

PROCEEDING

THE 53rd INTERNATIONAL

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***"Multilingual Education in Indonesia :
Issues and Concerns"***

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YOGYAKARTA**

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Schedule of The International TEFLIN Conference

In Search of the Ideal English Textbook

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Abstract: The inclusion of a textbook in the process of English teaching in a classroom is inevitable. Realizing the importance of the textbook to gain the success of English teaching at school, teachers need to be given knowledge on how to select a good textbook. However, they do not seem to use the correct criteria to decide which of the offered books will be able to be used effectively in the classroom context. They forgot the importance of determining the criteria for textbook evaluation. Such ignorance cause to the poor quality of textbook they have to use. Consequently they encounter a lot of difficulties in using the textbooks which lead to the inefficiency, if not the failure, of the English teaching. In this paper the writer reminds the teachers of the importance of making correct decision in selecting the textbook. The criteria for textbooks evaluation are also offered openly so that teachers can add more if they think necessary.

A. Introduction

The success of English teaching in general is caused by a lot of factors such as teachers, teaching methods, students, facilities, materials, etc. All of these factors are of the same importance. Each has its own role in making the teaching of English success. Each of them is interrelated to one another. Consequently all of them need to be given equal concern. If any of them is neglected, usually the teaching of English will not be satisfactorily successful or even it will fail.

As one of the important factors, a textbook will determine the major part of the classroom teaching and the students' out-of-class learning. When a textbook is prepared, the author has already decided what the students will learn, how they will learn it and which sections of the book should be given more emphasis. However, a textbook or instructional material usually gets insufficient attention from the teacher. Some teachers do not judge their choice of textbooks based on sound considerations. They judge their choice based on matters other than effective teaching principles. Although some teachers consider that textbooks can influence the creativity of them and hamper their teacher's autonomy, a lot more teachers believe that textbooks help them much. The less experienced-teachers can take a lot of advantages of them, especially when the textbooks meet all the suggested criteria.

In this paper the writer will elaborate the principle advantages a good textbook can offer to teachers as proposed by some experts. Then in the next discussion he will present some criteria of a textbook evaluation.

B. The Advantages of Using Textbooks

It is no doubt that a textbook offer a lot of advantages not only for techers but also for students. As quoted by Richard and Renandya (2001), Crawford lists some principles advantages of using a textbook in a classroom.

1. It provides structure and a syllabus for a program. A textbook tells the users the central core and a previously well and systematically planned syllabus. Without a textbook, a program may loose the central core.
2. It helps standardize instruction. It is possible that a school has several parallel classes and it is a textbook which will ensure the teacher as well as the students that they will receive similar materials. Without a textbook, they me be given different materials.
3. It maintains quality. If a textbook is well developed, the materials must have been tried and tested based on the reliable learning principles. The students will be exposed to such materials which are paced appropriately.
4. It provides a variety of learning resources. A textbook is often accompanied by such resources as workbooks, CDs, cassettes, videos, comprehensive teaching guides which provide a rich and varied resource for both teachers and learners. This will automatically help teachers teach better and the students will receive varied materials.
5. It is efficient. With an available textbook a teacher does not need to spend his time producing materials as it is really timing consuming. He can save his time to have better preparation instead.

6. It can provide effective language models and input. A non native English teacher can take the benefit of a textbook as it generates accurate language input.
7. It can train teachers. A teacher with limited experience usually relies much on a textbook. He can take the benefit of it only if it is accompanied by the teacher's book (manual) which can serve as a medium of initial teacher training.
8. It is visually appealing. A textbook which is commercially published is usually designed in such a way that it appeals to the learners and teachers.

A good textbook is designed based on a lot of consideration such as curriculum, learning principles, topics, teaching points, activities, instruction etc. It is designed in such a way that it will offer advantages to a teacher and students. These advantages can only be taken if a teacher is capable of selecting a textbook for him and his students. The problem is that, in fact, teachers do not know how to select a textbook which is good for him and his students. The failure of deciding which textbook he is going to use will cause difficulties in teaching his students. Therefore a teacher needs to know the criteria of evaluating a textbook.

C. General Criteria for Textbook Evaluation

It is very important that a teacher know for what qualities he should consider before he decides to use a textbook. There are many authors who offer similar criteria for selecting a textbook and instructional material. In this part of discussion, however, the writer will present the criteria or major areas which are offered by Rivers (1985: 476-483) and Robinet as adapted by Brown (2001: 142) and Halliwell (1993: 114-115).

Rivers proposes some major areas which should be evaluated in relation to the local situation.

1. Appropriateness for local situation. These include purposes of the course in relation to content of textbook; age and abilities of students; length and intensity of course. In short the need of the schools, the teachers as well as the learners should be matched.
2. Appropriateness for a teacher and students. In the textbook there should be suggested methods and techniques; supplementary aids; teacher's manual and students' workbook; convenience. These things are very important as not all teachers are very well experienced. Many are new teachers who need guidance in making the class successful as well as interesting.
3. Language and ideational content. It covers authentic language, realistic activity practice, and interesting reading material.
4. Linguistic coverage and organization. Selection of linguistic material, unit design, treatment of specific topic (grammatical, phonological, and lexical) is carefully considered.
5. Types of activities. The textbook should offer variety of types of activities, dialogues in realistic situation, actual communication in speech and writing. Monotonous activities which can cause boredom for the students have to be avoided.
6. Practical considerations. These deal with physical features; price; availability. Teachers need to know whether it is physically interesting; the price is affordable and it is easy to find.
7. Enjoyment index (for students and teachers). The textbook should enable the teacher enjoy working with it and that it offers scope for individual teaching styles. Besides, it should also offer interesting activities for students.

Robinet proposes similar criteria with what Rivers has suggested. However, he adds some wider elements to give better understanding to teachers.

1. Goals of the course. A teacher needs to know whether the textbook accomplishes his goal of the course or not. For secondary high schools, teachers need to find out whether the book is developed based on the suggested curriculum.
2. Background of the students. He needs to make sure that the textbook fits the students' backgrounds of age, native language and culture, educational background and motivation or purpose for learning English.
3. Approach. He should find out whether theoretical approach reflected in the book reflects a philosophy that he, his institution and his students can easily identify with. It includes the theories of learning and the theory of language. This is quite difficult to identify unless the manual of presenting the textbook is available.
4. Language skill. Does the textbook integrate the "four skills"? Is there a balanced approach toward the skill? Does the textbook emphasize skills which the curriculum also emphasizes? The four skills include listening, speaking, reading and writing. To get to know it, the teacher should previously know the curriculum well.

5. General content. The teacher has to evaluate whether the textbook reflect what is now known about language and language learning. It covers validity, authenticity of language, appropriateness and currency of topics, situation and contexts and proficiency level.
6. Quality and practice material. Are the exercises composed in such a way that they vary from controlled to free? Are the directions clear for both students and teachers? Is the active participation of students encouraged effectively? Is the grammatical and other linguistic explanation presented inductively or deductively? Is the review material and/or exercise sufficient?
7. Sequencing. He needs to see how the textbook is sequenced. Is it sequenced by grammatical structures, by skills, by situations or by some combination of the above? Is the sequence consistent from one unit to another?
8. Vocabulary. Does the textbook pay sufficient attention to words and word study? It includes relevance, frequency and strategies for word analysis. It is necessary as students are expected to acquire more and more new words through texts in their textbook.
9. General sociolinguistic factors. Does the textbook provide variety of English such as, American, British, dialects, or international varieties? Is there a cultural bias (in term of cultural content)? Is the culture difference explained clearly? Does it lead to cross cultural understanding?
10. Format (Is the textbook attractive, useable, and durable? It covers the clarity of typesetting, use of special notation (phonetic symbols, stress/intonation marking, etc., quality and clarity of illustrations, general layout (is it comfortable and not too "busy"), size of the textbook and binding, quality of editing, index, table of contents, and chapter heading.
11. Accompanying materials. Are useful supplementary materials available? They include workbook, tapes (audio and/or video), posters, flashcards, etc., a set of tests. These supplementary materials are vital as they will help teachers perform better in the class to make the students interested. Besides the students will also have enough practice.
12. Teacher's guide or teacher's book. Is it available? Is it useful? Does it contain methodological guidance, alternatives and supplementary exercises, suitability for nonnative speaking teacher and answer keys?

In Indonesia not many textbooks are published together with the teacher's manual and accompanying materials. If there is, the manual is not comprehensive enough and usually the accompanying materials are very limited. Whereas actually, good textbooks should have teacher's manual which is supplemented with accompanying materials. Producing a good manual can require a lot of deliberation and may affect the development of the textbook itself. Generally, the longer the manual, the more good things-such as teaching ideas and supplemental activities- it has and the more useful it will be. Features to look for in a teacher's book include interleaving-putting the manual and the student's book together; comprehensive vocabulary lists; additional activities perhaps pictures, and clear teaching procedure or presentation not only of the lesson but also the strategy behind the textbook.

Halliwell (1992: 114) proposes several questions which are divided into two, one from the point of view of the teacher and the other one from the point of view of students. All the questions deal with what the textbook offers. In detail the questions are as follows:

1. From the Point of View of the Teacher
 - a. Whether the book's priorities match with the teacher's priorities. For example: If the teacher takes learning through communicating as his priorities, does the book aim to set up genuine interaction? Real language use?
 - b. Whether the book seems to do what it claims to do. For example: If it claims to set up real language use, does it provide pairwork which really involves communication and not just learnt dialogues? If a textbook is claimed to be developed based on competency, does it give enough chance to the students to explore and be creative?
 - c. If it is clear how to use the book.
 - d. If the book is clearly structured and sequenced.
 - e. Whether the book provides integrated revision of key items.
 - f. If there are additional materials provided which the teacher personally can't otherwise obtain for example: authentic materials, native speaker tapes.
 - g. Whether it offers lots of practical ideas.
 - h. Whether the book develops a balance of the language skills of listening, reading, writing which suits the teacher's needs.
 - i. Whether it provides plenty of varied practice of any one set of language items.

- j. Whether it helps the teacher to set tests if they are required by the school.
- k. Whether it manages to avoid sexual, racial and cultural stereotypes.
- 2. From the Point of View of the Students
 - l. Whether the book looks interesting and fun?
 - m. Whether the students can easily see what they have to do.
 - n. Whether the book provide much for them to do independently.
 - o. Whether the book gives them activities and tasks which are interesting and worthwhile in themselves and which are not just language exercises.
 - p. Whether the book provides plenty for those children who cannot yet read and write with confidence, if it is intended for young learners.

These sets of criteria are not all. The teacher or the decision maker is given freedom to formulate his or her own questions to ask as the criteria before the decision is made. Some questions above deal with the procedure of presenting the materials or how to use the book and additional materials as the supplement to make the teaching and learning process interesting. To make sure whether the book meets such requirements, the teacher can ask whether the book is accompanied with the teacher's book or the manual on how to use the book. If so, the teacher can ask further questions whether the teacher's book provides alternatives and suggests other possible activities for teachers.

The above criteria are not fixed. Teachers, based on their own consideration, may add more. Tomlisan and Masuhara (2004) suggest that a teacher needs to develop their own criteria to evaluate textbooks. It is because they know better what they and their students need. For example; Budiyan (2002) argues that curriculum be included explicitly as one of the primary criteria and that a text book be written by Authors who know the culture of the target learners.

D. The Inclusion of Moral Teaching

A good textbook is not only the one which meets all the general criteria above but also the one which offers moral teachings. Moral teaching is usually formulated in the curriculum. In Indonesia, teachers have to be aware that the goal of national education is "*.... Untuk membentuk manusia Indonesia seutuhnya sesuai dengan fitrahnya, yaitu pribadi yang beriman dan bertakwa kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, berakhlak mulia, demokratis menjunjung tinggi hak asasi manusia.....*" (RUU Sisdiknas, 2001). The teacher needs to consider whether the textbook he is selecting can be one of the media to achieve this goal or not. He needs to check whether the textbook contains moral teachings which lead to the character building of the students. Lessons of honesty, respect, democracy, hard working, creativity, responsibility, independence, helping others etc. need to be explicitly exposed in each unit.

E. Closing

A textbook is in fact a indispensable tool for a teacher as it helps him and his students much. It is a framework which regulates and times the program. In many situation it can serve as a syllabus. It provides ready-made teaching text and learning tasks. It is also a cheap way of providing learning materials. For inexperienced teachers, it offers security, guidance and support. For students, no textbook means no purpose. Without a textbook, they will think that their learning is not taken seriously; besides they will be out of focus and teacher-dependent.

A teacher needs to base his considerations on the general criteria and the inclusion of moral teachings before he decides to choose a certain text book. It is not an easy job especially when there are many alternative textbooks and they almost have all the criteria suggested. When such situation happens, a teacher needs to weigh each of the criteria and score it. It will be better and less brain squeezing if he can work together with his colleagues. As what Halliwell says (1993: 114) choosing a textbook for whole class use is always something of a leap in the dark. It is very possible that a teacher will not have a really good picture of its suitability until he or she has been working through it for sometime. It is also suggested by Tomlisan and Masuhara (2004: 3-5) that textbook evaluation can be carried out before, while and after using the textbook (pre-use evaluation, whilst-use evaluation and post-use evaluation). However, identifying the potential strengths of a textbook generally can give us a starting point for looking at the strengths or weaknesses of any specific book.

No textbook is perfect. No mater whether is has been designed very well, it still cannot meet all the criteria the teachers want. It is impossible to find a textbook which interest everyone. Therefore, how "perfect" it is, it is just a simple tool in the hand of a teacher. He cannot expect to work miracles with it. He is the one who is in charge of working it out to make the teaching success.

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