

An Evaluation of Indonesian English Textbook for Secondary School: Teachers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore teachers' views on the quality of *When English Rings a Bell* as a nationally used English handbook in Indonesia. Employing the criteria of a good textbook from Cunningsworth, the textbook was analysed. English teachers were interviewed to give their insights about the textbook based on their experiences and the national curriculum. The results show that some parts of the textbook are in line with the Cunningsworth's criteria. Following this, the teachers mentioned that the textbook was appropriate with the learning objectives. It means the Cunningsworth's criteria; the national curriculum and the teachers' views were at the same vision in terms of the quality of a textbook. However, some drawbacks were found that first; there was still a need for teachers' explanation in comprehending the textbook for students. Second, other supporting materials seemed to be important as some parts of the textbook were not fulfilled.

Keywords: *evaluation, textbook, Cunningsworth's criteria of a good text book, when English Rings a Bell*

1. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language for communication used by the two third of population in the world. The purpose of using English varies depending on where and in what situation it is used. It could be academic, non-academic and business activities. English is also used in many technological devices. Thus, people cannot simply ignore it in daily life. Today, English and technology are parts of human life.

Since years ago particularly in the post-colonial era, Secondary Schools in Indonesia have started to insert English as part of their main curriculum. This was in an attempt to enhance Indonesian civilization as a nation. Richard [1] states that "in countries where English is not an official language it may still have a significant role to play." It may be an important school subject and necessary as a requirement to enrol a university. It may be the language of certain courses at a university, or at least of a large percentage of the students' textbooks [2]. This is very useful for many sectors such as tourism, journalism, and hotel.

Learning outcomes could be led by many factors. The efforts to achieve a successful learning involve all the process in the classroom that should be given high attention, from the beginning to the last activities. All of these need teachers' role, including designing the syllabus, deciding the materials and applying the teaching procedure in the classroom. Richards [3] argues that "teaching materials are key component in most language programs.

A teacher makes use of his or her own materials, instructional materials generally serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom". One of the material sources in learning English is a textbook [4].

According to Cunningsworth [5], a textbook is created based on someone's experiences and qualities. The materials in it are normally tested before being used as a piloting stage before publication. At the same time, a textbook is used as a source of materials in teaching learning process particularly in teaching English [6]. Indonesia has been using textbooks for many years in education. Hutchinson and Torres [7] state that "textbooks provide input into classroom lessons in the form of texts, activities, explanations, and so on." "Teachers and students will get benefits when textbook is used in teaching and learning process" [8].

O'Neill [9] adds the reasons for the use of textbooks: Firstly, most parts of textbook materials are appropriate for students' needs, even if they are not especially designed for them. Secondly, they make it possible for students to plan for future learning and also review the previous materials or lessons. Thirdly, textbooks provide students with high quality materials at a reasonable price. Finally, suitable textbooks allow teachers to adapt and modify them to meet the learners' needs and also allow for natural interaction to happen.

Actually, the teachers depend on the textbook. Textbook becomes an important thing in the classroom for teaching and learning process. A textbook means a created material designed as materials for teaching learning process in

order to increase the learners' knowledge and experience [10]. "Textbooks are best seen as a source in achieving aims and objectives that have been set in terms of learners' needs" [11], and they bring teachers at ease in preparing materials to teach. Thus, textbook is one important source of materials in teaching learning process.

2. METHODS

The type of this research is a descriptive qualitative research. The researchers collected the data, made analysis and finally made a conclusion. Content analysis was employed to analyse the textbook based on the Cunningsworth's criteria of a good textbook. The participants of this study were English teachers of SMP Muhammadiyah 10 Surakarta. This research applied document reviews and interview transcript as the data source.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Structure of *When English Rings a Bell* Text Book

The structure of a book seems to be essential part since it gives readers information about the chapters and contents. The teachers suggested that the sequence of learning stages was well described in the text book. The layout had been designed in order aiming to make teachers and students easy to understand the contents. Greeting was the beginning material taught in the classroom. Let's Talk, thanking expressions and introduction were given respectively. It implies self-introduction and introducing others, describing students' daily activities. The activity scope could be in their daily life, in the classroom such as describing daily routines, describing objects in the classroom.

Pursuant to this, the teachers claimed that the *When English Rings a Bell* text book satisfies the criteria of a good text book. These criteria did not only refer to Cunningsworth [11] but also follow Greene and Petty's criteria in Tarigan [12]. That making a textbook more attractive to learners should be prioritized so that learners are enjoyable during the lesson.

b. The Quality of the *When English Rings a Bell* Text Book

The teachers stated that the *When English Rings a Bell* textbook was appropriate since it was completed with learning objectives. Lathif [13] mentions that a textbook is an easy learning source in order that learning objectives can be properly achieved. Ramazani [14] adds that it is teachers' responsibility to prepare learning sources for materials. Other than these, teachers are required to find other sources of materials. That is why; the teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah 10

Surakarta used *When English Rings a Bell* not as the main source in teaching English. However, they stated that the layout of the book was interesting in terms of choice of colour and design. If using another textbook, they should examine and double check whether the book materials are relevant to the learning objectives. This led the teachers to make extra efforts so that the learning objectives could be met effectively.

The teachers' voices support Cunningsworth's [5] criteria of a good textbook which should be designed based on learners' needs. Learning objectives of a language learning program should be embedded in a text book which have been presented in the *When English Rings a Bell* text book.

This part shows the teachers' perception of how the *When English Rings a Bell* text book is qualified. The teachers gave a discourse that a good text book should avail clear explanation of a concept in each chapter. Not only that, the concept and explanation should also be accompanied with examples. They said that a qualified book conveyed materials with clear and elaborative explanation of cases. If it provided some expressions, then examples of the use should be given. The book should also have some assignments for students to do both in the classroom and at home. The *When English Rings a Bell* text book did not have any of those, just materials in it. It also needed some discussions, indeed, the book would be thicker.

However, the teachers mentioned that generally the *When English Rings a Bell* text book could be included to be a qualified textbook. It contained materials, explanation of materials although in brief, discussion of some cases and some examples of exercises. According to Tarigan [12], the *When English Rings a Bell* text book fulfils one of the criteria of a good textbook, namely linguistic aspect. Moreover, it would open the students' horizon if the contents of textbook were related to another branch of science.

c. Difficulties in Using the *When English Rings a Bell* Text Book

The teachers revealed that the students found difficulties when learning English using the textbook. One main reason spoken by the students was that learning English from the text book was not enough. They needed another supporting material to make them practise very often. Thus, it cannot be used as a sole reference in learning English. Moreover, the students encountered a problem in terms of comprehending the materials in the textbook. Not only had the students, the teachers had also an idea to combine other sources of materials to support the text book. That is why; a lack of practices which were not massively given in the text book should be covered by other learning references. By this, the principle in the curriculum 2013 for special mastery on particular field of study could be achieved.

Actually, the *When English Rings a Bell* had already been provided with the management of students' grading. Besides, the students were sometimes not able to understand all of materials in the text book because of least explanation about some concepts which eventually needed teachers' guidance. Another reason is because the students wanted to play a game to escape from the boredom.

Thus, it can be inferred that in using the *When English Rings a Bell* textbook, both the teachers and students faced some difficulties. First, the teachers needed to combine the text book's materials to other sources to make the students more understood. Second, the students still needed the teachers' further explanation beyond the textbook to get a whole description about a concept. Third, the students needed other supporting materials from other sources to improve their comprehension. However, the contents of the textbook were considered accurate and up to date. The textbook was relevant to the students' needs. The given materials in the textbook had a relation to the students' daily life. When the materials were connected to the real life, the students were easy to understand it.

Nonetheless, the textbook's contents were less interesting for the students. The teachers said that the textbooks' contents could fulfil the requirement of what the students had already learned based on the curriculum and syllabus. However it could not assess the students' interest. The students' interest might be different due to their background, environment, and the school they had enrolled before.

The teachers noticed that the textbook was also lack of examples. It could be seen that when the teachers were describing a picture in the book, the teachers had to find ways to explain the material being taught based on the students' background knowledge of the problem. Tarigan [12] suggested that the *When English Rings a Bell* text book does not satisfy one criterion of a good text book that the contents of textbook seem not to be clearly written for their examples. This leads to students' confusion when they are using the textbook.

d. The Role of the *When English Rings a Bell* Text Book in a Teaching Learning Process

The teachers also played role as motivators for the students to keep learning English. During the lesson the teachers found the students were less motivated, the teachers tried to give an interesting explanation about the materials in the text book, for instance, by giving some examples which were correlated with the students' daily life. This is due to various backgrounds of the students. For gifted students, this book was able to give motivation. Whereas, less gifted students needed teachers' intensive approach in order that the students were able to understand a concept and practise it properly. That is why; the teachers' help was one main

support when the students were using the *When English Rings a Bell* text book. However, in this case the teachers still motivated the students to learn independently after guidance. This was to support the essence of the Curriculum 2013 that a student is the one who explored the materials, not the teacher.

Related to this, the teachers admitted that the *When English Rings a Bell* textbook had fulfilled the criteria of a good textbook from Cunningsworth's as it had a clear role as a support for learning. Like teachers, it mediated between the target language and the students. The textbook was able to be used to motivate the students by the colourful pictures provided. Therefore, the students generally felt interested in the text book and made them struggle to finish every exercise they were given. In conclusion, the teachers saw the *When English Rings a Bell* text book as a guided book which was good to fulfil the competence requirement as stated in the curriculum 2013 in a teaching and learning process.

e. The Relevance of the *When English Rings a Bell Handbook* with 2013 Curriculum

Curriculum 2013 is national curriculum for Indonesian Secondary Schools which contains competences to foster students' characters and specific competences based on fields of study. The teachers mentioned that the *When English Rings a Bell* textbook was relevant to the Curriculum 2013. The reasons were as follows: the content aspect was divided into three sub aspects, namely 1) the appropriateness of materials explanation with the standard of competence and basic competence, 2) material accuracy and 3) supporting learning materials. It can be understood because the text book was issued by the Government.

For the standard of competence and basic competence, the textbook had met seven of the twelve criteria. They were 1) comprehension and production of interpersonal texts, 2) taking and giving things, services, information, and opinions in transactional texts; 3) functional communication in monologues, 4) texts of various genres; 5) exposure of text type, 6) linguistic features and 7) actual production of functional texts. This fulfilment indicates that the textbook was fair in the sub-aspect: retention, explicit guidance towards texts' social function, generic structure, and linguistic features.

For material accuracy criterion, the textbook had met all the criteria. They were 1) maintaining interpersonal relation with people through interpersonal texts, 2) getting things done through transactional texts, 3) accomplishing social functions through functional texts, 4) elements of chronological and systematic thinking skills in interpersonal and transactional texts, 5) elements of meaning in short functional texts and

monologues and 6) accuracy and appropriateness of the language.

In the meantime, for supporting learning materials criterion, the textbook had satisfied nine of the ten criteria. They were 1) relevance of the materials towards the topic discussed, 2) up-to-date references, 3) personal skills development, 4) social skills development, 5) academic skills development, 6) appreciation towards cultural diversity, 7) awareness towards local potential and equity, 8) appreciation towards democratic values and 9) appreciation towards nationality insight and self-belongings. In short, similar to Cunningsworth's [11] criteria of a good textbook, the competences match with the objectives of the language-learning program.

f. Using another English Text Book Used at SMP Muhammadiyah 10 Surakarta

When the teachers were asked about using another source of materials to teach, they stated that it would depend on a school's policy whether or not the teachers were allowed to use a reference not from the Government. Another factor was that whether or not a school afforded to buy another text book. A school also considered some points to buy a new text book: the students' competence and the students' parents' financial condition. At the school location of the research, the teachers revealed that the school freed the teachers to make creation of materials to support the main text book. However, another source of materials was also used for a supporting source. The supporting source was in the form of worksheet. The reason of using it was because the text book did not avail any worksheets for students' exercises. Besides, the exercises were enough to drill students' ability in English. They suggested that there should be a worksheet version of the text book.

g. Suggestions for the *When English Rings a Bell* Text Book

One strategy to enhance students' mastery in using English is by giving the students a lot of exercises. In terms of learning materials, the teachers gave their opinion that it would be better if the text book was equipped with more questions and exercises. The students needed to practice answering more questions to understand the materials. In so doing, the students would find it easy if they were drilled for particular skill. This is in line with Tomlinson's [15] statement that materials should be understood through, one among others, a textbook.

4. CONCLUSION

The textbook is considered qualified as it contains learning objectives in the beginning of each chapter. The teachers'

statements were in line with Cunningsworth [5] that a good textbook should correspond to the learners' needs. The content structure was in accordance with the sequence of learning stages for the students although it was not really interesting and attractive for them. Generally, the *When English Rings a Bell* text book could be stated as a qualified text book. It contains some materials, explanation of materials, discussion of some cases and some examples of exercises although relatively less adequate.

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