

Text-book Evaluation Entitled “Let’s Learn English” (K-13 English Text-Book)

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ABSTRACT

The main elements of teaching are included teachers, students, and textbooks. Many people argue that the students are the key success of the teaching. Thinking to against that many people belief, many studies pointed the view that textbooks are the key of learning. It based on the assumption that both teacher and students are depend on the book in learning process. Therefore, great care and attention to the quality of text-book itself has to be taken in selecting the most appropriate textbook that fit to some factors as teacher’s interests, teaching objectives and finally students’ needs as well. Textbook evaluation checklist by Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) is used in this study because it is most appropriate for evaluating this current textbook. In this current study, the researcher evaluated K-13 English text book used by XII grade students of MAN 1 Bojonegoro as instructional material in the teaching and learning. Some aspects to be evaluated based on Textbook evaluation checklist by Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) including subject matter, vocabulary and structures, exercises, illustration, and physical make-up. This study is important as it hope will find out the strength as well as the weaknesses areas of the course book. This current study has been developed in order to analyze an available specialized course book for the second grade students. The results of the current study have important implications both for language teachers and the improvement of the course book

Key words: *Assessment, Evaluation checklist, Text-book*

Introduction

Textbooks can be considered as a major source in providing instructions to the teachers and students so that is why it is stated that are the backbone of every educational system. The role of textbook is

help the teacher in designing the assessment and evaluation system for the students, shaping the process of classroom teaching and learning (Mahmood, 2011). Textbook are the core of all the educational activities because they provide the students a rich

array of new and potential interesting facts and the window to a world of fantastic experiences. Furthermore Mahmood in (2009: 158) describes the importance of textbooks as “most widely used tool for curriculum interpretation and implementation.

Teachers are the practical users of the textbooks and choosing the most appropriate textbook is an overwhelming task for them (Miekley, 2005). Considering the important of text-book in the teaching process, assessing text-book is crucial to be done in ensuring the quality of the text-book itself and the effort to control the quality of teaching and learning. As stated by Shatery (2012), text-book evaluation is the most critical especially in the field of English Language Teaching. Furthermore, Tok (2010) describes that course book analyses and evaluation help the teachers to improve them and help them to attain useful insights into the basis of material. A lot of work has been done in EFL/ESL context.

According to Sheldon (1988), we need to evaluate text-book for two reasons. First, the evaluation will help the teacher or program developer in making decisions on selecting the appropriate textbook. Furthermore, evaluation of the merits and demerits of a textbook will familiarize the

teacher with its probable weaknesses and strengths. This will enable teachers to make appropriate adaptations to the material in their future instruction.

Ellis (1997) proposed that textbook evaluation can be of three types, namely “pre-use”, “in-use”, and “post-use” evaluations. Evaluation of textbooks for pre-use, or predictive, purposes helps teachers in selecting the most appropriate textbook for a given language classroom by considering its prospective performance. The second type of evaluation aids the teacher to explore the weaknesses or strengths of the textbook while it is being used. Finally, post-use, or retrospective evaluation helps the teacher reflect on the quality of the textbook after it has been used in a particular learning-teaching situation.

Beside the advantages of the textbooks mentioned before, textbooks might simultaneously suffer from some problems and some of the important ones are discussed here. Richards and Renandya (2002) identify the disadvantages of textbooks as: (a) they fail to present appropriate and realistic language models, (b) They propose subordinate learner roles, (c) they fail to contextualize language activities, (d) they foster inadequate cultural understanding, (e) they fail to address

discourse competence, (f) they fail to teach idioms, (g) they have lack of equity in gender representation. A final reason for disappointment and skepticism with many ELT textbooks is the fact that they are often regarded as the "...tainted end-product of an author's or a publisher's desire for quick profit" (Sheldon, 1988).

Realizing the fact that many textbook might be belongs to some or at least one of the item motioned above, they still continue to be used as the most popular sources of transferring knowledge by all language teachers in their classrooms. However, to reduce the risk as much as possible, textbook developers and curriculum designers prefer to conduct an informative evaluation before using a book.

Research Methodology

Research method used in this study was descriptive qualitative with the design was a document analysis. This research was conducted in MAN 1 Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia. This school was chosen since this school has applied 2013 Curriculum. Teacher and students interviewed to know the respond of the book used. There are many kinds of checklist of textbook evaluation instruments that can be used, but in this current study the researcher used the

most popular instruments constructed by Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979). This checklist is widely referred to be used in analyzing and evaluating textbooks. The characteristic of this checklist consists of five big sections including: (a) subject matter, (b) vocabulary and structures, (c) exercises, (d) illustrations, and (e) physical make-up. In each section itself is composed of several detailed strategies which can be used as the criteria based on which the characteristics of a current textbook can be evaluated. The researcher has obtained a full knowledge over the whole book including its content and its different exercises as a result of careful examination of the book, consulting the book with some other qualified English teacher through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) activities.

Findings and Discussion

Subject Matter

The first aspect presented on the checklist, the following points deserve mentioning. Since the current book is written for twelve grade students, it has to obtain knowledge in various language skills in order to function effectively and appropriately. For this purpose, a variety of different topics have been presented taking into regard such factors as learners'

interests, their gender as well as their age and proficiency level. It has been attempted to focus on topics which are appealing both for males and females and for adults. For example lesson 7 titled “*what are you doing this weekend*” (page 207-236) focuses on planning vacation which will be attractive for various learners.

The subject matter is presented topically in an organized manner. A wide range of tools and costume from have been provided in the text-book. The topics are those which students most probably encounter and need to know in everyday life. The kind of syllabus designed in this text-book is to a great a knowledge-based syllabus. Since this is a specialized text-book, unlike most general ELT textbooks, here the needs of the students are given a special priority as we know that needs analysis was introduced within the realm of language teaching and learning.

Therefore, taking a look at the table of contents, it is clear that topics are arranged based on introducing the learners to everyday life. To take as examples lesson 6 “*here are some tips to follow*” present exactly the subject matter areas needs for students in which students have to acquire such basic knowledge about procedures text, ordering. In fact, all the topics presented

through the whole text-book turn around the knowledge areas required for students. As it is mentioned in the top section at the introductory pages of the text-book, it has been attempted to include authentic texts in order to give students firsthand experience of everyday life. Visually this text-book is attractive, motivating and relevant for the learners. Therefore, it can be claimed that the materials are accurate and up-to-date.

Vocabulary and Structures

This text-book is written for senior high class, so the vocabulary and grammatical structures must be appropriate to this level. As the text-book is designed for senior high class students, the vocabularies are everyday life-related ranging from family, job, etc. The vocabulary has been recycled and extended in the consolidation lesson and workbook. However, selection and gradation of vocabulary items are mainly on the basis of simplicity and frequency of occurrence. There is no clear list of vocabulary items; just every lesson contains one or two vocabulary activities mostly in matching format. These are either words matching with pictures or a list of words which have to be matched with their definitions.

Therefore, as is seen direct vocabulary exercises are limited, even

though in such specialized courses vocabulary plays a very crucial role. The words are not accompanied with their phonetic transcription. Learning pronunciation has been limited to one random pronunciation exercise in very lesson in which a single sound or a technical component such as stress or intonation is practiced. So the available of the list of vocabulary and the phonetic transcription is needed based on need analysis as foreign learners

The text-book is provided with an audio CD by which students can practice listening subconsciously, however, it is not sufficient and students need to learn pronunciation technically. Since there are not sufficient number of exercises meant for practicing vocabulary items, abilities like guessing the meaning of unknown words, or finding synonyms or antonyms are neglected. Such activities could be incorporated through vocabulary games, word puzzles, and vocabulary quizzes which are absent in the present book. Every lesson in the current textbook presents a specific topic related to the vacation of tourism. Thus in each unit a special set of words related to that single topic are practiced without considering the vocabulary presented in the previous lessons. In each new lesson there is

no indication to the previously learned vocabulary as we do not see any vocabulary repeated for the aim of reinforcement.

Nowadays no EFL textbook likes to be purely grammatical in terms of selection and gradation of language materials. The authors of this text-book also seem to realize that the focus should be on developing communicative competence of the students rather than grammatical competence. However, there is a sufficient treatment of grammar in this textbook. In each lesson, the grammatical structure to be practiced has been presented in a box with the title grammar focus. The authors seem to realize that the basis for speaking a foreign language with confidence is an understanding of its structural system. Therefore, they have tried to integrate a comprehensive language syllabus specific to the communicative needs of their students. Grammar is always presented in context and extensively practiced. Language functions are purposes for which people use language e.g. greeting, apologizing, complaining, describing, etc.

Functions should combine appropriate grammatical structures used in particular situations with purposes. In this textbook, functional language is also presented in context and then highlighted in

professional practice boxes that provide useful frameworks for key customer service encounters such as telephone bookings, giving advice, and dealing with problems. Contrary to the vocabulary which did not follow a clear line of progression, the grammatical points as well as their sequence is appropriate and systematically organized and presented in an order of difficulty.

The structures gradually increase in complexity to suit the growing proficiency level of students. For example, as is seen, the first unit deals with simple present tense, the second with the continuous tense while third lesson presents the simple past structure. Successively in next units more difficult structures like Conditionals and Relative Pronouns. In other side, the students are non-native speakers, it so hard for the students to understand and to realize the use of grammar in daily speaking context.

The composer tried to use everyday language by introducing topics and situations which the students may encounter normally in their real life. For instance, the second lesson "*Find a Job*" revolve around the routine affairs that are faced with a students about job. Realistic tasks have been created based on a variety of authentic texts to give students firsthand experience. Taking

into account the sections and tasks presented in the lessons, one can notice that they do follow a fixed order. As we see that for example in the first until the last lesson we come with listening, speaking, grammar, reading and writing. There is an orderly and logical presentation of various activities in each lesson. An advantage of this text-book is that linguistic items are introduced in meaningful situations to facilitate understanding and ensure assimilation and consolidation. This has been achieved mostly with the help of various colorful pictures. Bringing real pictures beside every text and linguistic item help assimilate the situation satisfactorily. The textbook has sufficient number of pictures to make the situation more lifelike.

Exercises and Activities

The activities and tasks built in each unit of this text-book evolve around the four major language skills. However, the balance between listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills development is appropriate to the learners and learning situation. The text-book devoted a particular space for two language skills, that is, listening and speaking. Reading is paid little attention and writing is just limited to some units. Most of the speaking activities are mainly based on pair work only, giving very little attention to

other communicative activities like group work, simulation, role play, etc.

Reading activities are mainly limited to question-answer types that range from simple scanning questions to questions that ask for opinions and arguments. Although the reading texts have wide coverage of topics and content, they considerably lack variety in materials and activities. Writing exercises are limited, but they are good tasks of writing intended to improve writing ability of the students as well as to practice the grammatical structures presented in each lesson. The text-book incorporated actual activities and tasks like writing letter of application and curriculum vitae (lesson 2). There are also challenging writing tasks, for example, news item text (lesson 4).

The good point is that the text-book leads students from simple controlled writing activities to guided writing activities, and gradually exposed free activities. Selection and gradation of vocabulary items are not mainly on the basis of simplicity and frequency of occurrence. Also there are not sufficient number of exercises meant for practicing vocabulary items attempting to develop the ability, for example, to guess the meaning of unknown words, or to find synonyms or to find antonyms. Such

activities can be incorporated through vocabulary games, word puzzles, and vocabulary quizzes.

A positive point observable within the exercise in the text-book is it starts with an exercise to practice the grammatical points, but this time without direct explanation of the grammatical structure. It also includes reading, speaking and writing tasks mainly focusing on those topics previously mentioned but this time again in a new context within an innovative task or activity. All the activities, exercises or tasks are following the ultimate goal of promoting meaningful communication. Great attempt has been made to achieve this goal by providing authentic materials as well as meaningful activities similar to realistic and routine practices occurring in everyday life of people.

Illustrations

Based on the current text-book observed, the strengths is that this current book use of a variety of beautiful, colorful, and real pictures which serve two main functions. *First*, these illustrations can make the students motivated. *Second*, the linguistic advantages of the pictures as they provide a meaningful context for each activity and help students to understand the materials and make sense of the tasks better.

Visualization techniques were one of a strategy which has been emphasized in various teaching methodologies and is considered as an important technique by material developers in designing instructional materials. In this book, illustrations and pictures both cartoonist and real ones taken from internet pages are encouraging and make the situations more real-like. The topic page of each unit is both provided with a detailed picture as well as the unit topic which together have an important role in activating the background knowledge of the students. Hence, students, using their schemata, can guess what the coming text. Each reading, speaking, and listening task is provided with a related picture that close to the text which all are effective in creating meaning. Even the grammatical exercises which test the structural knowledge of the students are also equipped with a related picture which activates the meaning part of the activity.

Physical Make-up

The Physical Make-up is the last section to be observed and evaluated. Almost, all the existing evaluation checklists include this section sometimes titled differently, for example Lay-out or physical appearance, which reveals the fact that it is a crucial factor to be considered in designing

every textbook. In fact, students make their first impression of every book based on its physical appearance regardless of its content. There many publication companies in every country, but they are not all given the same value or credit by material developers and textbook writers. This judgment, to a great extent, is based on the value of their work in such aspects as the printing quality, the material used in paper sheets and the cover page, and in general the durability of their work which all affect our judgments of a printed book. For instance, good printing not only makes a book attractive but also motivates the learners to read, whereas crowded printing or small fonts demotivate the students or at times it has been observed that bad appearance of a book has caused readers not even take a look at a single page of it. With regard to this criterion, the used textbook here gets an acceptable or perhaps the best score in comparison to the other criteria mentioned so far.

The results of evaluation are as follows: The paper used for the textbook is of good quality; each sheet is quite thick and ensures durability of the texts. Binding is not so strong, but the physical appearance is interesting and attractive. The good printing, size and type of the fonts used in this book

undoubtedly guarantee the smooth readability of the texts. The layout is clear and well-organized. The topic of each unit is written in bold type. All the letters unanimously are not always in a black color. There are no traces of weak points in the font size for topic and exercises, the top, bottom, left and right margins, the space between words, sentences, lines and paragraphs, the quality and color of ink used, etc. The researcher went thoroughly through the text-book but found no cases of errors. It ensures thorough editing and proofreading of the textbook. The titles and subtitles are in different font and color which attract the attention of the students. On the whole, in terms of practical considerations the book is satisfactory and well-organized.

Conclusions

The results of this evaluation showed that the current book can be used as an acceptable textbook. Overall, the lay-out and the physical appearance of the current book proved to be perfect in that the practical elements in this regard including the cover, the font, the size, the color, and the design of the whole book were shown to match the guidelines presented in the evaluation checklist. Regarding the content, it should

be mentioned that since the used syllabus was mainly skill based, attempt had been made to make the students communicatively competent in using the required skills in tourism industry. The activities and exercises were mostly speaking and listening based with some writing and reading tasks developed simultaneously in the form of meaningful tasks. Visualization was a major technique utilized in this book using various colorful pictures taken from internet or real world photos which were all intended to make the book and its content attractive and motivating. Grammar focus sections revolved around the important grammatical structures which were necessary to produce in relation to the skills presented in each unit. Among the advantages of the current book, the Review Units, the audio CD, the listening scripts as well as the grammar glossary presented at the end of the book were noticeable. Finally, the findings of the present study bear significant implications for material developers and both general and specialized EFL teachers. It is hoped that this textbook analysis provides the necessary insight for all language teachers to conduct such a procedure in their own practice of textbook selection. Moreover, the needs of the students as well as the course objectives

need to be considered in the very beginning stages of evaluating a textbook.

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