

IN NEED OF CRITERIA TO EVALUATE ELT TEXT BOOKS

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Abstract: *With reference to the introduction of English teaching at the Primary Schools in Indonesia, textbooks are very important things to deal with due to the fact that these are considered as “the visible heart of the ELT programme” for both students and teachers (Sheldon 1988:237). To meet the needs of the textbooks, schools buy textbooks commercially published by local and foreign publishers, whose writers are native speakers. They normally live in their own culture, and therefore find it hard to compose data beyond their own cultural boundaries. As a result, the definition and application of systematic criteria for assessing those published by local as well as foreign publishers are vital. By identifying the potential strengths and weaknesses of textbooks in general with the suggested criteria, the teacher will have a comparative basis for making decisions and he/she is unlikely to make a bad choice of textbooks.*

Keywords: *ELT (English Language Teaching), criteria, textbook, Primary School*

INTRODUCTION

The unsatisfactory results of teaching English in general, as a matter of fact, cannot be caused by only one factor since so many interrelating factors, such as the teacher, student, methodology, classroom quality, teaching-learning atmosphere and materials, might be involved. It could be the teacher who cannot teach with appropriate strategies. It could be the students themselves, who have no strong motivation and a poor attitude

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towards the English language. Other factors could be teaching materials that are not based on the real daily needs of learners, the teacher's inability to adjust or adapt the assigned textbooks to the situation of the students, the teacher's inability to produce materials for particular students, or any combination of all of them.

In response to the above mentioned problem, the Department of Education of the Republic of Indonesia has launched a program of reform. Syllabuses have been revised several times (1968, 1975, 1984), textbooks have been revised accordingly (*English for SLTP*, 1976, *English for SLTA*, 1976, *Bahasa Inggris E untuk SMP*, 1988, and *Bahasa Inggris E untuk SMA*, 1988) and upgrading courses for English teachers have been held in many places. Yet, progress seems to be very slow in our efforts to improve the teaching of English in Indonesia.

Age is thought to be an important factor to consider in the hope of being able to achieve a breakthrough in these efforts. The government of Indonesia, therefore, decided to extend teaching English to Primary Schools. Since the academic year 1994, English has been taught as an elective subject to Primary School students according to local needs. According to Nababan (1993), the introduction of English at Primary School seems to have stemmed from three arguments. Firstly, various areas of Indonesia need their people to be able to speak English in view of the demands of the tourist industry. Secondly, some educators believe that the earlier a child learns a foreign language, the better his chance of acquiring a high proficiency in the language. Thirdly, it is closely related to the second argument; the longer a person learns a language, the higher the proficiency he will achieve.

In general the evidence about whether young learners learn language better or more efficiently than older children or adults is unclear. What is clear, though, is that effective teachers can help learners to progress rapidly at any level of schooling (Brumfit, 1990:vi). He further mentions that children have fewer negative attitudes to foreign languages and cultures than adults; consequently they are better motivated than adults. Compared to adults, children devote vast quantities of time to language learning. Therefore, they are better because they do more of it.

With reference to the introduction of English teaching at the Primary Schools in Indonesia, the discussion will concentrate on textbooks due to the fact that these are considered as an important factor for both students and teachers in an English teaching and learning process. Due to the

unavailability of textbooks from the government, schools will definitely buy textbooks commercially published by both local and foreign publishers. As a result, in order to meet the urgent need of textbooks, the definition and application of systematic criteria for assessing those published by local as well as foreign publishers are vital. Therefore, in this article, I will suggest some criteria for textbook evaluation, which, I think, is most suitable for Primary Schools in Indonesia.

SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR TEXTBOOK EVALUATION

There are a number of articles dealing with the criteria for evaluating textbooks and materials (Sheldon 1988:237-146; Cunningsworth 1987:45-54; Breen and Candlin 1987:13-28; Williams 1983:251-5; Dendrinis 1992:17-18) and those for developing and designing ELT materials (Allwright 1981:6-16; Block 1991:211-7; Clarke 1989:133-141; Nunan 1989:1-24).

In addition, various kinds of questionnaires have been designed by Williams (1983), Breen and Candlin (1987), Kitto (1987), and Sheldon (1988), the criteria of whom have similarities and differences. Such criteria as method (William, Kitto, and Cunningsworth), culture (Sheldon and Williams) are implicitly stated. Breen and Candlin provide an interactive, stepbystep consumer's guide to help teachers to make practical and informed textbooks decision. Kitto emphasizes "the financial and practical pressure exerted on judgment made by such purchasers who, because of concern and maximization of profit and the student's consumability of textbooks, frequently have priorities at odds with those of teachers" (Sheldon, 1988:7).

Sheldon (1988:7) further points out "any culturally restricted, global list of criteria can never really apply in most local environments, without considerable modification." Similarly, Williams (1983) mentions how evaluative statements can be generated from this framework and how such statements can be weighed to suit a particular language teaching environment or educational level. Therefore, in this chapter, I would like to present the criteria for textbook evaluation, which, I think, is most suitable for Primary Schools in Indonesia.

GUIDANCE

Textbooks should provide appropriate guidance for teachers, especially nonnative teachers of English. Williams (1983:251-255) shows the

relationship between the untrained or less qualified teachers and their dependence on the textbooks as follows:

This does not mean, of course, that the method demonstrated in the textbook is always fruitfully reflected in the methods as practised by the teacher. It is ironically that those teachers who rely mostly heavily on the textbooks are the ones less qualified to interpret its content and method.

Tape scripts, vocabulary lists, answer keys, structural/functional inventories, cultural notes, and lesson summaries provided in the Teachers' Book are teacher's supporting materials. The following is an example of a cultural note taken from *OK Teacher's Book*. This cultural note is very important for nonnative teachers to know before the actual teaching learning process begins.

Mr and Mrs Bonds, Miss Fox
Explain that Mr and Mrs are used with surnames when you talk to adults. They cannot be used on their own without a name afterwards.
Explain that Miss is used with the surname when you talk to an unmarried woman, and can be used on its own. Students may see Ms.
Explain that this is used about both married and unmarried women.

Figure 1: Cultural notes taken from *OK 1 Teacher's Book* by Bolton (1989:6)

Unlike English people, Indonesian people, specifically the Javanese, mostly do not have surnames; therefore, using titles such as Mr., Mrs, Miss, Ms., Sir, and Madam might result in difficulty on the part of the learners without the teacher's clear explanation.

Sheldon (1988:243) points out that one needs to see whether a textbook has indexes, vocabulary lists, section headings and other methods of signposting the content that allow the students to use the materials easily, especially for revision or self study purpose and gives clear advice to the learner about how the book and its content could be most effectively exploited

Some textbooks provide answer keys in the student book and some others provide them in the teacher's book. Based on personal experience of teaching Junior High School and Senior High School, I have found that there is a disadvantage in providing the student book with the answer keys because the students tend to memorize the keys without knowing the meaning and refer to them when they are given homework assignments.

The application of this criterion to the selection of ELT textbooks for Primary Schools in Indonesia is that the student books should not be provided with the answer keys but that they should be put in the teacher's book. The students are so immature that they are tempted to refer to the keys before they actually do the assignment. As a result, the lesson will not be challenging any more because they will already know the answers. They tend to memorize the answer keys and know nothing when the teacher asks them to explain the answer.

Furthermore, lack of such information as guidance for teachers may result in their ignoring the writer's intention, in that minimal pairs of lead/lid and seat/sit should be used for pronunciation practice, and not merely just for teaching their meanings.

METHODOLOGY

Williams (1983), Cunningsworth (1979) and Kitto (1987) point to methodology as one of the criteria in selecting textbooks. According to Cunningsworth, methodology covers the approach the textbooks use for language teaching (learner-centred or teachercentred), the way new items are presented, the kinds of activities used for language practice, the way meaning (grammatical meaning or lexical meaning), and the phonological system are taught (sound production, stress, rhythm, and intonation). Williams (1983:251) emphasizes the uptodate methodology textbooks must be "consistent with the psychological and linguistic principles underlying current accepted methods of second language learning". Similarly, Breen and Candlin (1987) point to whether the materials are appropriate to the learners' own approach to language learning and to the classroom teaching/learning process as a criterion in selecting a textbook.

The application of this criterion to the selection of Elementary School textbooks is that the methodology used by textbooks must be based on the National Curriculum in terms of methodology.

RELEVANCE TO THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

According to Adaskou, Britten, and Fashi (1990), there are various dimensions involved in language teaching. The first dimension is aesthetic sense in which a language is associated with literature, films, and music of a particular country. The implication is that teaching materials may be based on literary texts. The second dimension is the sociological sense of a culture,

in which language is linked with the customs and institutions of a country. The implication is that the materials will be connected with information about such things as family life, education, and holidays. The third dimension is the semantic sense in which a culture's conceptual system is embodied. This, in turn, conditions the culture's perceptions and thought processes. In order to teach the semantic sense of a culture, classroom materials might include, for example, the vocabulary needed to describe family relationships, vocabulary for which there might be no direct equivalent in the learner's mother tongue. The last dimension is the pragmatic sense of a culture, which determines what language is appropriate for what contexts. If the curriculum deals with the sense of culture, classroom materials might include such items as how to politely refuse an invitation or how to complain about service. To the extent that such rules of speaking differ crossculturally, it is difficult to know whose culturally determined standards of politeness apply to curriculum.

Due to the close relationship between culture and language teaching, culture is used as one of the criteria in evaluating textbook. Sheldon (1988:244) puts an emphasis on such factors as whether the course book enshrines stereotyped, inaccurate, condescending or offensive images of gender, race, social class, or nationality, whether the author's sense of humour or philosophy is obvious or appropriate, or whether accurate or 'sanitized' views of the USA and Britain are presented; uncomfortable social realities (e.g. unemployment, poverty, family breakdown, racism) are left out. The following is an illustration of the writer's humour, which might be inappropriate for the textbook illustration.

Some people might be offended by this illustration as teaching material as seen in Figure 2, because it is uncommon to find a peanut butter or jelly sandwich in such a food stall. The only place where people can buy such things is in the supermarket.

There are second language problems in learning vocabulary and syntax that arise from differences between the cultures associated with the target language and the mother tongue. In certain 'grey areas of usage', acceptability may best be determined by reference to socio-cultural norms. ESL textbook writers need to be sensitive to shifts in usage that are due to the worldwide spread of English (Williams 1983).

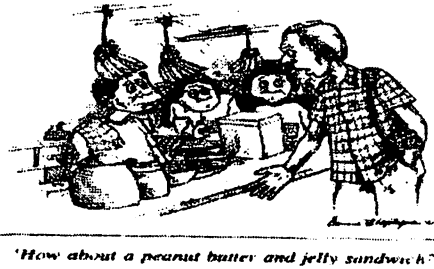


Figure 2: Cultural notes taken from *Cultural Shock-Indonesia* by Draine (1991:59).

The following task (see Figure 3) comparing differences on holidays, gestures, learning styles, sex roles, and emotional behavior can also help to foster better cross cultural understanding.



How do you greet people in your country? Do you?
What do you think the British people do? Discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Report your discussion to the class.

Figure 3: Cross cultural activities taken from Nolasco (1990:7)

NEEDS FOR THE LEARNERS


In order to see whether a textbook is good or not for learners, we have to see whether it is appropriate to their needs and interests and whether it offers them the chance to develop their language knowledge and capabilities.

In connection with the needs of the learners, Halliwell (1992:115), similarly, presents a list of questions as a guideline as follows:

Does the book provide much for them to do independently? ... Does it give them activities and tasks that are interesting and worthwhile in themselves and which are not just language exercises? ... Does it provide plenty for those children who cannot yet read write with confidence?

The following task (see Figure 4) offers the students the chance to develop their writing skill and provide much for them to work independently:

Use the information below in the table to write sentences about Ratno, Heru, and Susanto



	Ratno	Heru	Susanto
wears glasses	✓	✓	✓
has short hair	✓	X	✓
plays tennis	X	X	✓
likes sport	✓	X	✓
likes music	✓	✓	✓
likes reading	X	X	X
likes cycling	✓	✓	✓
collects stamps	X	X	✓
has a large family	✓	✓	✓
is good in science	X	✓	✓
is good in English	✓	✓	X
is good at geography	X	X	X
is good at addition	✓	✓	✓

Figure 4: Writing (Richard and Markus, 1983:20)

CURRICULUM

None of the above writers explicitly mentions the word curriculum as one of the criteria in textbook evaluation. Nunan (1989) points out the importance of the linkage between curriculum and ELT materials. I, therefore, would like to argue that it is quite important to see whether the textbooks are closely linked to the curriculum they serve, not only in designing the

teaching materials but also in evaluating the textbooks which are commercially published by the local as well as foreign publishers.

In assisting teachers in selecting which teaching materials will be most appropriate to their own language learners, Breen (1987) provides teachers with questions to help them explore what they can use materials for in the classroom. He further mentions that this guide has both an 'evaluative and a design aspect'. Questions such as "Are the materials appropriate to your learners? How and to what extent do the materials fit your learners' long-term goals in learning the language and/or following your course?" are closely related to curriculum because the objectives of learning a language are stated in the curriculum.

Similarly, Sheldon (1988:244-245) implicitly mentions curriculum as one of the criteria in evaluating the textbooks and materials in different terms, educational validity and user definition, as follows:

Is there a clear clarification of the target age range, culture, assumed background, probable learning preferences, and educational expectations? Does the textbook take account of, and seems to be in tune with, broader educational concerns (e.g. the nature and roles of learning skills, concept of development in younger learners, function of 'knowledge of the world' exploitation of sensitive issues, values of metaphor as a powerful cognitive learning device.

To respond to such questions, we need to refer to the curriculum, in which we can find the objectives of teaching and learning English, expected cultural content in the textbooks, the target age range, etc.

However, while we are discussing the curriculum as one of the criteria for selection, the government, unfortunately, has not yet even issued the curriculum for English teaching in the Primary School, although, they have already issued the English curriculum for SMP (Junior High School) and SMA (Senior High School). As teaching and learning of English from the Primary School to High school is a process of continuum, logically the English teaching and learning in the Primary School as the bottom rung of the education ladder constitutes the basis of that in higher levels.

In addition to the five criteria mentioned above, there are some other criteria a teacher needs to consider when he/she selects and evaluates textbooks for students.

- a. Cunningsworth (1979) puts emphasis on whether the textbooks require a high degree of teacher input and whether the material is almost self-sufficient. Similarly, Sheldon mentions whether the textbook is complete enough to stand on its own or whether a teacher must produce bridging materials to make it workable.
- b. Layout and graphics are also important criteria for textbook selection. Primary School students will be interested in the textbooks with good layouts and graphics, and colourful, functional, and appealing artwork and typefaces.
- c. One of the important criteria is whether the textbook can be exploited or modified as required by local circumstances. In my opinion, in connection with the fact that English must be based on local content, the textbook must be able to be exploited or modified as required by local circumstances.
- d. In Indonesia, most students should buy the textbook themselves; therefore, its price must be taken into consideration. The ELT books published abroad, for example in the UK and the States, are very expensive and beyond the students' capability.

Halliwell (1992) says that choosing a book is always something of a leap in the dark. It may be that the teacher will not have a really good picture of its suitability until he has been working through it for sometime. However, by identifying the potential strengths and weaknesses of textbooks in general with the above criteria, the teacher will have a comparative basis for making decisions and he/she is unlikely to make a bad choice of textbook. However, it would be even better if the teacher could discuss the matter with another teacher or a group of teachers by using the above criteria. He/she can discuss with them points where his/her judgements are the same or differ and follow this by discussing which elements he/she considers essential and which of them he/she is willing to compensate for. Finally, he/she can exchange ideas of how to compensate for the shortcomings of the textbook.

However, it is particularly true, when it comes to setting up real language use that the book the teacher has already chosen, at some stage, is not completely suitable. Halliwell says that

This is something he/she can do better than the textbook because the teacher is the one who is in a position to set up real communication much more easily than the average textbook can. The book can provide the material but

it is usually the teacher who can best organise the events, which turn that material into a real language exchange (1992:117).

CONCLUSION

The definition and application of systematic criteria for assessing textbooks published by local as well as foreign publishers are vital due to the unavailability of those published by the government. The rationale for the need of the criteria stems from the fact that most commercially published ELT Materials focus on elements about target language culture. Most of the textbook writers who claim that their books are made use of in both EFL and ESL contexts are native speakers. They normally live in their own culture, and therefore find it hard to compose data beyond their own cultural boundaries. As a result, other learners from other societies such as Indonesia find it difficult making use of them on account of their irrelevance to their own culture.

By identifying the potential strengths and weaknesses of textbooks in general with the above criteria, the teacher will have a comparative basis for making decision and he/she is unlikely to make a bad choice of textbook.

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