

EFL COURSEBOOK EVALUATION

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

English language is undoubtedly regarded as a global language nowadays. The importance of English communication skill in today's society is unquestionable since even the most current statistics shows that around 1,500 million people worldwide speak English, while only 375 million are the native speakers (Statista, 2017). As a result, English language can be seen as a key that can open multiple doors of opportunities. Connecting with people while creating a sense of unity is one of the general advantages that an English speaker can obtain. Additionally, people with the ability of fluently speaking the global language can also be granted an easier access to professional world compared to those who do not.

Schools as the main formal education, especially in non-English speaking countries, have so long been aware of the importance of English communication skill in the real world. In

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Indonesia, English is taught as early as possible. Some schools teach simple English words to their students from the age as early as play groups, while some others even use English as the medium of instruction. English is even one of the main subjects that are required to be passed in national examination. The importance of English subject in formal education might be the factor that encourages the increasing number of informal school for English (English courses) in Indonesia, since some students might need the additional assistance in order to meet the school's expected proficiency.

When speaking about teaching and learning English language, be it in formal or informal school, it is impossible to disregard the importance of the coursebook used. Ur (1999) argued that a good coursebook should be able to provide a clear framework in order to be able to guide both the teacher and the students to teach and learn in a progressive manner. English basic skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as vocabulary and grammar are supposed to be

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included to every coursebook for each level. If the coursebook is carefully prepared in a way that is suitable for the students' need and is optimally utilized by the teacher, the students can learn in a more meaningful way which can lead them to have a critical thinking; a very crucial quality required in the professional world.

In formal schools, the coursebooks used have mostly undergone a certain procedure of editing before they are finally officially published. The schools then meticulously select the coursebook based on their needs in accordance with their curriculum. However, the problem lies in the ones used by English courses. While some nationally franchised English courses actually use officially published English coursebooks whose material are similar with the ones used in formal schools, some others prefer to design and produce their own coursebooks. This can be considered risky since there are many factors that should be taken into account in the process.

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By taking the role of coursebooks as one of the most important elements in teaching and learning English, a coursebook evaluation is undeniably important in order to find out about how a coursebook will be or has been helpful to both the teacher and the students. Tok (2010) evaluated a textbook from teachers' perspectives. His study examined the advantages and disadvantages of one type of TEFL materials which was used in state primary schools in Turkey. 46 English teachers were chosen randomly as the participants to reflect on a five-likert type scale. The criteria that were taken to be evaluated were the layout and design, activities and tasks, language type, subject, content and skills and whole aspect. The result of the study surprisingly revealed that the textbook did not provide systematic in-depth analysis and that the negative attributes far out-weighed the positive characteristics.

Meanwhile, Rahimpour & Hashemi (2011) focused on the selection and evaluation of textbook in EFL context. They evaluate three English language textbooks that were used at

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high schools in Iran from the high school English teachers’

point of view. There were three major criteria that were

evaluated; which are the five sections of the textbooks

(vocabulary, reading, grammar, language functions, and

pronunciation practice), their physical make-up, and practical

concerns. The participants were fifty high school teachers who

were asked to reflect on the questions stated in the 46-item

questionnaire. The result of the study showed that the

textbooks are not acceptable from the teachers’ point of view

with regards to the mentioned criteria.

Shabani & Nejad (2013) also conducted an evaluation of the third-grade high school English textbook. The purpose of their study was to depict the educational value of the third-grade English Book in Iranian high schools and its significance in the language program. The participants were 233 students (91 male and 142 female) and 5 teachers who taught using the English book. The students had to fill in the questionnaires which were adopted from Litz (2001) and the teacher should

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fill the textbook evaluation forms. The criteria that were taken into consideration were textbook package (practical consideration), layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content and overall consensus. The result of the study revealed that only a low number of teachers and students (2.5 and 4.56 percentage respectively) were eager to choose the textbook to study again.

In the present study, the researcher evaluates a coursebook produced and used in a particular English course. She is eager to evaluate the coursebook because the English course itself does not have any specific curriculum; it was the owner who designed the coursebooks particularly by adjusting them to the levels of proficiency. Each student has to take a placement test to be registered to their respected level and the objective of each level is for the students to master the materials presented by the coursebooks.

The English course provides sixty-four sublevels with a period of three month for each level. For this study, a

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coursebook from a particular level was chosen and evaluated based on several criteria which included the organization and selection of content, vocabulary, grammar, exercises and activities, and also clarity of instructions. The selection of the book was based on the class that the researcher had taught herself in order to achieve a more thorough investigation. To validate her study, the evaluation itself was done not only by her as one of the English teachers of the English course, but also by the students as the users as well. The students who had used the book were asked to fill in a questionnaire (a simplified version of the same evaluation checklist used by the researcher as the teacher) regarding their opinion on how the book had been helpful for their English learning process. The mechanism of the analysis will be further explained in the following sections.

Research Questions

The suitability of an English coursebook in order to fulfill the students' learning needs plays a very significant role

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in guiding the students through their path of language learning.

The course book is expected to be the guidance for the teacher to direct the students towards the right systematic path where the students can learn progressively from the simplest concepts to the more sophisticated ones. By taking this into account, the researcher was interested to evaluate a coursebook provided by an English course to see whether or not the coursebook that had been used in a particular level was helpful for the students' learning process based on several criteria which are the organization and selection of content, vocabulary, grammar, exercises and activities, and also clarity of instructions. Therefore, the specific statements of the problems raised by the researcher are:

1. How is the content of the coursebook?
 - a. How is the content organized in terms of vertical and horizontal relation?

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- b. How is the content selected in terms of the authenticity and familiarity?
2. How is the vocabulary presented in the coursebook?
3. How are the grammar items presented in the coursebook?
4. How are the exercises and activities presented in order to support the students to maintain the learned knowledge?
5. How clear are the instructions in helping the students to finish the given tasks?

Purpose of the Study

In accordance with the research questions, the study aimed to evaluate a coursebook used in an English course in Surabaya based on several criteria such as the organization and selection of content, vocabulary, grammar, exercises and activities, and also clarity of instructions.

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Theoretical Framework

Taking a role as a guidance for both teachers and students, coursebooks are undoubtedly inseparable from the nourishment of teaching and learning development. To be specifically elaborated, coursebooks perform quite a number of functions in English Language Teaching field. A coursebook acts as a resource for presentation material (spoken/written), a source of activities for learners' practice and communicative interaction, a reference source, a syllabus, a resource for self-directed learning or self-access work and also a support for less experienced teachers (Cunningsworth, 1995). Being one of the most important elements required in an English classroom, the evaluation of the coursebook as the source of materials has been one of the most significant current discussions in ELT. The topic has been investigated by a numerical study.

When performing a study with the topic of coursebook evaluation, there are two fundamental types that should be considered; predictive and retrospective evaluation

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(Cunningsworth, 1995) & (Ellis, 1997). Predictive evaluation

occurs in the stage of pre-teaching preparation where teachers decide which materials to be applied in the classroom.

Teachers choose several materials from the ones they are provided with by taking the general purposes of the learning into consideration. Teachers are able to opt from two different ways when doing this type of evaluation. The teachers can make use of a numerical sources of evaluation and assessment that have previously been conducted by more experienced researchers or educators. This is obviously more beneficial and efficient for the teachers considering the number of options they can refer to through a few clicks around the internet.

However, some teachers may also opt for a more purpose-specific way which is by conducting their own evaluation. In order to do this, plenty of sources about the coursebook evaluation are offered to the teachers to consult furtherly.

There is also a wide range of instruments such as checklist that can help teachers in conducting their own evaluation. However,

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teachers might feel the need of conducting the predictive evaluation through both ways in order to achieve a more detailed result.

The second type of evaluation is the retrospective type. This type of evaluation is done after the teaching process occurs. The main consideration is whether or not a book is worth to be reused. This evaluation is conducted by the teachers through a meticulous observation of how helpful the coursebook has been to aid the students motivation and fulfill their needs throughout their learning development. In other words, the coursebook is evaluated by how well it has performed its role during the teaching and learning process. The retrospective type can also be done in two ways. The first way requires the teachers to actively assess the effectiveness of each activity and material during the learning regarding their benefits to the students' learning progress. By doing so, the teachers can make a summative judgement about the materials they have used. The other way requires more time and effort

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since the teachers should try to collect the information in a more systematic manner. This demands the teachers to conduct an overall assessment regarding the benefit and effectiveness of the materials that have been used.

The present study opted for the latter type of evaluation. Specifically, the researcher did the retrospective evaluation through the first way which will lead to the summative judgement of the materials that have been used. When the summative judgement indicated the lack of benefits of the materials regarding to the purposes of learning, some adaptations were suggested as a way of improvement.

According to Gabrielatos (2000), teachers can make the adaptation of the coursebook through several modifications. It can be through omission, re-organization or combination, replacement, or even addition of the certain materials or tasks in the coursebook. However, teachers must be aware that there are several factors that should be undertaken prior to the

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modifications. They may modify the materials and tasks based

on the following reasons:

- a) The language provided by a certain topic has been familiar to the learners.
- b) The materials do not serve the learning purpose.
- c) The language or the topic is not appropriate for the levels of the learners.
- d) The items are in inappropriate quantity (too long).
- e) Instructions of the items are unclear and misleading.
- f) There are too many similar tasks in a specific area.

There is also a possibility that the teachers might find a wider range of reasons that might be the basic for the modifications of the contents in the coursebook as they proceed with the evaluation during the language course. Thus, there might be more specific adaptations that can be applied as the research proceeds.

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Significance of the Study

By taking the important role of the coursebook into account, it is then natural to say that the designing process of the coursebook is very much crucial. The design of the coursebook should take many different aspects into consideration and it should also go along with the curriculum or the objectives of the course.

This study took a coursebook of an English course to be evaluated. By doing the evaluation of the coursebook, it was expected that this study would result to a summative judgement that not only would show how helpful the coursebook has been for the learning process but also might pinpoint the areas that needed improvement in that particular book based on some criteria which were the organization and selection of content, vocabulary, grammar, exercises and activities, and also clarity of instructions. It was also expected that the result of this research would be fruitful for the whole improvement of the materials used in that particular English course.

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By revealing the findings, it was believed that this research would raise awareness of the coursebook designers to take many different criteria or aspects into account in the process of designing the appropriate and effective coursebook that is suitable to fulfill the learning needs of the particular level.

Scope and Limitations

The research is conducted by taking a research conducted by Cakit (2006) entitled “Evaluation of the EFL Textbook "New Bridge to Success 3" from the Perspectives of Students and Teachers” as the model. The main purpose of the previous research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the book in several criteria which are the selection and organization of content, level, physical appearance, content, exercises and activities/tasks, vocabulary and grammar, clarity of instruction, supporting aids/sources, development of learner autonomy, consideration of learning styles differences, and teachers’ books/manuals. However, the present study is designed to

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focus only on several criteria that are considered important for the whole improvement of the particular coursebook as well as the English course itself. They are the the organization and selection of content, vocabulary, grammar, exercises and activities, and also clarity of instructions. Therefore, the present study is more specifically designed to evaluate the coursebook of the particular English course.

This study did not focus on the supporting aids/sources as well as the teachers' books/manuals since they are not provided by the English course. The only supporting aid that was used in this study was the listening audio that only acted as a supporting element in the evaluation. Development of learner autonomy was also excluded since the students usually only use a book for three months each term, so the time was not long enough to make a judgement on their autonomy.

Meanwhile, consideration of learning style differences was also not the focus of the present study since there is possibility that a class consists of only one student. The participants of the

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present study were the users; the teacher and the students who had used the coursebook.

Definitions of Terms

EFL: this abbreviation stands for English as Foreign Language

ELT: this abbreviation stands for English Language Teaching

Coursebook: According to Tomlinson (1998), “a coursebook is a textbook that provides the basic materials for a course and it serves as the only book used by the learners during a course. It usually covers work.”

Coursebook Evaluation: According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.96) and Tomlinson (1998, p.xi), coursebook evaluation is the systematic appraisal of the value of the coursebook in relation to both its objectives and learners’ objectives.