

# An Analysis on Language Content and Readability Level of Primary English Textbook

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## ABSTRACT

Teaching English is not easy. Teachers will sacrifice their time and energy to prepare better students in a constantly growing competitive environment. Textbook is one of many media that is used by the teacher to teach their students. So, choosing the textbook should be done selectively. This study was conducted to analyse language content and the readability level with Flesch-Kincaid Readability Formula. The study employed descriptive qualitative analysis methods. The data and source of data of this research was adopted from an English textbook entitled Learning Daily English for Grade 5 Elementary School published by Grafindo Media Pratama. All of the passages were concluded as good text because each text had relation to the thematic subject and the vocabulary existed in the text were daily used vocabulary. In terms of readability level, there were 5 texts that had a suitable level of readability. The other 6 texts were below the grade and age level. The other two texts were above the grade and age level of the students. Hopefully, these results would give a great contribution to the textbook selection and evaluation.

**Keywords:** *Language content, readability, textbook evaluation*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning Daily English for Grade 5 Elementary School is a textbook which is used by one of the Government Primary schools in Banyuwangi, East Java. The school has 672 students from grade one until six. Even though English is not a compulsory subject in elementary school level, this school gives English lessons as a supplementary subject. There are two English teachers and both of them have English educational backgrounds. From the preliminary interview with one of the English teachers, she stated that the students have good competences in English skills. Then, the school decided to choose the book based on students' level of competence.

This textbook evaluation will use frameworks from Cunningsworth (1995), and Flesch Readability Formula (Flesch, 1948). The analysis of language content of the text was focused on frequency, usefulness, and appropriacy of vocabulary. The range of frequency and usefulness are seen from how applicable the words are used outside school regarding the socio-cultural environment. Appropriacy will be emphasized on students' language style. Language style is showing habits which are used by a group of people in every conceivable occasion and are restricted to certain kinds

of social context (Crystal & Davy, 2016). Based on this definition, the languages will be analysed in context whether or not to allow the learners to use it in communication, especially formal and informal situations.

The second framework is from the Flesch Readability Formula from Flesch (1948). In his article titled "A New Readability Yardstick", Flesch made a formula to predict reading ease from scale 1 to 100. The scale of 30 means that the reading is very difficult and 70 is easy, while 100 indicates that the reading can be understood by fourth graders in Primary School. Here, the researcher not only uses the reading ease formula, but also uses the grade level. Both of the criteria will be used to find out whether the texts existed in the textbook are easy to understand or not and also whether they are suitable for Primary level or not.

### 1.1. Textbook Evaluation

Textbooks provide useful materials to teachers and students, but they should not be their main tools (Cunningsworth, 1995). The best way is when the textbooks become one of many sources in achieving the targets learning that have been set in each of students. As professional EFL teachers, it is very important to have the

ability to evaluate and supplement the teaching materials effectively (McDonough & Shaw, 2012).

After finishing each lesson, the process of reflection and evaluation is compulsory. It is valuable if teachers keep a record of the selection, adaptation, and supplementation process. Not only focusing on the teaching and learning process, but teachers also need to focus on the textbook used. Cunningsworth (1995) stated that the judgment process will be based on the views and priorities of any parties conducting it. This is categorized as a complex process performed in different ways. They vary from a teacher-owned decision process, a centralized process, and a more decentralized approach (Byrd in Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

According to Richards (2014) there are three stages of evaluating the textbook, namely: pre-use (pre-evaluation), during use and after use. In pre-use stage it is divided into two: analysis and evaluation. The evaluation stage is more difficult because it involves subjective judgments. Richards then suggested making the group evaluation more objective.

### ***1.2. Developing Criteria for Textbook Evaluation***

Defining the quality of the textbook can be measured by the criteria raised by the experts. There are many books discussing the criteria for a good English textbook. Textbook should include bibliographic data, aims and goals, subject matter, vocabulary and structures, and layout and physical makeup (Skierso, 1991). Garinger (2001) stated that three content areas needed to be addressed when evaluating a textbook's content: teaching objectives, depth and breadth of material, and whether the textbook needs to be supplemented or not. In line with this, Cunningsworth (1995) proposed general criteria for textbook evaluation, which included criteria in 8 categories: aims and approaches, design or organization, language content, study skills, topic, methodology, teacher's book, and practical considerations.

Textbooks will always contain passages or texts. In relation to the students' understanding of texts, one of the factors determining students' understanding of a text is text readability. The readability of a book depends on whether it is comprehensible and legible for the reader. Readability level depends on the length of the sentences and the complexity of the language used in the book (Soyibo, 1996). Readers use their past knowledge and experiences to generate meaning from a text (Alvermann, 1989).

In measuring the readability level of texts in English textbooks can be measured by using the Flesch-Kincaid formula. The readability of a text depends upon how easily it can be understood by the reader (Fry, 2002). From those aspects proposed by experts, there are two criteria which will be used in this research. They are

language content, which focuses on vocabulary, and readability formula of the text.

### ***1.3. Flesch Readability Formula***

In this study, the researcher used the Flesch readability formula to determine the level of reading ease and grade level. In the Flesch Reading Ease test, the highest score indicates material that is easier to read; lower scores indicate difficult to read. The formula of Flesch Reading Ease (Scott, n.d.) can be seen in Equation 1.

$$RE = 206.835 - (1.015 \times ASL) - (84.6 \times ASW) \quad (1)$$

RE: Readability Ease

ASL: Average Sentence Length (the number of words divided by the number of sentences)

ASW: Average number of Syllables per Word (i.e., the number of syllables divided by the number of words)

RE is a number ranging from 0 to 100. The higher the number, the easier the text to read. The score between 80 until 100 is largely considered acceptable. Flesch Kincaid Grade Level (Scott, n.d.) assesses the approximate reading grade level of a text. The first step of using the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level is calculating the average number of words used per sentence. Second, calculate the average number of syllables per word. Third, multiply the average number of words by 0.39 and add it to the average number of syllables per word, then multiplied by 11.8. Lastly, subtract 15.59 from the result. The specific mathematical formula is defined in Equation 2.

$$FKRA = (0.39 \times ASL) + (11.8 \times ASW) - 15.59 \quad (2)$$

FKRA: Flesch-Kincaid Reading Age

ASL: Average Sentence Length (i.e., the number of words divided by the number of sentences)

ASW: Average number of Syllables per Word (i.e., the number of syllables divided by the number of words)

Analyzing the results is a simple exercise. For instance, a score of 5.0 indicates a grade-school level, i.e., a score of 5.3 means that a fifth grader would be able to read the document.

### ***1.4. Related Research Report***

Many studies are conducted in coverage of language content and readability of textbooks. The focus of studies can vary according to researchers' interest. The related research reports can be seen as follows. Litz (2005) did a study to determine the overall pedagogical value and suitability of the book towards a specific language program. The result of the study was the textbook stood up reasonably well to a systematic in-depth analysis and that the positive attributes far outweighed the negative characteristics. Compatible with the University's language learning aims and suitable for small, homogeneous, co-ed. classes of senior Korean students. The second research was done by Gómez and Lafuente

(2019) to examine the degree of accuracy of the six most commonly used readability indices, and to present a new optimized measure. The result was a discriminant analysis of all the variables under examination which enabled the creation of a much more precise model, improving the previous best results by 15%.

The last research was done by Yulianto (2019) to analyse the readability level of English reading text. The result was only 1 out of 8 texts which was appropriate for seven or eight grade Junior High School students. One text was for High School level and the other 6 texts were for Elementary level. Various studies confirmed that evaluated textbooks are important to do. Language content and readability of the text increase the chance of target audience that will read and interact with the contents or passages.

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This research used a descriptive qualitative analysis method, in which the researcher tried to describe, elaborate, and analyse the language content and the readability level of read aloud texts in Learning Daily English for Grade 5 Elementary School published by Grafindo Media Pratama. Croker (2009) states that in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary research instrument.

### **2.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

The data and source of data of this research is adopted from an English textbook entitled Learning Daily English for Grade 5 Elementary School published by Grafindo Media Pratama. In this study, the researcher needs a tool to be flexible in collecting data. The main instrument in this research is documentation. The researcher used documentation to analyse the language content and the readability level of text in the English textbook and the document itself is the sources that are taken from written forms. The steps to collect data are as follows:

1. Identified the reading text in an English textbook entitled Learning Daily English for Grade 5 Elementary School published by Grafindo Media Pratama.
2. Read the text carefully.
3. Analyse the vocabulary used in terms of socio-cultural environment and appropriacy.
4. Count the number of sentences, words, and complex words in each text

To analyse the English text, Flesch readability formula is used since it is easy to implement. The researcher used a website for readability formula, namely

Readability Test Tool, which can be accessed at [www.webfx.com](http://www.webfx.com). The steps in using website of readability formula can be seen as follows:

1. Open the website namely <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>
2. After that, choose one of the ways you want to input the text. There are four ways: test by url, test by direct input, test by referrer, and tool feedback.
3. Click direct input; there will be an area to paste the text.
4. After pasting the text, click calculate readability and the formula will work and also show the text readability automatically, including the Readability Indices and Text Statistics.
5. Analyse the readability level of texts based on the Grade-level Scores and Flesch Reading Ease Score.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Findings**

#### **3.1.1. Language Content**

Based on the description in the textbook, the theme in each unit was selected based on curriculum 2013 in Indonesia. So, the themes in the textbook were related to the thematic subject of grade 5. There were 13 passages of read aloud sections in the textbook. The first text was descriptive text. The text focused on a specific person. The vocabulary used was mostly about characteristics, qualities, and identifying. The second text was a report text. The topic of the text was organs in the body. The vocabulary used in the text included general nouns, behavioural verbs, relating verbs, and technical terms. The third text was descriptive text. It described the writer's favourite food. The vocabulary was mostly adjectives and nouns. The fourth text was a report text. It focuses on the organs in the body. It was almost the same as the second text. The vocabulary was mostly about technical terms. The fifth text was descriptive text. The text was about the writer's favourite activity.

The sixth text was a report text. The text focused on specific animals. The vocabulary used in the text was mostly about general nouns and behavioural verbs. The seventh text was descriptive text. The topic was the writer's interesting activities. The eighth text was descriptive text. The text was focused on describing particular activities of the writer. The ninth text was a recount text. The text was telling the writer's experience in visiting a place. The vocabulary used was mostly about action verbs, adjectives, pronouns, and nouns. The tenth text was dialog about colonialism in Indonesia. The vocabulary used in the text was about technical terms and action verbs. The eleventh text was descriptive text. The

text was about the environment. The twelfth text was a letter about the suggestions from students to the school principal. The vocabulary which was mostly used in the text was emotive words, linking verbs, and nouns. The thirteenth text was a dialogue about the procedure of making beverages. The vocabulary was mostly about imperative and action verbs.

**3.1.2. Readability Text**

**3.1.2.1. Sentences, Words and Complex Words**

**Counting**

In analyzing the data, the first step was counting the sentences, words, and complex words. The sentences, words, and complex words for each text can be seen in Table 1.

**3.1.2.2. Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease**

In the Flesch Reading Ease test, the highest score indicates material that is easier to read; the lower number marks passages that are more difficult to read. The level of reading ease for each text in the textbook can be seen in Table 2.

**3.1.2.3. Flesch Kincaid Grade Level**

The Flesch Kincaid Grade Level is a widely used readability formula which assesses the approximate reading grade level of a text. The Flesch Kincaid Grade Level for each text is listed in Table 3.

**3.1.3. Teacher’s and Students’ Perspectives on the Textbook**

The first aspect of teachers’ perception toward the use of textbooks is teachers’ understanding about textbook evaluation and selection. From the findings, the teachers believe that textbook evaluation and selection is a process in which the teachers identify the textbook and choose the best textbook that fits their teaching purpose. They believe that textbook evaluation and selection are important to conduct in order to find the best one to be used by the students. The teacher’s opinion toward textbook selection and evaluation can be seen in the first interview excerpt number 4.

Excerpt 4:

“In my opinion, it is very important. In selecting the book, I consider the opinion from other English teachers because we have two teachers in this school and also, I see the textbook good or not from the students’ achievement. We usually evaluate the textbook every year, at the end of the semester.”

**Table 1.** Sentences, words and complex words counting

No.	Number of Texts	Sentences	Words	Complex Words
1.	Text 1	12	86	5
2.	Text 2	8	89	6
3.	Text 3	6	44	4
4.	Text 4	7	59	3
5.	Text 5	7	47	2
6.	Text 6	7	58	13
7.	Text 7	10	50	7
8.	Text 8	6	59	3
9.	Text 9	13	89	19
10.	Text 10	13	95	16
11.	Text 11	8	70	9
12.	Text 12	13	116	14
13.	Text 13	15	88	3

**Table 2.** Flesch Kincaid reading ease

No.	Number of Texts	Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease	Difficulty Level
1.	Text 1	88.4	Easy
2.	Text 2	82.4	Easy
3.	Text 3	78.3	Fairly easy
4.	Text 4	90.7	Very easy
5.	Text 5	88.4	Easy
6.	Text 6	64.2	Standard
7.	Text 7	64.7	Standard
8.	Text 8	90.7	Very easy
9.	Text 9	50.6	Fairly difficult
10.	Text 10	60.5	Standard
11.	Text 11	74.7	Fairly easy
12.	Text 12	75.3	Fairly easy
13.	Text 13	91.3	Very easy

**Table 3.** Flesch Kincaid grade level

No.	Number of Texts	Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	Suitable Age
1.	Text 1	2.7	8-9y
2.	Text 2	4.5	11-12y
3.	Text 3	4.2	10-11y
4.	Text 4	2.7	9-10y
5.	Text 5	2.6	8-9y
6.	Text 6	6.4	14-15y
7.	Text 7	5.5	12-13y
8.	Text 8	3	9-10y
9.	Text 9	7.9	14-15y
10.	Text 10	6.6	12-13y
11.	Text 11	5	12-13y
12.	Text 12	5	12-13y
13.	Text 13	2	8-9y

Excerpt 6:

“That becomes one of the reasons why I choose the book because it is suitable for the basic competence and syllabus. I arrange the materials based on my lesson plan...”

The teacher believed that the textbook they used was attractive and interesting for students and culturally

acceptable. The textbook reflected the students' needs and interest and had appropriate the physical characteristic and authentic texts. Moreover, the teacher informed us that there was an appropriate balance of the four language skills in the textbook they used and was appropriate with the students' competence level. Related to the teacher's need, the textbook used required little or not too heavy preparation. It is because the textbook used was accompanied by good supplementary materials and teachers' guide. These opinions can be seen in the following first and second interview. The excerpts are as follows.

Interview 1, excerpt 8:

"They are interesting. Many fun activities are provided in the textbook, such as: matching pictures, making dialogues, etc."

Interview 2, excerpt 6:

"Actually, I choose this textbook for several reasons. First, this book is completed with the syllabus and lesson plan, so I can easily understand the materials covered in this book..."

Even though in the interview the teacher showed that her interpretation toward the textbook use was positive. The teachers did not fully rely on the textbook and the entire materials from one textbook. It was because the teachers did not use the textbook as the only source of teaching material. The teacher freely looked for the materials from other reliable sources that could increase students' knowledge that can be seen in the excerpt below.

Interview 1, excerpt 8:

"...But I do not always rely on the textbook's activities, sometimes I make supplementary materials to support the learning process."

### **3.2. Discussion**

In terms of vocabulary of the passages, all of the passages were concluded as good text because each text had relation to the thematic subject and the vocabulary existed in the text were daily used vocabulary. There were four types of text which existed in the read aloud section, namely: descriptive, report, recount, and procedure. The most interesting passages were descriptive text. They provided daily used vocabulary, such as: introducing others, favourite food, weekend activities, hobbies, etc. From teacher perspectives, it was in line with my opinion that the textbook had good vocabulary in terms of language used. The teacher's opinion could be seen in the interview excerpt below.

Interview 2, excerpt 14:

"Since the themes in the textbooks are connected to the thematic subject, the students can use the language

for daily academic needs. But it can also be applied in daily conversation although the portion is smaller than the academic needs."

Besides the language content, the readability text was analyzed by Flesch Kincaid Readability Formula. From table 1, we can analyze that there were 6 different levels of reading difficulties. Three of the texts were very easy. There were three texts which were easy. Three texts were in each level of easy and fairly easy. The standard level had one text and one text of fairly difficult level. The average level of readability text in the textbook was fairly easy. From table 2, we can see the readability grade level of each text. The data from the interview, the students' ages were in range 12-13 years old. There were 5 texts that had a suitable level of readability. The other 6 texts were below the grade and age level. The other two texts were above the grade and age level of the students. Unfortunately, the teacher did not realize this, but she revealed that some chapters need an effort to deliver the materials. She directly helped the students whenever they found difficulties. It can be seen in the interview excerpt below.

Interview 2, excerpt 10:

"The reading texts are good. In the beginning, there are several difficult vocabularies to ease and increase the students' understanding."

Interview 2, excerpt 12:

"I don't know about that. But several chapters are more difficult, so I need more effort to deliver them to my students."

## **4. CONCLUSION**

In relation to findings and discussion, it is concluded that the English textbook titled Learning Daily English for Grade 5 Elementary School has been a good textbook. There were four types of text which existed in the read aloud section, namely: descriptive, report, recount, and procedure. The most interesting passages were descriptive text since it provided daily used vocabulary, such as: introducing others, favourite food, weekend activities, hobbies, etc. The language content, especially vocabulary used in the texts, is good and represents daily communicative language. Even though, the portion of communicative language is smaller than the academic needs. In readability factor, it can be concluded that the readability level of reading texts varies from one text to another. Only 5 out of 13 texts which are suitable with the grade level of the students. Six texts are below the level and two texts are above the grade level.

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