

When Content and Culture Attack Strike: A Teacher's Perspective on the Use of Textbook

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ABSTRACT

A textbook is considered as one of the important components to the teaching and learning program specifically in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) setting. The textbook not only becomes a framework for the teacher in achieving the aim and objectives of the learning but also serves as guidance in conducting lessons. To this, the teacher has an important role in the process of textbook selection and evaluation. Thus, the study is aimed at investigating the use of textbooks from the teacher's perspective. CAN DO series are imported textbooks used by the teacher being investigated. As imported textbooks may include the author's culture, it is worth analysing the content and cultural issues portrayed in the textbook. The qualitative approach under the descriptive research method was used in this study with adaption frameworks from Sheldon, Mukundan, and Mohamed applied to evaluate textbooks from the teacher's perspective. The study revealed that the textbook comprised marvellous content to cover what it takes to stimulate and to provide students with the nature of English spoken and written. Yet, as the school upholds Islamic values, some of the contents that are influenced by western cultures are quite contradictive with the school's values. To this, the teacher conveyed that he helped students to be aware of these differences after learning the unique cultures presented in the textbook. The different value that was shared between the school and the textbook has led the teacher to consider whether he modified or passed the cultural elements that provided in the textbook.

Keywords: Cultural issue, teacher's perspective, textbook content

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of textbook uses at schools has been widely acknowledged as a promising role to provide material sources for both teachers and students. Thus, textbook selection and evaluation should be carefully done as it also plays as the heart of English Language Teaching (ELT) programs (Mohamed, 2013; Rosyida, 2016; Shahmohammadi, 2018; Sheldon, 1988; Tok, 2010). In terms of the evaluation process, it is assigned that textbook evaluation can be very useful in teachers' development and professional growth as Ellis (1997) suggests that textbook evaluation helps teachers go beyond rough assessments, and it helps them to get a clear description of the overall nature of textbook material. Teachers might do a predictive evaluation of materials available to determine which are suited to their purpose, or retrospective evaluation to examine whether the chosen materials to be used worked for teachers (Ellis, 1997).

Several researchers have promoted framework analysis to conduct a textbook evaluation. Identity,

layout and design, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, exercise, methodology, language content, skills, and practical consideration are similar items to be evaluated constructed by those researchers (Jusuf, 2018; Mohamed, 2013; Mukundan et al., 2011; Sheldon, 1988). However, some other aspects should be taken account into considerations in evaluating a textbook. Sheldon (1988) stated that publishers sometimes neglect matters of cultural appropriacy, unaware of pedagogical theory and research in linguistics and language learning.

The use of adopted textbooks and the type of school in this study are seemed to have a very different point of view. At some point, those two elements share different values. Thus, the framework of Sheldon (1988), Mukundan (2011), and Mohamed (2013) are applied to evaluate textbooks from the teacher's perspective. Both Sheldon and Mohamed comprise cultural items which could give a brief perspective toward the use of the textbook. Accordingly, the general attributes in the Mukundan framework might give a content illustration taken from the teacher's perspective as well.

Considering numerous aspects to be evaluated in each framework, this study will only focus on presenting content and cultural issues of the textbook from the teacher's perspective. Therefore, this study will aim at investigating both content and cultural issues in the adopted textbooks from the teacher's perspective.

1.1. Literature Review

The fact that textbook plays a crucial part in language teaching and learning (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016; Shahmohammadi, 2018; Tok, 2010), it is undeniable that its presence in the classroom serves as the main source of linguistic input after teachers (Razmjoo, 2010). With its important quality and role, textbooks might affect the success or failure of the learning program. Therefore, textbook evaluation is progress that cannot be ignored since it provides an opportunity for teachers, supervisors, even materials developers to make a judgment about the textbooks and how to choose them for the learners (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016). Furthermore, according to Sheldon (1988), it is essential to evaluate and analyse various textbooks which exist in the market to select suitable English textbooks so that it will help educational practitioners to adapt and adopt the textbooks fit with their learners' need.

1.1.1. The Role of Teacher in Textbook Evaluation

There are four influential factors in language teaching and learning, those are teachers, learners, context, and textbooks (Shahmohammadi, 2018). As teachers are those who direct students in using and deliver the content comprised in the textbooks, teachers are expected to be those who are involved in both the selection and evaluation process. Aligned with the aforementioned position that teachers possessed, they can manage, evaluate, and administer the education program especially teaching textbooks (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016). Moreover, using or adapting textbooks is an important part of teachers' professional knowledge, and evaluating textbooks is the teachers' responsibility that becomes the part of their works (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016). Also, Sheldon (1988) stated that familiarizing teachers with textbook selection can be done through evaluation since it gives clear and known information about the strength and weak points of those printed materials.

1.1.2. Benefit and Drawback in the Use of Textbook

Having textbooks as the main sources in conducting the teaching and learning process presents its pros and cons as many studies revealed both sides. Ur (1999) stated the advantages of the textbook as follow: (a) they

supply a clear outline for teachers and students to know how to use the textbook, (b) they provide a plan for the selection of the language context systematically, (c) they provide the teachers to choose the appropriate textbooks based on the students' level for most of the class, (d) they provide learning material for each student cheaply and easily, (e) they supply appropriate packages whose components are bound in order, (f) teachers' guide helps the teachers especially inexperienced teacher to teach better, and (g) they supply self-sufficiency for the students to use them and learn new materials, review, and monitor progress.

With numerous benefits that textbooks offer as the primary sources to be used in the class, it gives a lot of efficiency and practicality for teachers. Yet, as teachers become dependent on textbooks, they might lead them to become less creative and overuse the prescribed textbooks (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016). Furthermore, Richards and Renadya (2002) indicate the disadvantages of using textbooks, those are: (a) they are not successful to present valid and realistic language models, (b) they decrease learners role, (c) they do not succeed in contextualizing language activities, (d) they provide inappropriate cultural understanding for the students, (e) they are unsuccessful to provide discourse ability, (f) they cannot present idioms, and (g) they are weak in presenting equity in gender representation.

1.1.3. Teacher Perception Toward Textbook

What teachers perceive toward the use of textbooks is a fruitful input that will contribute to portraying future considerations to the existed printed materials. The various study conducted to reveal teacher's perception toward textbooks as they spend a great deal of time on those textbooks. Riasati and Zare (2010) have conducted a study on the EFL teachers' perspective on the "New Interchange" textbook series. The results found that the teachers were satisfied with the subject content of the series and have the same opinion that the subject and content of the textbook are realistic, interesting, challenging, motivating, and relevant to students' needs. However, they said that the layout design was not appropriate and clear, and the textbook was unorganized effectively.

Another study on teachers' perspectives was also conducted by Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2015). They analysed one hundred Iranian teachers' perceptions using Razmjoo (2010) checklist which includes six criteria, namely language components, tasks, activities and exercise, language skills, teacher's manual, general consideration, and critical discourse analysis features. The textbooks being analysed were Prospect 1 and its old version 'RPE1'. The results of the research indicated that the majority of teachers believe that Prospect 1 followed CLT and listening and speaking skills are paid more attention. Furthermore,

grammar is completely neglected. On the contrary, RPE1 did not follow the CLT approach

2. METHOD

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach under the descriptive research method. As Creswell (2018) explained that this approach is a model of educational research which relies on the participant’s view, and the descriptive research method by which describe particular behaviour as occurs in the participants, both approach and method fit with the aim of this study which focused on teacher’s perception on the use of a textbook.

The instrument of this study was used a semi-structured interview. The open-ended questions were constructed based on the checklist proposed by Mohamed (2013), Mukundan (2011), and Sheldon (1988). The checklist as the framework of this study was used as a questions guideline to portray what the teacher perceived on the use of the book in the form of an interview session.

The result of the interview was recorded and transcribed to acquire more accurate data. The steps in analyzing the data in this study were: (1) Collecting and reducing the data from the interview. The data were selected, identified, and focused on the specific information needed by referring to the objective of the study. (2) Displaying the data. The data that has been reduced were described in sentence form. The data were displayed and explained through well-ordered sentences. (3) After displaying the data, the conclusion was drawn. The conclusion was drawn from the interpretation of the interview and then the data were compared and contrasted to the related theories to conclude the result statement.

The purposive sampling was chosen as the participant of the study. The English teachers have been using the CAN-DO textbook since 2013. It is said that the textbook is projected to elevate student’s comprehension of learning English. The sophisticated design and interesting topics in each unit are other rationales under the use of this textbook.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

English language teaching that takes place in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) setting needs to be provided with instructional materials that will give guidance for teachers to conduct their learning. Among two forms of instructional materials; those are printed and non-printed materials (Tok, 2010), the printed one is the most widely used at schools with a variety of textbooks selection ranging from those provided by the government to those which are published by local and international publishers. Regarding this fact, it clears

that textbook is considered as one component to the teaching and learning program. Therefore, what teacher perceives on the use of textbook is another important factor that might affect the teaching program. The results of the study were portrayed under the following subsections.

3.1. The Content of the Textbook

The result under this topic was derived from the general attributes section of the checklist framework. It is revealed that the textbook related to syllabus and curriculum as the teacher said in the interview excerpt on figure one.

What the teacher said about the textbook indicated that the teacher had no difficulties in using the textbook since it matched with the syllabus and curriculum to be used in the school. This statement aligned with what Richards (2001b) says about the role of a textbook saying that a textbook should provide a structure and a syllabus that is planned and organized systematically. The content of the textbook was compiled assuredly where grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, communication aspect, and socio-cultural and learning skills were described in the table of the content section. Yet, the teacher did not use the textbook orderly from unit 1 since it should be matched with the competencies in the curriculum. Figure two is the textbook’s table of content samples containing what students will learn under a specific topic.

Excerpt 1:
 “CAN DO Book has a more expanded range of learning units compared to the applied syllabus in the Indonesian curriculum. Those units, albeit different in theme, still cover the same learning materials as proposed in the syllabus.”

Figure 1 Interview Excerpt 1

Unit	Grammar	Vocabulary & Pronunciation	Communication	Socio-cultural & Learning skills
1 New Friends 4 – 9	• Parts of Speech • Like + Noun or Gerund	• Computers • Describing Personality	• Meet new people • Describe my friends • Read a computer profile • Write a personal profile	• Improving computer awareness • Attitude
2 Different Lifestyles 10 – 15	• Present Simple + Adverbs of Frequency • How often...? • Present Simple • Present Continuous for Arrangements	• Routines • What people are doing • Linking	• Do a survey about routines • Find out what people are doing • Follow a radio interview • Ask about people’s lifestyles	• Comparing lifestyles • Before listening
Dossier 1 - A School Web-site 16 – 17				

Figure 2 Table of Content

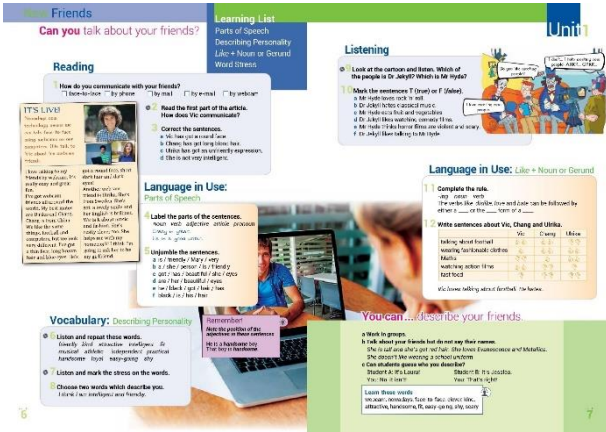


Figure 3 Teaching Cycle Comprising GBA Stages

In terms of the methodology in ELT, the textbook claimed that the activities available can be fully exploited and can embrace the various methodologies in ELT as the teacher also said that the textbook can explore the variety of techniques to explain each available activity and it goes in line with ELT methodology. What is said about the textbook is aligned with the statement from Hutchinson (1994) which mentioned that textbook provides the necessary input into classroom lessons through different activities, reading, and explanations that should be covered in ELT. Moreover, referring to what is stated in the 2013 English Curriculum saying that Genre-Based Approach (GBA) is the suggested method in teaching English, the CAN DO textbook, according to the teacher's opinion, supports this method. As there are four stages in the GBA namely Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modelling of the Text (MOT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCOT), and Independent Construction of the text (ICOT) (Badger & White, 2000), the textbook comprises those four stages in one cycle of teaching. The following picture is the example of one teaching cycle that is claimed to cover the four stages of GBA depicted in the textbook.

Excerpt 2:

"The textbook is very colorful, very well-designed, made of good material, and quite affordable to the students in our school. It uses large font and a soft, balanced color pallet which are eye-friendly. The paper is thick which makes it durable, but on the downside, it uses coated paper which causes graphite pencil to barely leave any mark on the surface. This type of paper might be more resistant to moisture and tearing, but it absorbs ink slowly, thus it takes some time to let any marks from pen dry out."

Figure 4 Interview Excerpt 2

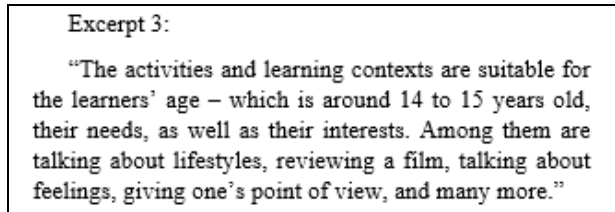


Figure 5 Interview Excerpt 3

Physical attributes of textbooks and suitability to learners are other parts that are highlighted from the findings of this study. As Richards (2001b) mentioned that commercial textbooks should visually appeal to learners and teachers who have high standards of design and production, this statement was also confirmed by what the teacher said through the excerpted interview on figure four.

Derived from the teacher's opinion about the physical attributes of the textbook, it can be considered that both teacher and students were attracted by the textbook as the criteria of appealing textbook attributes were fulfilled. Furthermore, concerning the textbook suitability to the learners, the textbook compatibility to the age, the needs, and the interest of the learners were also accommodated by the textbook. It is determined by what the teacher perceived as portrayed in figure five.

The teacher's opinion on figure five was supported what Crawford (2002, cited in Richards & Renadya, 2002) states about effective teaching materials. It is said that effective materials are those which engage learners both affectively and cognitively, and it should be flexible enough to cater to individual and contextual differences. The availability of supplementary materials such as audio records, teacher's guidance, and student's workbook, is aligned with the criteria provided in the checklist proposed by Sheldon (1988) and principal advantages by Richards (2001a).

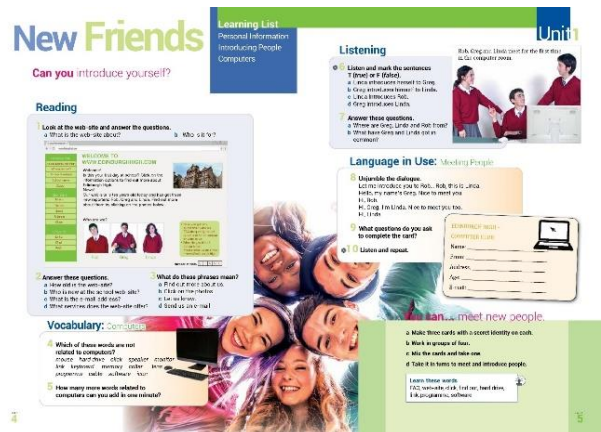


Figure 6 Sample of Exercises

The exercises provided in the textbook were another part that was reviewed under several aspects. First, the teacher reported that the exercises provided in the textbook had clear instruction and sometimes provided an example of how it should be done. Second, the teacher admitted that the textbook provided an adequate amount of exercise with could encourage them to understand the context of the topic visually interesting. Third, it is claimed that the example provided in the textbook might promote independent learning activity as the instruction was clear enough. Fourth, it provided balance activities and tasks that focus on both fluent and accurate production of language. Fifth, the tasks moved from simple to complex with grammar points, and vocabulary items were introduced in motivating and realistic content. Last, the exercises incorporated individual and group work and could be modified easily.

Corroborating the teacher’s explanation about exercises in the textbook, the sample of exercises above confirmed that what the teacher claimed was matched. The task started from the simple to the complex one, the exercises presented also covered four skills with clear instruction, and adequate, and interesting exercises that focus on both fluent and accurate production of language, the learning list provided at the top of the page served as the teacher’s guidance to teach what competencies to be mastered by students. Then, those exercises comprised both individual and group works which could be modified easily to adapt to students’ needs.

3.2. The Cultural Issues in the Textbook

The fact that many Indonesian educators prefer imported to local textbook has led to the investigation on the rationale of textbook selection. The study conducted by Zacharias (2005) resulted that most educators believed that internationally-published materials were preferable to those published locally because they used ‘perfect’ English despite the international role that English has today. The fact that the author’s value and culture might be represented in the textbook (Johnston, 2003) is an issue that teachers should aware of as the textbook would be used widely by the students. Under this issue, there were some pros and cons that were revealed according to the findings of this study.

Depicted from the checklist as the framework of this study, the teacher said that the content of the textbook was free from stereotypical images and information and it expresses positive views of ethnic origins, occupations, age groups, and social groups. These aspects are important to be considered since students in the level of the teenage group are characterized by the “searching for identity” stage (Brown, 2000) that is a crucial phase that forces teachers to carefully lead and guide them well. Since students would frequently spend

their time engaging with the textbook, the textbook should free from those issues aforementioned.

What makes students attracted to the textbook was the content discussed presented some well-known characters from different areas of the world. Aligned to this aspect, the teacher reported that most discussion includes famous figures from western countries such as Angelina Jolie, Emma Watson, and Leonardo DiCaprio as the representatives of famous figures. Though it rarely introduced well-known characters from other areas, the teacher claimed that most students were still engaged to the textbook.

Furthermore, the social and cultural contexts in the textbook are comprehensible as the teacher statement in the excerpted interview on figure seven. What the teacher said about the social and cultural context above was supported by the fact that the textbook provided a variety of socio and cultural understanding in each unit that gave students various information about English language culture and another interesting discussion about different cultures. The summary of socio-cultural and learning skills provided in every CAN DO unit was portrayed in table one.

Regarding what was presented in the table by which covering different social and cultural contexts, the textbook also upheld socializing function which means that textbook might represent as a society to its member (Marinković & Erić, 2014). Therefore, the textbook as a society and school must respect national, cultural values and universal human values covering (1) democratic values (freedom, toleration, and respect to differences), (2) in discrimination of different human groups and communities, (3) universal declaration of the rights of man and child, and (4) cultural, religious, and art values which are relevant for a certain subject.

Besides, since textbooks are widely acknowledged as the main materials used in language classes, the massive production of imported textbooks is aimed to meet the needs of language learners, so that they can function linguistically and culturally well in English communicative acts (Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012). Therefore, it is extremely important that these textbooks include the vital components to teach the language, its culture, and are appropriate for learners’ needs, cultural background, and level.

Excerpt 4:
 “The socio-cultural aspects of the book are suitable for the user’s ages. Any discussions about social and cultural understanding can also put students’ interest in reading more about what happened in the world.”

Figure 7 Interview Excerpt 4

Table 1 List of Themes and Socio-cultural & learning skills items of the textbook

UNIT	THEME	SOCIO-CULTURAL & LEARNING SKILLS
1	New Friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving computer awareness
2	Different Lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitudes Comparing lifestyles
3	The Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before listening Appreciating sporting achievement
4	Money Talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check your work Consumer habits Act it out!
5	Important Moments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussing films Writing drafts
6	Reading the Signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describing superstitions Memorizing new words
7	Romance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking about relationships Improve your reading
8	Breaking the Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussing school rules Opinions
9	Game Freaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating games Mistakes are good for you
10	Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The global economy Using your knowledge
11	Good Idea!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Festivals Presentation counts
12	Are We Lost?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map reading Speaking Practice
13	Well Done!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to News Guessing meaning
14	Fresh Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting a job A language profile

As the chosen textbook in the school is imported one by which mostly presented western cultures as it has been highlighted in the previous part, the school which upholds Islamic values as the school cultures had different perspectives between both sides. To this, the teacher needs to understand the value he is transmitting and also the values of the students' cultures (McLeod, 1985 cited in Rajabi & Ketab, 2012). In line with this, the textbook can be a major source of cultural elements besides providing linguistic and topical contents which necessarily reflect the ideology inherent in the EFL context. Among 14 units provided in the textbook, most of them has covered cultural elements that should be put into English teaching to make the students understand the culture of English native speaker.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that this imported textbook has consistently presented a native cultural context which is most of the part is influenced by western one.

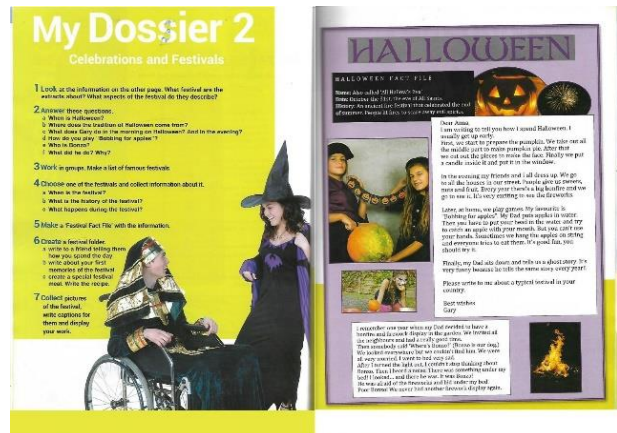


Figure 8 Example Unit – Halloween

As the school upholds Islamic values, some of the contents that are influenced by western cultures are quite contradictive with the school's values. To this, the teacher conveyed that he helped students to be aware of these differences after learning the unique cultures presented in the textbook. The example of cultural content which mismatched the school value was presented on Figure 8 above.

Figure 8 is a content example that mismatched the school value. In this unit, the students are given a text talking about a Halloween tradition. The students are asked to mention the Halloween items and talked about their Halloween experience. Of course, the content contradicts with the students' background where they are prohibited to celebrate this festival. Yet, though the unit contradicts the school value, the teacher said that he didn't skip this unit. Instead of changing the materials which more suitable with the school value, the teacher continued giving this material to students. The teacher believed that students should know the reason why this celebration does not fit with Islamic values that underpinned the school. The teacher also confirmed this was an effort to give an understanding of why the students should not celebrate this day which is popular recently in our country. What the teacher modified was the task given to the students. Rather than asking them about Halloween experiences, the teacher asked students to compose another writing about other celebrations that mismatched with their cultural background.

Regarding the finding of what teacher believe about not skipping the inappropriate cultural contents was because he had to give comprehension to students that there were various cultures in the world. Yet, they should not follow things that do not fit with their belief. This is supported by the statement from Reimann (2009) saying that both schools and teachers play an important role in preparing students for cultural pluralism. They do so by presenting a curriculum that reflects multiple perspectives on issues.

3.3. The Teacher Perception on the Use of Textbook

The elaboration on both elements presented previously which discussed the textbook's content and culture has conveyed that the teacher was satisfied with the textbook. The content of the textbook which stimulates and attracts students to enjoy learning English has given a beneficial impact on the teacher. The themes, the topics, the layout, the textbook organization, and the exercises presented in the textbook made the teacher easier in delivering the materials. Yet, with some cultural contents that contradict the school value, it led the teacher to choose whether he skipped or kept on delivering the materials. On this occasion, the teacher kept on delivering those materials by considering how to transmit the message so that the students understand the issues underlying those specific cultural.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings and discussions on this study have presented that the textbook comprised marvelous content to cover what it takes to stimulate and to provide students with the nature of English spoken and written. What is lack is laid on the cultural content which did not present local culture. The textbook was written by non-local authors but was promoted to be used by Indonesian schools, it would be better if the textbook considers the students' culture to be inserted in the textbook. This rationale will eventually make the textbook to be more acceptable and friendly user for the schools which share similar values as in this school. Presenting common issues that are acceptable by different races, beliefs, and cultures will be a good way to go to make this textbook to be more flexible to be used at schools. This consideration will be another benefit for the textbook as CAN DO has supplemented the teacher with teacher's book as guidance to teach using this textbook, practice book for students, audio MP3 for listening activities, and syllabuses matched with the 2013 national curriculum.

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