3%)	301 (100%)

Table 2 shows that the dominance of Scripted Respond tasks is consistent across all five chapters, ranging from 63.3% in Chapter 4 to 67.7% in Chapter 1. Initiate tasks remain the smallest category in every chapter, varying only modestly between 12.9% (Chapter 1) and 20.0% (Chapter 4), while Not Required tasks range from 16.7% to 20.0%. Although Chapter 4 shows a slightly higher proportion of Initiate tasks, this increase is not sustained in Chapter 5, indicating that the textbook does not demonstrate a clear progression toward more learner-centered interaction as chapters advance.

Characteristics of Each Turn-Taking Type

Beyond their frequency, the three turn-taking types differ qualitatively in their linguistic features, task structure, and interactional implications, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparative Characteristics of Turn-Taking Types

Feature	Initiate	Scripted Respond	Not Required
Learner role	Active	Reactive	Passive
Typical verbs	discuss, ask, create	answer, complete, write	listen, read, look
Output	Extended, self-generated	Short, predetermined	None
Interaction pattern	Peer- or group-based	Teacher- or textbook-led	None
Communicative potential	High	Limited	Absent

Initiate tasks, illustrated by instructions such as “Discuss the topic with your partner,” require learners to produce extended, unscripted language and typically involve pair or group interaction, giving them the highest communicative potential of the three categories. Scripted Respond tasks, exemplified by instructions like “Answer the questions based on the text” or “Complete the chart below,” restrict learners to short, fixed responses and position them mainly as respondents to teacher- or textbook-initiated prompts. Not Required tasks, such as “Listen to audio 1.1” or “Read aloud the expressions,” involve no learner speaking turn at all and position learners as passive participants whose role is limited to receiving input.

Discussion

The dominance of Scripted Respond tasks (65.8%) supports Littlejohn’s (2011) argument that textbook tasks often pre-structure classroom interaction by assigning learners a limited, reactive role. This pattern aligns closely with the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), in which the teacher initiates and evaluates while students merely respond, a structure that Walsh (2011) notes tends to centralize control in the teacher’s hands. The finding is consistent with previous research on Indonesian EFL textbooks: Puspa and Jazadi (2025) similarly found that an elementary English textbook positioned learners mainly as reactive participants, while Damayanti and Mukarto (2024) reported a predominance of form-focused, controlled activities in the same English for Nusantara series.

Only 15.9% of the task instructions fall under the Initiate category, suggesting that opportunities for learner-initiated turns are relatively scarce. From a Task-Based Language Teaching perspective, meaningful interaction and learner-generated output are essential for language acquisition (Ellis et al., 2019; Nunan, 2004), and tasks that involve asking questions or discussing ideas are more likely to promote the negotiation of meaning that drives second language development (Long, 1996). The limited presence of such tasks, together with the absence of a clear increase in Initiate tasks across chapters, suggests that the textbook does not consistently scaffold learners toward greater interactional independence.

Not Required tasks, comprising 18.3% of the dataset, involve no turn-taking and mainly consist of listening, reading, and individual writing activities. While such tasks are valuable for providing input and supporting comprehension, Seedhouse (2010) contends that tasks which do not require participation effectively exclude learners from the turn-

taking system altogether. In a context where teachers rely heavily on the textbook, as is common in Indonesian classrooms, this constraint on interaction is likely to be reflected in actual classroom discourse (Inayah et al., 2022).

Taken together, these findings support the view that textbooks function as prefigurative models of classroom interaction (Littlejohn, 2011): the wording of task instructions does not merely describe activities but actively shapes how interaction is likely to unfold. From the perspective of communicative language teaching, effective materials should give learners opportunities to initiate interaction, negotiate meaning, and engage in extended discourse (Canale & Swain, 1980). However, the predominance of scripted and non-interactive tasks in English for Nusantara suggests that these opportunities remain underrepresented. This does not mean the textbook is ineffective, but rather that it reflects a constrained pedagogical approach that combines communicative elements with traditional, form-focused practice (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017), and that may benefit from teacher adaptation to create more space for learner-initiated talk.

Viewed through Littlejohn's (2011) framework, the pattern that emerges across the three categories is systematic rather than incidental: Initiate tasks promote learner agency but remain limited in number; Scripted Respond tasks dominate and constrain interaction to short, predetermined exchanges; and Not Required tasks remove learners from turn-taking altogether. This consistent hierarchy, replicated across all five chapters analyzed, indicates that the interactional design of English for Nusantara is a stable feature of the textbook rather than a chapter-specific artifact, reinforcing the interpretation that the material favors controlled, teacher-centered participation over spontaneous, learner-driven communication.

Conclusion

This study set out to identify the types of turn-taking embedded in the task instructions of the English for Nusantara Grade 7 textbook and to describe the characteristics of each type, using Littlejohn's (2011) Task Analysis framework. The findings show that three types of turn-taking are present in the textbook: Initiate, Scripted Respond, and Not Required. Scripted Respond tasks dominate the dataset, accounting for 65.8% of all 301 task instructions analyzed, while Initiate tasks make up only 15.9% and Not Required tasks 18.3%. This distribution indicates that learner participation is predominantly structured in a reactive manner, with learners expected to respond to prompts rather than to initiate interaction. The chapter-level analysis further shows that this pattern is consistent across all five chapters, with only minor variation and no sustained progression toward more learner-centered interaction.

With regard to the characteristics of each type, Initiate tasks encourage learners to produce extended, self-generated language and to engage in peer interaction, but their limited frequency reduces their overall impact on the textbook's interactional design. Scripted Respond tasks mainly use directive verbs that elicit short, predetermined responses and reflect a teacher-controlled pattern of interaction, while Not Required tasks involve receptive or individual activities that remove learners from turn-taking altogether. Taken together, these findings suggest that English for Nusantara predominantly promotes a controlled, teacher-centered model of interaction that offers relatively limited opportunities for learners to initiate and sustain meaningful communication.

These findings carry several practical implications. Teachers are encouraged to expand closed tasks into open-ended activities, for example by turning "answer the

questions” into follow-up discussions, and to build in more opportunities for peer interaction even within tasks that are originally designed as individual or teacher-led. Textbook writers and curriculum developers may consider increasing the proportion of Initiate tasks, ensuring a clearer progression from controlled to open-ended activities across chapters, and providing interactional scaffolding such as models and prompts to support learners in more open-ended communication. Future research could extend this study by observing how these task instructions are actually implemented in real classrooms, by examining other aspects of Littlejohn’s framework such as interactional configuration, or by comparing turn-taking patterns across different textbooks and grade levels.

In conclusion, while English for Nusantara offers structured and pedagogically organized tasks, its turn-taking patterns may constrain the development of learners’ interactional competence unless supplemented by teacher adaptation. A more balanced, interaction-oriented design of task instructions is essential for fostering active, meaningful, and communicative English language use among Indonesian junior high school learners.

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