

STRATEGIES OF USING TEXTBOOKS: A CASE OF SCHOOL-LEVEL CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstrak

Pemberlakuan buku ajar Bahasa Inggris (barBIng) di Indonesia seiring dengan perubahan kurikulum. Meski Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) mulai diterapkan, penelitian tentang barBIng serta strategi belajar dan pembelajarannya masih sedikit. Penelitian ini mengamati strategi guru dalam menggunakan barBIng dengan metode deskriptif. Dua pengajar kelas 10, SMA KS1 Bandung dilibatkan dalam pengumpulan data melalui angket, wawancara, dan observasi. Berdasarkan analisa teori Grant (1987), barBIng yang digunakan memiliki kelebihan sekaligus kekurangan. Sejumlah strategi penggunaan barBIng yang diusulkan para ahli, mereka terapkan. Penelitian ini juga memberi rekomendasi cara mengevaluasi sekaligus menggunakan barBIng, dan gambaran cakupan minat, kebutuhan, serta pengalaman belajar siswa dalam barBIng, dan keterampilan (yang harus dimiliki) guru dalam menggunakan barBIng.

Kata kunci: buku ajar, strategi pembelajaran, KTSP, kurikulum berbasis kompetensi

Background

Teachers as the facilitator is the main and right persons who decide the approach, techniques and procedures, and materials and teaching aids employed in their class (Brown, 2001). Unfortunately, in certain cases, they fail to play their role. Therefore, textbook provision takes an important part in accomplishing the process of learning (Brown, 2001).

A textbook is a universal element in the teaching of English as both a foreign language (EFL) and a second language (ESL). It has become an important aspect in conducting learning. It is what curriculum requires to meet its goal.

People generally think of textbooks as providers of input into classroom lessons in the form of texts, activities, explanations, and so on. Allwright (1981) in Hutchinson and Torres (1994) characterizes the lesson as an interaction between the three elements of teacher, learners, and materials. What this interaction produces are opportunities to learn.

In Indonesia, the use of English textbooks has been going on in accordance with the changes of curriculum. According to Hamied (2001), in the earlier part of its educational development of formal schooling since independence up to the 1994 curriculum implementation, textbook provision was the responsibility of the government.

The site of the present study was SMA KS 1 Bandung. It has been implementing the school-level curriculum since 2006. Two teachers were assigned in 10 classes of the first grade. A private publisher's textbook was employed. The study employed descriptive method with multi instruments. Interviews and questionnaires were the main instruments in collecting data and field notes supported the data gained.

Teaching Strategy

Brown claims when students' learning styles are matched with appropriate approaches in teaching, then their motivation, performances, and achievements will increase and be enhanced (1994). Apparently, establishing optimal environmental and psychological climates will foster learning by allowing students to learn in accordance with their own preferred learning styles (Chapelle, 1995; Halimah, 2000; Ibrahim, 2000; Kinsella, 1996; Kroonenberg, 1995; Reid, 1995; Reiff, 1992; Sims and Sims, 1995; Smith, 1990; Smith and Renzulli, 1984; Syafrizal, 2000; Wesche, 1981; and Yusuf, 2003).

Teaching strategy correlates with learning strategy as teaching styles with learning styles (Sprat *et al*, 2005; Kurniawati, 2003; Yusuf, 2003; Carter and Nunan, 2001; Brown, 2001 and 1994; Ibrahim, 2000; Ur, 1996; Reiff, 1992; Oxford, 1990; Grant, 1987; Abraham, 1985; Stern, 1985; and Smith and Renzulli, 1984). Stern (1983) proposes six major teaching strategies, expressed in pairs as three parameters:

1. Intralingual-crosslingual (intracultural-crosscultural) dimensions concern the use or non-use of L1 in L2 learning,
2. The objective-subjective (analytical-experiential) dimensions result from the code-communication dilemma. It refers to the possibility of treating the target language and culture as codes and as such as *objects* of study and mastery or as something to experience *subjectively* through participation in personal contact and communicative acts.

3. The explicit-implicit dimensions relate to techniques which encourage the learner either to adopt vis-à-vis the new language a cognitive or reasoning approach, that is, in Krashen's term, to bring the Monitor into play, or, alternatively, to employ techniques which encourage more intuitive absorption and automaticity, in Krashen's terms, to develop "acquisition" processes.

In addition, matching learning styles has a positive impact on students' achievements, interests, and motivation (Smith and Renzulli, 1984 cf. Kang, 1999). Sims and Sims found that students' performances could be enhanced by adapting the instructional methods to individual differences in learning styles (Wesche, 1981; Sein and Robey, 1991 cf. Kang, 1999).

In conclusion, Kinsella (1996) claims that some instructional principles may optimize learning (Kang, 1999). They argue that identifying learning style and providing appropriate instruction contribute to more effective learning (Sims and Sims, 1995 cf. Kang, 1999).

Textbooks: Purposes and Characteristics

The number of textbooks recently produced shows no sign of abating. Even more striking in fact than each new generation of books is more comprehensive and more highly structured than the last (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994).

Yet, this phenomenon—textbook choice—has been generally critical. Swan (1992 cf. Hutchinson and Torres, 1994) gives this warning:

The danger with ready-made textbooks is that they can seem to absolve teachers of responsibility. Instead of participating in the day-to-day decisions that have to be made about what to teach and how to teach it, it is easy just to sit back and operate the system, secure in the belief the wise and virtuous people who produced the textbook knew what was good for us. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case (p.33).

From my preliminary research (Yusuf, 2003) conducted at the same site, SMA KS 1 Bandung, the study found that the students have shown a misconception of using textbooks as means of learning. Such a practice often happens as a sign of miscommunication between either the school management and the teacher or the teacher and the students.

According to Garinger (2001), a textbook can serve different purposes for teachers: (a) a core resource, (b) a source of supplemental material, (c) an inspiration for classroom activities, and (d) a curriculum itself.

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) state that most teachers consider the textbook choice for the reason that textbooks assist them in managing their lesson. Using textbooks means saving time, giving direction to lessons, guiding discussion, facilitating in giving homework, making teaching ‘easier, better organized, more convenient’, and learning ‘easier, faster, better’, and most of all, it provides confidence and security.

For students, they see the textbooks as a ‘framework’ or ‘guide’ that help them to organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom. It enables them to learn ‘better, faster, clearer, easier, more’ (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994).

Language instruction has five important components—students, a teacher, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation (Kitao and Kitao, 1997). Alwright (1981) argues that materials should teach students to learn, that they should be resource books for ideas and activities, for instruction/learning, and that they should give teachers rationales for what they do. In order to function effectively, a textbook should bring about an effective learning situation. Accordingly, Wada (2005) claims that a good textbook can reach its students. It inspires them to pursue and to use the knowledge whatever profession they enter.

There are two kinds of textbooks; traditional and communicative textbooks. Communicative textbooks try to create opportunities for the students to use the language in the classroom, as a sort of “halfway house” before using it in real life. The communicative textbooks have the following characteristics:

- they emphasize the communicative functions of language – the jobs people do using the language – not just the forms.
- they try to reflect the students’ needs and interests.
- they emphasize skills in using the language, not just the forms of language, and they are therefore activity-based.
- they usually have a good balance among the four language skills, but may emphasize listening and speaking more than a traditional textbook does.
- they tend to be very specific in their definition of aims.

- both content and methods reflect the authentic language of everyday life.
- they encourage work in groups and pairs, and therefore make heavier demands on teacher's organizational abilities.
- they emphasize fluency, not just accuracy.

The Book Center of National Education Department has classified textbooks which are appropriate to use in schools. They should fulfill three aspects of good textbooks: coverage, materials presentation, and language (2003). They would be briefly described as follows.

Coverage includes learning materials that should be correct, in line with discourse and linguistic aspects of English language. It should be specific, obvious, and accurate in accordance with the current curriculum and be up-to-date. The four language skills should be integrated and meaningful. Vocabulary and sentence structure should accord with students' development and interest. Illustration should be educative, not merely decorative. It also suits the topic of discussion and has high accuracy, but remains understandable.

Accordingly, Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989 cf. Kitao and Kitao, 1999) argue that materials cover a hidden curriculum that includes attitudes toward knowledge, attitudes toward teaching and learning, attitudes toward the role and relationship of the teacher and students, and values and attitudes related to gender, society, etc.

Material presentation is related to presenting learning objectives, materials arrangement. Materials should be slightly higher in their level of difficulty than the students' current level of English proficiency allowing them to learn new grammatical structures and vocabulary (Kitao and Kitao, 1999). Tasks arrangement, relation between materials, relation between text and tasks, and how materials motivate the students, lead to communicative competence, recall prerequisite, give feedback, and provide self reflection.

Language relates to readability in typography, space width and other graphic aspects, materials attraction relating to readers interest, ideational comprehensiveness, and writing style. Kitao and Kitao (1999) add English textbooks should have correct, natural, recent, and standard English. It should not be biased and should reflect

background cultures of English. It should include visual aids, etc., to help students understand cultural information.

Ansary and Babaii (2002) claim that no textbook is perfect. Any textbook should be used judiciously, since it cannot cater equally to the requirements of every classroom setting. Therefore, there should be guidance for teachers, particularly, to select a good textbook.

It is ironical that teachers who rely most heavily on the textbooks are the ones least qualified to interpret its intentions or evaluate its content and method. The arguments for using a textbook are:

- a textbook is a framework which regulates and times the programs,
- in the eyes of learners, no textbooks means no purpose,
- without a textbook, learners think their learning is not taken seriously,
- in many situations, a textbook serves as a syllabus,
- a textbook provides a ready-made teaching texts and learning tasks,
- a textbook is a cheap way of providing learning materials,
- a learner without a textbook is out of focus and teacher-dependent, perhaps most important of all,
- for novice teachers a textbook means security, guidance, and support.

The counter arguments that believe not to use a textbook are:

- if every group of students has different needs, no textbook can be a response to all differing needs,
- topics in a textbook may not be relevant for and interesting to all,
- a textbook is confining, i.e., it inhibits teachers' creativity,
- a textbook necessity sets prearranged sequence and structure that may not be realistic and situation-friendly,
- textbooks have their own rationale, as such they cannot by their nature cater for a variety of levels, every type of learning styles, every category of learning strategies that often exist in the class, and most important of all, perhaps,
- teachers may find themselves as mediators with no free hand and slave, in fact, to others' judgments about what is good and what is not. (Ur, 1996 cf. Ansary and Babaii, 2002).

Ur (1996) proposes EFL/ESL textbook evaluation as Tucker introduced in 1975. A cursory look at its content indicates that still “good” pronunciation practice, “good” grammar presentation, grading and sequencing, cultural and pedagogical concerns in presentation, vocabulary practice, topics being interesting to different learners, etc. are emphasized as “grounds on which one might criticize or reject a textbook”. However, setting up a system of textbook evaluation, mostly depends on one’s own priorities. And so long as one’s specific requirements in a specific teaching situation have not been identified, one probably cannot exploit any already-available criteria to judge teaching materials.

What follows here is what Ansary and Babaii (2002) and Grant (1987) claim as a set of universal features of EFL/ESL textbook.

- Approach: dissemination of a vision (theory or approach) about the nature of language, the nature of learning, and how the theory can be put to applied use.
- Content presentation: stating purpose(s) and objective(s) (for the total course and for individual units); and selection and its rationale (coverage, grading, organization, and sequencing).
- Satisfaction of the syllabus
 - to the teacher: providing a guide book; giving advice on the methodology; giving theoretical orientations; key to the exercises; and supplementary materials,
 - to the students: piecemeal, unit-by-unit instruction; graphics (relevant, free from unnecessary details, colorful, etc.); periodic revisions; workbook; exercise and activities,
 - in the classroom: homework; sample exercises with clear instructions; varied and copious; periodic test sections; and accompanying audio-visual aids.
- Physical make-up: appropriate size and weight; attractive layout; durability; high quality of editing and publishing; and appropriate title.
- Administrative concerns: macro-state policies; appropriate for local situation, culture, religion, gender; and appropriate price.

Competency in School-Level Curriculum

According to Sundayana (2003), the competency-based curriculum is a curriculum in which its entire element — the goals up to the evaluation — is unified under the coverage of competency. In Indonesia Education Decree no.045/U/2002, competency means a set of responsible smart efforts possessed by someone as requirement to conduct a particular duty in his community (Chapter 1). It consists of (1) main competencies (communicative competence), (2) supporting competencies, and (3) other competencies entailed with the main competencies (Sundayana, 2003). The fundamental concept of the competency-based curriculum relates with the quantity, quality, relevancy, effectivity, efficiency, elitism, and management. Mulyasa (2003) considers the curriculum change is in need to anticipate the global change of the world.

The school-level curriculum is a revised curriculum of the 2004 curriculum. It brings about competencies as the core of the curriculum. The main aim of the implementation is to cover the very fast development of science and technology, especially information technology as its target.

Mulyasa (2003) claims that characteristics of the school-level curriculum, which is competency-based in nature, among others, are as follows:

- the competency-based curriculum emphasizes the development of tasks-competence under a particular performance standard,
- the competency-based curriculum focuses on gaining a certain competence in mastering the language,
- the competency-based curriculum requires professional and qualified teachers as classroom facilitator.

The findings of my research (Yusuf, 2003) on the textbook-misuse have identified some relations in school setting. Thomson (2001 cf. Yusuf, 2003) in his article states that materials in any form—linguistic, visual, auditory or kinesthetic—and in any means—print, live performance or display, on a cassettes, CD-ROM, DVD, or internet—are used to facilitate the learning. He adds textbooks should be treated as a sub-section of methodology. Therefore, the role of the textbooks plays an integrated aspect of a teaching methodology.

Findings: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Textbook

The study shows that both teachers consider the textbook in use has strengths on the following:

- It reflects their students' needs and interests. Regarding illustration, language, and coverage, both teachers consider the textbook meet the students' interest.
- It provides little or no time-consuming preparation. Both teachers could just operate what the textbook provides. For some materials, they need little time to prepare (to understand) the instruction provided.
- It is appropriate for and liked by their colleagues.
- It has been recommended or approved by the authorities. As its policy, the management of SMA KS 1 has assigned the teachers to use the textbook.
- It has been prepared for the target examination. The teachers believe that the provision of a textbook is intended to provide students with learning activities that will be examined by the end of the course.

Both teachers also agree on the following weaknesses of the book:

- It is above students' mastery level. The teachers claim the textbook is too difficult for their students. The students found them difficult to follow the set of activities and materials presented.
- Its physical characteristics are inappropriate (e.g. it is less lasting). The textbook was printed on a less qualified paper. So it was easily torn, wet, and folded when they put it in their bag.
- There is no teacher's guide, no answers and help on methods and additional activities. The teachers found some difficult instructions to present. Even, they found them difficult to understand what activities were intended.
- The approaches are hardly adaptable, the textbook is not well graded; it does not give well-structured and systematic coverage of the language, and it does not provide well-planned and executed activities, contents, and methods. Since the textbook provides materials higher than their students' level of mastery, the teachers consider the approaches need to review. They require more systematic presentation so that their students could follow it as it is intended.
- There is insufficient provision made for tests and revision.

- There is an imbalance between what the exam requires and what the students need and it does not contain useful hints on examination technique.

Furthermore, both teachers agree that the textbook in use shows neither strength nor weakness on the remaining criteria as follows:

- It is attractive.
- It gives enjoyment to the average age of the students.
- It is culturally acceptable.
- It is about the right length.
- There are enough authentic materials, so that the students can see that the book is relevant to real life.
- It achieves an acceptable balance between knowledge about the language and practice in using the language.
- It achieves an acceptable balance between the relevant language skills, and integrates them so that work in one skill area helps the other.
- It contains enough communicative activities so to enable the students to use the language independently.
- Its overall impression of the contents and layout of the course is favorable.
- Materials, instructions, and illustrations in the book help them teaching their students and make them easily understand the lesson.
- They have any difficulty understanding materials and illustrations, and following instructions of the book.
- They can use the book in the classroom without constantly having to recheck the teacher's guide.
- The recommended methods and approaches are suitable for them, their students, and their classroom.
- Useful ancillary materials such as tapes, workbooks, and visual are provided.
- It uses "spiral" approach, so that items are regularly revised and used again in different contexts.
- It follows the official syllabus in a creative manner.
- If it does more than the syllabus requires, the result is an improvement.

- There is enough examination practice.
- The method provision helps students to prepare the exam.

Findings: Teachers' Perception on Weaknesses of the Textbook

The following are teachers' perception of the weaknesses of the textbook in use.

On level of difficulty: rather than being too easy, both teachers regard the textbook in use too difficult not only for their students, but also, some, for them. From the classroom preparation and interaction, there are strategies used by the teachers in handling the weaknesses of the book: skipping the materials that are too difficult neither for them (the teachers could understand what the materials were intended or how they present them to their students) nor for their students, simplifying the materials (by paraphrasing the instructions, clarifying the illustrations, and giving clues to difficult passages), and giving exercises as homework (homework is as follow-up activities or difficult materials that the teachers present in the following meeting.).

On inappropriate physical characteristics (e.g. it is less lasting): no teacher's guide, no answers and help on methods and additional activities and hardly adaptable approaches. As the teachers could not find teacher's guide they define themselves methods and approach. They provide additional activities or giving homework on related topic, and rearrange materials presentation of the book considered appropriate for their students and for final examination (it does not merely follow or does not present what the textbook presents).

On poor-graded, poor-structured and systematic coverage of the language: the teachers did the following: simplifying or translating some instructions that are too difficult for their students to understand and skipping some materials if they themselves do not understand them (or even leaving them).

On poor-planned and executed activities, contents, and methods: both teachers tried to rearrange materials presentation by presenting materials that are easier to more difficult or are more comfortable to the teacher to teach.

On insufficient provision made for tests and revision, imbalance between what the exam requires and what the students need, and containing less hints on examination technique: regarding the three items, both teachers made tests and revision themselves,

guided their students to prepare for the examination, and provided their students hints for the examination.

Discussion

Concerning level of difficulty, the strategies used were skipping the materials that are too difficult neither for the teachers nor for their students, simplifying the materials, and giving exercises as homework. It accords Spratt *et al* (2005: 111), Abraham (1985) and Brown (1994) who suggest the teachers reorder the materials e.g. ask learners to cover up a page or part of a page, so that they focus on what the teachers want them to do first, and change the level of the material; more challenging e.g. learners try to answer comprehension questions before reading or less challenging e.g. break up a long text into shorter sections.

Relating to inappropriate physical characteristics (e.g. it is less lasting), no matter how inadequate the physical characteristics of the textbook is, a teacher can still make use of the sources provided in the textbook. It is in line with Spratt *et al* (2005: 111), Hutchinson and Torres (1994) and Allwright (1985) who suggest making use of all the resources in the book by using material from the book: grammar summaries, words list, lists of irregular verbs, or give whole-book tasks.

Regarding no teacher's guide, no answers and help on methods and additional activities and hardly adaptable approaches, the strategies employed were defining themselves methods and approach, providing additional activities or giving homework on related topic, and rearranging materials presentation of the book, as they consider appropriate for their students and for final examination. It is supported by Spratt *et al* (2005: 111) and Swan (1992) who suggest the following to overcome no teacher's guide, no answers and help on methods, no additional activities, and hardly adaptable approaches are changing the form of tasks, extending the materials, and reordering the materials.

Concerning poor-graded, poor-structured and systematic coverage of the language, the teachers used the following strategies: simplifying or translating some instructions that are too difficult for their students to understand and skipping some materials if they themselves do not understand them. Spratt *et al* (2005: 111), Swan (1994), Syafrizal

(2000), Smith and Renzulli (1984), and Kurniawati (2003) suggest the teachers use as much as the teachers need, but do not have to feel to use it all and give different parts of the text or task to different learners.

Relating to poor-planned and executed activities, contents, and methods, the strategies employed were rearranging materials presentation, it is in line with Spratt *et al* (2005: 111), Swan (1994), Syafrizal (2000), Smith and Renzulli (1984), and Kurniawati (2003) who suggest the following: changing the interaction pattern, e.g. use a matching task as a mingling activity (i.e. on in which learners move around the class, in this case to find their partners).

Regarding insufficient provision made for tests and revision, imbalance between what the exam requires and what the students need, and containing less hints on examination technique, the strategies employed were making tests and revision themselves, guiding their students to prepare for the examination, and providing their students hints for the examination. It follows Spratt *et al* (2005: 111), Kinsella (1996), Grant (1987), Chappelle and Abraham (1990), Brown (1994), and Allwright (1981) who suggest the teachers make use of all the resources in the book, e.g. giving whole-book task.

Conclusion

The study indicated that (1) the textbook did not seem to have gone through a sound evaluation, (2) various activities in the textbook did not seem to provide adequate different stimuli in learning process, (3) surveys on textbooks in the investigated school seemed to have less attention to the students' needs and wants, (4) the teachers seemed to have inadequate knowledge on good textbook criteria, (5) teachers did not seem to bridge students and textbook standard, and (6) teachers seems not well trained helping students using the textbook.

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