

ELT TEXTBOOK PROS AND CONS IN EFL ENVIRONMENT: HOW TEACHERS SHOULD MAKE A DECISION

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Abstract: The use of textbook in the EFL classroom play a very crucial role for both teachers and students as textbook is the main source to learn English. In Indonesia, the use of textbook cannot be denied because it provides a resource, a source of activities, a reference, a syllabus, a great support for inexperienced teachers, and serve as a source for self-directed learning or self-access work (Cunningsworth, 1995). Even though textbook has many advantages, still some theorist believe that textbook has more shortcomings that affects the teaching and learning English. The pros and cons on the use of ELT textbook have lead confusion for the teachers in making decision. This paper has a purpose to meticulously review the advantages and disadvantages on the use of textbook in the ELT, the pros and the cons among the experts, and provide suggestions for the teachers in using the textbook for their teaching and learning.

Keywords: ELT textbook, EFL classroom, pros and cons on the use of textbook

Introduction

Most educators believe that the use of the textbook in the classroom instruction is indeed undeniable. A textbook is not merely a bundle of papers which cover of unstructured texts and odd exercises. Pamungkas (2010) said that textbook is one types of learning materials which is well-written, tightly organized, and greatly condensed. Further Tomlinson (2011)

explained that a textbook comprises the core materials for a language-learning course where various issues are covered considering the learning needs of the students within a course period. The textbook are the tool for both teachers and students to achieve the learning goals. Textbooks play a prominent role in the teaching and learning process as they are the primary agents of conveying knowledge to learners. Besides, one of the basic functions of textbooks is to make the existed knowledge available and apparent to the learners in a selected, easy and organized way (AbdelWahab, 2013). Even though the role of the textbook is widely accepted as essential in language classroom (Richards, 2001), the use of textbook in the classroom has become a long debate among the experts and educators in the worldwide due to its limitations. There are two sides between ones who pros to the use of the textbook during teaching and learning and the others who cons. This sometimes affects the teachers when deciding whether to use of not to use the textbook in teaching English. Therefore, this paper has a purpose to meticulously review on the use of the textbook in English language teaching, the pros and the cons on the use of textbook, and how the teachers should make a decision for their teaching.

The Role of Textbook in EFL Classroom

Teachers, students, textbook, and context in teaching are the main factors prompting English foreign language classroom. Of all four factors previously mentioned, textbooks play a very important role in English as a foreign language (EFL) or second language (ESL) because teachers always use them as main materials when teaching English in the classroom. As it is stated by Sheldon (1988, p.237) textbooks not only “represent the visible heart of any ELT program” but also offer considerable advantages—for both the student and the teacher—when they are being used in the ESL/EFL classroom. In addition to Sheldon’s point of view, Nunan (1999, p. 98) states that “a textbook is the main component of any instructional program and it is difficult to imagine a class without it”. Particularly, in English as foreign language (EFL) classroom, textbook plays a crucial role because it offers a primary source of linguistic input (Razmjoo, 2009). Ahour and Ahmadi (2012) also claimed that textbooks could simply transfer and offer the information to the students.

Hundreds copies of textbooks are sold every year and every publisher compete to launch a new textbook every year. This is as prove that textbook is an almost universal element in teaching English (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p.315). Similar to the previous statements, Immanuel (2010:5) argued that textbooks are key factor in almost language programs. Textbooks offers explicit framework which clues teachers and students in what they have done and what will be done (Ur, 1998). It should be regarded as one of the many sources teachers can draw upon in creating an effective lesson and may offer a framework of guidance and orientation. In addition, the textbook helps an inexperienced teacher who finds difficulties in developing or adapting materials. Furthermore, textbook is a kind of instructional materials which commonly used in every process of teaching and learning even though many other materials are available to help teachers communicate in new ways (Rahmawati, 2012).

In Indonesia where English is as a foreign language, textbooks are the main teaching source which the teachers are mostly depended on. Both teachers and students consider textbooks as their guidance, sources, motivation, and potential learning sources. Commonly, in Indonesia the textbooks are the main sources for the teachers in teaching, for giving a task, homework, and test to the students because the students hardly have opportunities to practice English outside their schools. Subsequently, English textbook appears to be the most crucial source by which students receive input and the main material for both teachers and students to rely on as well (Park, 2004 p.2). In Malaysian schools where English is as a second language, as reported by Mukundan (2004), the textbook is and has always been an important aspects of teaching as teachers use textbook while teaching and depend on them for the provision of tasks and test for students. It can be concluded that the use of textbook in both EFL and ESL classroom are undeniably.

Because the role of the textbook as one of learning material resources, it should be selected carefully and appropriate to the students' needs. Educators should pick a good textbook which match to the learning objectives, syllabus, and learning environment. Additionally, Tomlinson (2011, p. 21) highlighted that a good materials should achieve impact which stimulate the learners' curiosity, interest and attention. Further, materials should help learners to feel at ease. Besides, materials should help learners to develop confidence and materials delivered by teachers should be perceived by learners as relevant and useful. In addition, Tomlinson explained that materials should provide the learners with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes. Learners should be given a chance to communicate with the target language rather than just practice it in situations created by teachers and textbooks. Moreover, activities that support the learners to use of language through meaningful communication provide a better opportunity for learning. It is encouraged that teachers emphasize on small-group work or pair work activities which give the learners greater opportunity to the use of the language and to develop fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 97).

The Pros and Cons on the Use of Textbook in the Classroom

ELT textbook represents a meaningful resource not only for teachers as a lesson designers but also for learners as persons who are acquiring the English language (Gak, 2014). However, theorists have divided themselves into two sides; ones who pros on the use of the textbook during classroom instruction and the other ones who do not agree that textbook are useful for teaching and learning (the cons). The theorists, the pros ones, believe that the use of the textbook in teaching have many benefits if it is used wisely to achieve the learning objectives. The prominent figures who paid a lot attention on the use of textbook in the ELT, such as Hutchinson and Torres (1994), Sheldon (1998), Haycroft (1998), and O'Neill (1982), agreed that the use of ELT textbook bring positive effect for both teachers and learners in the ESL/EFL classroom. As for example, the one main benefits of using textbook for the learners is that it is essential for students to assess their progress and achievement correctly when they use it. Besides, Sheldon (1988) pointed out that published textbook have more credibility compare to the in-house materials. In addition to that, using textbook in the classroom are much more efficient in terms of time and money; teachers could possibly adapt or improve the

materials in the textbook. If it is compared to the in-house materials, using textbook offers an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presentation material, a source of ideas and activities, a reference for students, a syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence.

While many previously mentioned theorists are pros with the use of textbook during classroom instruction due to its extensive benefits of using EFL/ESL textbook, there are many other practitioners who do not accept the textbook as a good learning source (the cons). The pros ones believed that textbooks are too inflexible and generally reflect the pedagogic, physiological, and linguistic preferences and biases of their authors. Afterward, the methodology that textbook promotes will influence the classroom setting and that will affect the teachers' teaching and students' learning. As it is known that most pedagogic principles displayed in many textbooks may also be conflicting, contradictory or even out-dated (Allwright, 1982). Besides, cultural and gender bias are often shown up in the textbook (Porecca, 1994; Florent & Walter, 1989; Clarke & Clarke, 1990; and Renner, 1997). In terms of authenticity, the textbooks are actually too contrived and artificial in their presentation of the target language. Most of the text models and dialogues are unnatural and inappropriate to be used to communicate in the real life environment (Litz, 2005). Moreover, Sheldon (1998, p.239) stated that textbooks are the tool for the publishers to get quick profit. Too many textbooks are often marketed with serious problems, design flaws, and practical shortcomings.

Teachers' Decision in Selecting a Textbook

Whether one believes that textbook are too inflexible and biased to be used directly as instructional material or that they actually help teaching and learning, there can be no denying the fact that textbooks still keep their popularity and are most definitely here to stay. The previous section discussed the pros and cons on the use of the textbook for English language teaching. The pros and cons exist because textbook has its advantages and disadvantages. What one teacher considers an advantage in a textbook, another teacher may consider a disadvantage (Grave, 2000, p.175).

Knowing the pros and cons on the use of textbook and understanding the advantages and disadvantages of using textbook to teach English, teachers should be able to make a careful decision in their teaching. There are several steps that the authors suggest in order to teachers could make the best decision. First step is by understanding the advantages and disadvantages of the textbook. By minimizing the shortage of the textbook usage, teachers could make the better learning environment for the students. The second one is by identifying the characteristics of a good textbook. This will help the teachers to select appropriate textbook for their students. After making evaluation on the textbook, the next step for the teachers to do is to make decision whether to adopt or adapt the textbook for English language teaching. This part will discuss the previous steps for the teachers.

The first stage is understanding the advantages and disadvantages on the use of the textbook in ELT in order to minimize the dearth of the textbook usage. The following table

shows the summary of advantages and disadvantages of using textbook (Graves, 2000, p.175; Basturkmen, 2000, p.149).

Advantages	Disadvantages
Providing a syllabus for the learning process	Providing inappropriate content as it may not reflect the students' needs
Providing security for the students because textbook offers road map of the course; they know what to expect and they know what is expected from	Containing inauthentic language
Giving a set of visuals, activities, readings, and other materials which save the teachers time in finding or developing such materials	Displaying boring visuals, reading text, and teaching activities
Giving teachers with basic guidance to assess students' learning.	Does not take the students' background knowledge into account
Providing supporting materials such as teachers' guide, CD, worksheets, and videos	In accordance between sequence of units with the real work-related
Providing sequences of students' levels	Unrealistic timetable for completing task

Table 1 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Textbook

There is no perfect textbook for every class situation. Therefore, teachers should carefully select the appropriate textbook which meet their students' needs and can achieve the learning objectives. Teachers should have knowledge on how to measure the good and the bad textbooks as it seems impossible to teach English without textbook especially in Indonesia where English is only as a foreign language. As textbook is a kind of learning materials, it is very important for teachers to know the characteristics of good materials in order to select the materials which suit to the students' needs and learning goals. Richards (1990, p.15) stated that good materials are an important part of the process of instruction. Littlejohn and Wendeatt (1989) as cited in Kitao and Kitao (1997) argue that materials have 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.

Tomlinson highlighted several characteristics of good materials including:

- Materials should help the learners to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity (Byram and Fleming, 1998; Tomlinson, 2000b).
- Materials should reflect the reality of language use.
- Materials should help learners to learn in ways similar to the circumstances in which they will have to use the language.
- Materials should help to create readiness to learn.
- Materials should achieve effective engagement.

The list above showed the characteristic of a good material. Therefore, a good textbook should meet criteria of a good material. Beside the above criteria, a textbook used should be suitable for the teachers and accompanied with materials equipment such as tapes, workbooks, visual, and guide book. Approach and method in textbooks should be suitable for teachers and students. A good textbook should contain a good and clear teacher's guide with answers and help on methods and additional activities. Language in the textbook should be put into consideration. For the lower level students, vocabulary and grammar should be controlled and appropriate with the students' mastery level.

After knowing the advantages and disadvantages of the textbook and the characteristic of a good textbook, the next step for the teachers to do is to take the decision whether to use the particular textbook or to not or to adapt the textbook for their teaching. The most appropriate choice for the teachers is to adapt the textbook. As it suggested by Graves (2000, p.176) that in order to minimize difficulties when selecting textbooks, teachers should: use the textbook as a resource for students, but not the only resource; use a textbook as a guide, be free to modify, evaluate, develop, change, eliminate, or add to the material in the textbook, supplement the textbook with lots of outside readings. That is the basic strategy of doing materials adaptation.

In doing textbook adaptation, the teachers still use the particular textbook for their teaching with several steps of modification. Richard (2001, p.4) proposed a variety of textbook adaptation which includes modifying content, adding or deleting content, reorganizing content, addressing omissions, modifying tasks and extending tasks. Alibakhshi (2007) suggested five useful techniques for textbook adaptation. They include:

- 1) Adding: it means to add necessary materials by extending or expanding to contextualize the pattern.
- 2) Simplifying: it is rewording or paraphrasing the text without damaging its authenticity.
- 3) Deleting: deleting refers to omission of some exercises quantitatively by answering a proportion of it or qualitatively by omitting a tedious and boring experience.
- 4) Reordering: it is the change in the order or sequences of materials, so that they are more tangible and learnable for the learners.
- 5) Replacing: in this technique, the teacher replace some activities and exercises in textbook with more appropriate ones.

The teacher can choose which adaptation technique he or she is going to use to adapt the textbook for their classroom instruction depending on his/her needs. Textbook adaptation helps the teachers make decision to use ELT textbook and they can fill up the shortcomings of the textbook.

Conclusion

Textbook offers a big contribution in the teaching and learning process for both teachers and students. Harris and Hodges (1995, p.124) defined a textbook as a book for the instructional purposes especially in schools or in colleges. Even though a textbook has many limitations

such as inauthentic language use, irrelevant to the students' needs, out of contents and de-skilling teachers, it offers many advantages that makes its role integral in language learning. In the EFL environment, the question is not whether to use a textbook or not, the consideration is how teachers should select and use them in appropriate and productive way. Teachers can choose a textbook published by educational government or by general publishers but they have to make sure that the textbook selected is appropriate to the students' needs and can achieve the learning objectives. Teachers should be familiar to the characteristic of a good book, have ability to select a good textbook and ability to adapt the textbook based on their teaching needs.

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