

## AN EVALUATION OF READING MATERIALS IN “ENGLISH IN FOCUS” TEXTBOOK FOR SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS IN ONE OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN BANDUNG

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**Abstract:** This study was intended to evaluate the reading materials on “English in Focus” textbook for seventh grade students published by the National Department of Education in Indonesia in 2008 based on good reading materials and to investigate the teachers’ perception about the textbook. The evaluation criteria is based on the good reading materials criteria by Patel and Jain (2008). The study was employed descriptive-qualitative method with checklist and interview as its instrument to collect and identify the data. The results show that the reading materials in the textbook fulfill the criteria of good reading materials. Furthermore, the results from the interview show that the teachers’ perception about the book is sufficiently good.

**Keywords:** *textbook, reading materials, materials evaluation*

### Introduction

The teaching and learning materials play some roles in language learning. The teaching and learning materials is a key component in language program Richards and Renandya (2001). The teachers and the learners can use the materials to facilitate the teaching and learning process. In addition, the materials also act as an exposure of language for learners, which imply on that the materials need to present real language, as it is used, and the full range that learner requires (Evans and John, 2009). Ball and Cohen (1996) mentioned that materials are the stuff of lesson and units, of what teachers and students do in the classroom. Materials specifically defined as any systematic

description of the techniques and exercises to be used in classroom teaching (Brown, 1995). Thus, though the forms of materials are various, their main function is to facilitate the learning of a language (Sorohiti, 2005).

#### • Reading Materials

Reading materials that can be found in an English textbook usually provide with texts, dialogue or any piece of information data and it becomes important materials input in reading session (Hutchinson and Waters, 1994, p.108). Nunan (1991) stated that authentic texts should be introduced into the learning situation. According to syllabus for Junior High School students, the standard

competences of reading mentioned that students hoped to understand meaning of short and simple functional text and short essay that is related to the students' closest real life context. From this standard competence, the basic competence that the students have to develop that they are supposed to be able to respond the meaning and the rhetoric procedure of simple short functional texts and essays which are based on students' own real life context, in the form of instructions, shopping list, congratulatory, announcement, descriptive and procedure.

The reading materials in textbook also provide number of things, such as stimulus materials for activities and tasks. An enjoyable activity that engage the learners' thinking capacity should be provided within the materials (Hutchinson and Waters, 1994, p.107). Besides, the main purpose of language learning is language use. Materials should be designed to lead towards a communication task in which learners use the content and language knowledge they have built up through the unit. This provide opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills.

Reading can help students learn to think in a target language, broaden their vocabulary, improve their writing, and find out about new ideas, facts, and

experiences (Mikulecky and Jeffries, 1996, p.1). From the reading materials in the textbook, the students can learn many kinds of text that can broaden their knowledge. The reading materials in the textbook become important thing in reading session, so that it can help the students to develop their reading skill.

- **Reading Materials Criteria**

There are several criteria of good reading materials set by Patel and Jain (2008). The researcher are used the criteria to specifically evaluate the reading materials in "English in Focus" textbook. Those criteria are:

1. The subject matter should be well graded;
2. The words and structure are carefully graded; and
3. Clear and unambiguous instruction should be given alongside the practice and exercise.

- **Materials Evaluation**

Evaluation is a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose (Hutchinson and Waters, 1994 p. 96). McGrath (2002) uses Cunningsworth's point of view that course materials are not intrinsically good or bad, rather they are more or less effective in helping learners to reach particular goals in specific contexts.

Dickins and Germaine (1994) states “evaluation is an intrinsic part of teaching and learning”. Evaluation plays a key role in education and it is important for the teacher since it can provide valuable information for the future going of classroom practice, the planning of courses and management of learning tasks by students. Finally, evaluation is essential for the use of instructional materials such as textbooks.

There are some methods of evaluation that can be used to evaluate teaching and learning materials. McGrath (2002), differentiate three methods, which are impressionistic method, in-depth method and checklist method. Impressionistic method is an analysis method that concerned to obtain a general impression of the materials with just by looking through it and getting an overview of strengths and weaknesses. In-depth method can give detailed information about language description, grounded learning value used by the materials and whether the materials fulfill the claims that are being made for them. Checklist method used checklist as a tool for evaluating the materials. The evaluation checklist consists of a list of items with the purpose to compare, identify and verify the information within the materials.

This research will use the checklist method suggested by McGrath in evaluating the reading materials on the English textbook entitled “English in Focus”. An evaluation checklist is an instrument that helps practitioners in English Language Teaching (ELT) evaluate language teaching materials. It allows a more sophisticated evaluation of the materials in reference to a set of generalizable evaluation criteria. McGrath (2002) mentions that there are at least four advantages in using checklist for materials evaluation:

1. It is systematic, ensuring that all elements that are deemed to be important are considered.
2. It is cost effective, permitting a good deal of information to be recorded in a relatively short space of time.
3. The information is recorded in a convenient format, allowing for easy comparison between competing sets of material.
4. It is explicit, and, provided the categories are well understood by all involved in the evaluation, offers a common framework for decision-making.

The advantages in using materials evaluation checklist should be considered, it would make the research easier to be conducted.

Based on the explanations above, this study is conducted to investigate:

- 1) To what extent do the reading materials in "English in Focus" textbook for seventh grade students fulfill the criteria of good reading materials?
- 2) What are the perceptions of the teachers about the reading materials in "English in Focus" textbook?

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate whether reading teaching materials in English textbook "English in Focus" for seventh grade students fulfill the criteria good reading material or not. This study was designed in a descriptive-qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a kind of non-experiment research that is difficult to quantify and it is used interpretive analysis rather than statistical analysis (Mackey and Guss, 2001). Furthermore, Ary et al. in Kirana (2010) states that descriptive research designed to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena.

The subject of this research was an English textbook entitled "English in Focus" for seventh grade students used in a Junior High School in Bandung. The textbook is mostly used in most of national Junior High School in Indonesia.

The book has published by the National Department of Education in Indonesia in 2008. The reading materials analyzed according to the criteria of good materials by Patel and Jain (2008). The evaluation conducted in every reading section of the textbook. There are eight reading sections within the textbook, were evaluated including reading texts, tasks, and exercises to gather the data to answer the first research question. Two English teachers were also involved as the respondents of the research in order to answer the second research questions about teachers' perception about the reading materials.

### **Data Presentation and Discussion**

The findings and discussions are presented the three general criteria and its specific criteria on reading materials, which were analyzed by using evaluative checklist, developed from Patel and Jain's good materials criteria

#### **1. The subject matter should be well graded**

The findings show that the gradation of reading texts in the textbook categorized into good. The readability level of the reading materials had been served vary enough by the textbook. However, most of the texts were categorized into easy texts and were

indicated below the student's current grade. Next about the new knowledge of the text was categorized into good. The new knowledge presented in the reading materials are quite vary. Most of the text give new knowledge such as cultural information, language features, and structure of texts. The last indicator for this criterion that is suitability with syllabus categorized into fair. The reading materials in the textbook almost presented all the materials mentioned in the syllabus. There are some materials and/or text form that were not presented in the textbook.

**Table 1. The subject matter should be well graded**

No	The Checklist Items	E	G	F	P
1.	Gradation of texts vary from easy to difficult		✓		
2.	The text give new knowledge for students		✓		
3.	Suitable with the syllabus			✓	

**a. Gradation of texts vary from easy to difficult**

A readability test tool was used to gather the data about the difficulty level of the text. This research used Microsoft word 2013 to find the readability score of the reading text on the reading materials of "English in Focus" textbook. There are two kind of readability tests, which are

Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. The Flesch Reading Ease test rates text on a 100-point scale. So, the smaller the score, the more difficult the text. Sixteen texts were evaluated by using the readability test. Based on the findings from Reading Ease test of readability, most of the reading texts on the textbook graded as easy texts. From the chart above, the texts' average score for Flesch Reading Ease test is 66. It means, the reading text in the textbook were fulfill the score for most standard text. Based on the Flesch Readability theory, the score between 60 and 56 is the score for most standard text. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test rates the text based on the school grade level. For example, a score 7.0 means, that an seventh grader can understand the text. However, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test score indicated that the reading texts in the textbook were below the students' grade level. The average score for Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test is 5, meanwhile the students' current grade are 7. There are only four texts that scored almost appropriate with the students' current level (text number 2, 4, 13, and 16). There are also texts that scored above the students' current level; those are text number 8 and 10. The study found that both easy and difficult text were provided in the textbook. Regarding

the difficulty level of the text, Nunan (1992) points out difficulty of the text has traditionally been seen in language learning. The text by which input to learners should be graded in terms of language items, and careful selection or 'control' of these items. Kiato (1997) mentioned that it would be useful to have a variety text forms so that the students can learn to deal with different forms. It would be useful to have a variety text forms, so that the students can learn to deal with different forms. He explains that the materials presented should be slightly higher in their level of difficulty than the students' current level of English proficiency. It could allow them to learn new grammatical structure and vocabulary.

**b. The text give new knowledge for students**

From the study it was found that the reading materials in "English in Focus" textbook give students kind of new informations and knowledges, such as on the topic of text, culture, language feature and structure of the text.

The study found that the reading materials on "English in Focus" textbook were give new knowledge for the students. First, the reading materials provided various kinds of interesting topic on every reading sections. There are 16 texts in the

reading materials on "English in Focus" textbook, with different kinds of text forms, such as introduction, description text, advertisement, and procedural text. From the 16 texts included in the reading materials, there were almost have different topic presented. For example there were seven texts in the form of descriptive, each text has different topic presented. The topic were about the description about a house, one's daily activities, a Indonesian - Japanese restaurant, family's regular habits, one's profession as a farmer and a clown. The topic in five advertisement texts also provided different topic, such as ad about a Chinese and Western restaurant, advertisement about discount promotion in a bookstore, furniture store and in a department store. Therefore, from the various topic given by the reading materials the students, of course, get some new knowledges. In general, this topic gave new knowledge to the students because the students can learn about the information in the text. The topic given in the reading materials also presented in a sequence and systematically order. Regarding to the topic of the materials, Sheldon (1987) stated that the variation of topics in the textbook should be organized in a systematic sequence, chapter by chapter in order to support the

development of student's creativity and critical thinking. Second, the reading materials also presents some cultural informations, such as Indonesian, Chinese and Western culture. Regarding on the text that gives new knowledge for the students, McGrath, (2002) stated that reading is an important way to gain knowledge. Learners can learn more than language from the materials used in language learning. Besides, the textbook should be acceptable for any culture. In line with that, Al-Ghazo and M.Samdi (2013) the textbook should have the cultural side which builds students' knowledge of national and international culture.

**c. The materials should be suitable with the syllabus**

The research found some suitability and unsuitability between the syllabus and the reading materials in the "English in Focus" textbook. According to the syllabus for Junior High School students, the standard competencies of reading mentioned that students hoped to understand the meaning of short and simple functional text and short essay that is related to the students' closest real life context. From this standard competence, the basic competence that the students have to develop that they are supposed to be able to read aloud and respond the

meaning and the rhetoric procedure of simple short functional texts and essays which are based on students' own real life context, in the form of instructions, shopping list, congratulatory, announcement, descriptive and procedure.

There are two kinds of reading materials to be learnt listed in the syllabus, which are short functional text and short monolog. The short functional are in the form of instructions, shopping list, congratulatory, and announcement. While the short monolog text are in the form of descriptive text. However, there are only four kinds of text presented on the "English in Focus" textbook. Those are descriptive, procedure, introduction and advertisement text. There are four kinds of functional texts that are not presented in the textbook. Those are in the form of instruction, shopping list, congratulatory and announcement. The unrepresented text forms became the teachers' responsibility to arrange the reading materials. According to teachers' opinion from the interview, it is more important to teach the materials stated in the syllabus. It was because the materials stated in the syllabus become the indicators that would be assessed by the teacher. In addition, the textbook also presented some reading materials that are not listed in the syllabus, such as introduction and advertisement.

Even though introduction and advertisement form of text was not stated in the syllabus, the teachers would still taught the materials briefly.

Although there are some unsuitability between the syllabus and the reading materials, there are also some suitability that cannot be neglected. There are some similarities between the syllabus indicators and the reading material objectives. The indicators in the syllabus and objectives of the reading materials both mentioned that the students should identify the kind of information from the text, such as identified the rhetoric structure, communicative function and stated the language features on descriptive and procedure text. Both of the indicators and objectives similar in demanding the students to be able to read aloud the text with the right pronunciation and punctuation. McGrath (2002) said that teachers and materials writers require an organizational framework for their work, and this function fulfilled by a syllabus. When there is an official syllabus which teachers are expected to follow, this will be an important factor in using materials.

**2. The words and structure are carefully graded**

The indicator for this general criterion is that the words and structure already learned and repeated in the coming pages.

This indicator categorized into good. The words and structures were almost repeated on each text and chapter.

**Table 2. The words and structure are carefully graded**

No	The Checklist Items	E	G	F	P
1.	The words and structure already learn and repeated in the coming pages so that the students could revise them making them stable in their memory		✓		

The research found that the repeated words and structure were related to the learning materials. The repeated words and structure found were in the form of adjective, adverb, preposition, there is/there are, to be, and simple present tense.

Simple present tense is the most repeated structure on “English in Focus” textbook. The simple presents tense always repeated in every reading text. It was because the simple present structure is used by the four kind s of text form on the textbook, which are introduction, descriptive, advertisement, and procedure. simple present tense structure on the reading text of “English in Focus” textbook were presented almost in every

reading materials on every chapter. The simple present structure was presented continuously because this structure related to every text form included on the reading materials of the textbook. The repetition on the simple present tense gave the students more example on the use of it. The student knew that when they want to make an introduction, a descriptive, an advertisement, and a procedure text, they have to use simple present tense. On the textbook, also mentioned the use of simple present tense, such as to describe about habitual activities and general truth.

In addition, there were always be some same vocabularies repeated, that related to students' real life. The repeated vocabularies are house, parents, kitchen, school, students, breakfast, lunch, restaurant, and activities. The repeated words and structures not only presented in the reading text but also on the exercises with a variety of activities. The repetition of the vocabularies can help the learners remember those new vocabularies.

Regarding the words and structure on the reading materials, Syafitri, Sada, Sumarni (2013) stated that the proper and appropriate words and structure of the text would help the students to develop understanding the reading materials. It can help the learner to remember those words and structure. In line with that, Patel and

Jain (2008) stated that it is important to repeat the word and structure. In accordance, the students could revise them making them stable in their memory. Therefore, materials can encourage learners to apply their developing language skill beyond the classroom.

### 3. Clear and unambiguous instruction should be given alongside the practice and exercise

The table shows that the instruction of practice and exercise in the textbook categorized into good. Most of the instruction of the practice and exercise were understandable and uses simple language. The level of question categorized into fair. The reading materials in the textbook presented all of the three levels of questions. However the number of the literal questions was quite huge than the other level of questions.

**Table 3. Clear and unambiguous instruction should be given alongside the practice and exercise**

No	The Checklist Items	E	G	F	P
1.	The instruction of practice and exercise should be clear and unambiguous		✓		
2.	The level of question in exercise consists of three level; literal, inferential, and critical question			✓	

**a. The instruction of practice and exercise should be clear and unambiguous**

A clear and an ambiguous instruction should be given along the exercise and practice of the textbook. The reading materials on "English in Focus" textbook mostly presented clear and unambiguous instructions on its practice and exercise.

The result of the analysis showed that there are 48 of instruction of practice and exercise, 35 of them included as clear and unambiguous instruction and 15 of them included as unclear and ambiguous instructions.

The clear and unambiguous instruction was presented in a short sentence. The most instructions that can be found in the reading materials is "Read the following text". There is no other meaning on that instruction, rather than to read the text given.

The clear and unambiguous instructions of practice and exercise that are found on the reading materials tend to use only one verb. For example, "fill in the following form", "Choose a, b, c, or d for the right answer", "Answer the questions based on the text", "Find the main idea of the paragraph from the text in practice 5." etc. There are also instructions with two verbs, but those instructions was still

understandable because it was clear and simple. For example, "Discuss and answer the following questions", "Look at the picture and answer the questions", "Work in pairs. Find the characteristics of text in Practice 5", "Observe the picture and answer the questions that follow", etc. The simple language that was used by the instructions make the students easy to understand what they should do.

The number of unclear and ambiguous instructions found on the reading materials were much less than the clear and ambiguous one. However, this should be taken into consideration for the teacher. Since the unclear and ambiguous instructions may mislead the students.

A clear and unambiguous instruction would be clearer and easier to be understood by students. Moreover, the materials and the practice/exercise should be connected to the objectives, so that the learners know how it will develop the knowledge/skills required to master the objective. Regarding to the instruction of the exercise and practice, Syafitri, Sada, Sumarni (2013) mentioned that good instructions use simple language. They also should have a clear purpose on what they are supposed to do.

**b. The exercise and practice consists of three levels of questions**

On the reading materials of “English in Focus” textbook, there are about 100 questions given along the exercise and practice. There are 44 questions indicated as a literal level of question. As for the inferential level of question, there are 42 questions of it. The last, there are 20 questions indicated as critical level of questions. The literal question related to the question that the answer explicitly found in the text. The answer of inferential question usually can be found implicitly in the reading text. Meanwhile, the critical question needs the students’ background of knowledge to answer the question. The question given usually related to the students’ opinion about something or their experiences.

The three levels of question is important to make a better understand of the materials being presented. It is essential for students to learn and to think critically and to ask higher levels of questions. By asking higher level of questions students deepen their knowledge and create connections to the materials being presented.

#### **4. Teachers’ Perception**

There were some reasons why the teachers choose the textbook to be used as their main source for the classroom activities. The teachers said that the textbooks was available for all of the

students in conducting the teaching-learning process. The textbook also could be a guide for both teacher and students. In general, both of the teacher judge the textbook as sufficiently good for the classroom activities.

Based on the teachers’ perception, the reading materials in “English in Focus” textbook was good, including its cultural context, difficulty level of texts, and exercises. However, both of the teachers said some of the reading texts was too easy for a seventh grade student. Furthermore, there are some unsuitability between the reading materials in “English in Focus” textbook with the syllabus used.

Finally, both of the teachers judge the textbook as good enough as a guide for the teaching—learning process. In term of the less appropriate reading materials in the textbook, the teacher said that it was not influence the teaching and learning activities significantly in the context. This matter was covered by searching other supplementary resources, such as others English textbook and/or internet.

#### **Conclusions**

The Evaluation towards reading materials in English textbook “English in Focus” for junior high school of seventh grade students is using checklist which is adapted from Patel and Jain (2008). It

shows that reading materials in English textbook "English in Focus" have been fulfilled the criteria of good reading materials in terms of the subject matter that should be well graded, the words and the structure are carefully graded, clear and unambiguous instructions should be given alongside the practice and exercise. Although there are some aspects that are less appropriate in the textbook, the aspects do not influence the teaching and learning activities significantly in the context.

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