

Developing Literacy through Primary School English Textbooks: A Case of Bandung

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Abstract

Since, English was introduced to Indonesian Primary Schools in 1990s, it raised different perspectives on teachers' qualification and competence, syllabi, teaching aids, and learning materials. Regarding a few (good) textbook available to support Indonesian literacy level, the present study aimed at finding out (1) what aspects the textbooks in use cover, and (2) what contribution of the aspects to the students' literacy development.

Employing five local English textbooks ranging from 4-6 grades as the main resource, the data were then analyzed using textbook analysis proposed by Grant (1987) and Kern's theory (2001) on literacy. The study showed that the aspects covered are content topics, book map, sequence, and illustration. The textbooks covered the four language skills in various topics, though only few concerned on young learners' literacy. The sequence did not help much to develop the student literacy. Only few provided a clear review of the materials presented. In some cases, the illustration did not bridge the new information and the students' prior knowledge. It might result in complexity or even confusion.

To conclude, the textbook authors' horizon may play a crucial role in developing students' literacy. Their knowledge and skills in packing the message can facilitate their readers to develop their literacy level; otherwise, their products merely present unsystematic materials.

Key words: literacy, textbooks, Primary School, competence

Background

People generally think of textbooks (coursebooks, Nunan, 2003) as provider of input into classroom lessons in the form of texts, activities, illustrations, and explanations. Unfortunately since 1994, the policy of using them in Indonesia has raised different perspectives on their contents and syllabi, and teachers' competence in realizing them in their classes. Many consider

they did not fulfill the needs and characteristics of their pupils. It seems that they are just the replicas of the textbooks for teens or even for adults. The teachers' competence is in question since most English teachers do not have certain qualification and/or trainings of teaching English to children and of realizing coursebooks in their classrooms. Therefore, the teaching practices do not meet and reflect the required competence the pupils should get.

In 2004, in East Java, it was found that only seven of 27 textbooks for Primary Schools were qualified good on coverage and language (Suyanto, 2004). Moreover in 2005, there were only three books were considered good of 10 on readability (orthography), content coverage, and language in West Java (Sundayana et al., 2005). Meanwhile, 35 Indonesian textbooks show gender bias (Damayanti, 2007 dan Rahmani, 2009). The last study found that those textbooks were likely to follow patriarchal system of society (Rahmani, 2009). In addition, a study at a private high school in Bandung indicates that the students showed a misconception of using textbooks as means of learning. Such practice indicated miscommunication between school management and its teacher and, moreover, teachers and their students (Yusuf, 2003).

The present study investigated (1) what aspects primary schools' textbooks in use cover, and (2) what contribution of the aspects to the students' literacy development.

Textbooks: Purposes and Characteristics

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

Yet, this phenomenon—textbook choice—has been generally criticized. 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).

Anyhow, no textbook is perfect (Ansary and Babaii, 2002). 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. 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, a good textbook can reach its students. It inspires them to pursue and to use the knowledge whatever profession they enter (Wada, 2005). It can serve different purposes for teachers, among others are (a) a core resource, (b) a source of supplemental material, (c) an inspiration for classroom activities, and (d) a curriculum itself (Garinger, 2001).

Most teachers choose a textbook for the reason that textbooks assist them in managing their lesson. They consider using textbooks means saving time, giving a clear direction to lessons, providing guidance for 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 (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994).

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).

The Book Center of National Education Department has classified textbooks to usefully function in schools. They should fulfill three aspects of good textbooks: coverage, materials presentation, and language (2003). Coverage of a textbook 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, learning materials in a textbook 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, and

society (Littlejohn and Windeatt, 1989 cf. Kitao and Kitao, 1999). Their presentation is related to presenting learning objectives, materials arrangement. They 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 (Ansary and Babaii, 2002 and Grant, 1987).

The language of a textbook is related to readability in typography, space width and other graphic aspects, materials attraction relating to readers interest, ideational comprehensiveness, and writing style (Ansary and Babaii, 2002 and Grant, 1987). 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 (Tucker, 1975; Ur, 1996).

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.

Methodology

The present study took five local English textbooks ranging from 4-6 grades as the main resource. They were available in Bandung primary schools. The books were analyzed using Grant's theory on communicative textbook (1987) and Kern's on literacy development (2001). Having identified the coursebooks used, the analysis began from identifying the aims of the units, steps of the lessons (how the unit introduced, how the core materials presented, and how it concluded/reviewed), and supporting features.

Findings and Discussion

The study showed that the aspects covered are content topics, book map, sequence, and illustration. The textbooks covered the four language skills in various topics, though only few units concerned on young learners' literacy. You can take a look in the following tables in detail.

Table 1: Elements in the Textbooks in Use

Textbooks (TB)	Grade	Content Map	Units/ Topics	No of Tasks in each Skill				Total Tasks	Illustration
				L	S	R	W		
TB 1	6	No	7	22	46	44	71	104	Yes
TB 2	5	No	12	46	46	30	37	146	Yes
TB 3	4	No	12	25	11	61	34	151	Yes
TB 4	4	No	14	21	21	37	24	81	Yes

TB 5	4	No	12	25	11	61	54	151	Yes
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Note: L=Listening, S=Speaking, R=Reading, W=Writing

The table shows the textbooks' authors have been aware of the importance of putting forward the objectives of each chapter/unit of their textbooks. Therefore, they will enable their readers to get the intended target (Ansary and Babaii, 2002; Garinger, 2001; Grant, 1987).

The highest coverage of the textbooks use is 14 units/topics and the least is seven. Meanwhile, the highest number of tasks is 151 and the lowest is 81. Then, all textbooks observed provide content map and illustrations. A sufficient preparation of learning tasks will provide teachers with choices and enable them to organize the materials with regard to their preference which relevant to their students' needs and wants. For students, the tasks may give them opportunity to practise designated language skills and aspects (Wada, 2005; Alwright, 1981). They will help them bridge their prior knowledge with the new skills and knowledge presented to them. Therefore, a well-guided tasks provision may facilitate both teachers and students toward the obtainment of the goals of the lesson (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994, Richards, 1990).

Table 2: Tasks Composition

No of Tasks (Spoken Language)		Total Tasks (Spoken)	No of Tasks (Written language)		Total Tasks (Written)	Total No of Tasks (All)
L	S		R	W		
22	46	68	44	71	115	104

46	46	92	30	37	67	146
25	11	36	61	34	95	151
21	21	44	37	24	61	81
25	11	36	61	54	115	151
139	135	274	233	220	453	

Note: L=Listening, S=Speaking, R=Reading, W=Writing

Regarding the composition of tasks, the table shows that only one textbook provides more tasks on spoken language. It indicates that the authors' attention mostly pays on language skills that most textbooks for adults do. Teachers may not find relevant rationale from such resource for teaching. It may cause disorientation as the resource cannot combine the nature of language and the nature of learning of the students. Therefore, it may result in ineffectiveness. When the resource does not reflect its students' needs and interests, it may not lead students to the right path of the language studies (Grant, 1987). It may not develop their communicative competence, recall prerequisites, give feedback, and provide self-reflection (Kern, 2000; Kitao and Kitao, 1999). In other words, the resource may not help students improve their literacy level.

Table 3: Illustration and Sequence of Tasks Relation

Textbooks	Grade	Illustrations	Sequence of Tasks	Review Units
TB 1	6	Pictures, characters, symbols	Gradual	Yes, related
TB 2	5	Pictures, characters, tables, symbols	Not gradual	Yes, not related

TB 3	4	Pictures, characters, symbols	Not gradual	No
TB 4	4	Pictures, characters, symbols	Not gradual	No
TB 5	4	Pictures, characters, symbols	Gradual	Yes, not related

Note: TB = textbook

Although three of the five textbooks provide review on related topics, the issue of relevance remains a barrier. It seems that the textbooks in use went through no sound evaluation as in some parts of the tasks the illustrations may not match the tasks discussed. They are not likely to provide clear contexts for the tasks given. In the mean time, image provision may lead to well organization of the materials for the teachers and makes students learn easier and faster (Ansary and Babaii, 2002; Ur, 1996; Grant, 1987). Supplemental materials in the review may provide students reminders of the key concepts and refresh them towards what the teachers emphasize. Furthermore, they can also give teachers ready-made test sections for each unit (Ansary and Babaii, 2002; Grant, 1987).

Conclusions

Coverage, language, and presentation are the key issues in the textbook production. The inability to retrieve them explicitly may result in ineffectiveness and disorientation. Although it may need teachers' role in realizing them, covering them may make classroom facilitated.

Textbooks' authors may be considered the key player towards good textbook producers. Their role can color the way their product will be. Towards literacy level, their knowledge and skills in packing the concepts into tasks and activities may develop the learners' capability and capacity systematically.

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