



An Evaluation of an English Coursebook “When English Rings The Bell”

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate an English course-book for eight graders entitled “*When English Rings the Bell*” published by the Ministry of Culture and Education of Indonesia in 2014. The study discussed what the teachers perceived as a good quality course-book and what recommendations they expected for the improvement of the course-book. The study was carried out in Bengkayang District. It employed a mixed-method with 15 English teachers as the research subjects. It applied the convenience sampling method and collected data using a questionnaire designed based on Tomlinson’s course-book evaluation framework and analyzed by interpreting the subjects’ answers. The finding revealed that the teachers perceived the course-book positively with some recommendations for its improvement.

Keywords

Course-book Evaluation, Mix Methods Approach, Tomlinson Course-book Evaluation Framework

DOI: 10.26418/jeltim.v1i2.33346

1 INTRODUCTION

A course-book evaluation is complex because many variables influence the success or failure of a course-book in use in a certain course of instruction. The evaluation criteria vary, depending on the particular circumstances of teaching and learning situations. To this point, expert has proposed many useful checklists and approaches. Evaluators are able to select from the available checklists, or they can create their own criteria to reflect the important priorities of their specific English teaching and learning contexts.

Evaluation plays a major part in education. It is defined as the process of delineating, gaining, and supplying useful information for judging decision alternatives (Stufflebeam, 1972). A need for course-book evaluation takes on special importance. Such information from the evaluation can be used to determine whether the materials are suitable to be used again, which tasks 'work', and how to adjust the materials to make them effective for future use. Those things can be supplied from an evaluation (Ellis, 1997).

The course-books may be selected periodically, although they are not rewritten on a periodical basis. As such the evaluation of technical course-books is suggested to be done frequently. It was stated by Cunningsworth (1984) that most teachers tended to use published teaching materials at many stages in their teaching-learning process. No matter where the teacher

works, what or to whom they teach, they prefer to use some materials from the course-book or other published material considering time and money-saving. Thus, the materials are needed to be evaluated in order to make judgments and to reach acceptable decisions.

For these reasons, it is very important to evaluate the materials in a course-book. The information from the evaluation help teachers decides the appropriateness of the course-book in order to be used in the teaching-learning process.

In line with this, the objective of the study is to evaluate English course-book for eight-grader entitled “*When English Rings The Bell*” based on English teachers’ perceptions. The book was published by Ministry of Culture and Education of Indonesia in 2014. The evaluation concerns on how the teachers perceive the quality of the book and what recommendations the teachers suggest for the coursebook improvement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Coursebook

Awasthi (2006) offers a truly detailed definition of a coursebook. It is defined that a coursebook is a teaching and learning material for both the teacher and the learner to be used in the process of teaching and learning. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) define that a

course-book is a guide for teachers in teaching learning process, and an equipment for students to review their knowledge. It is considered as a record for the measurement of what has been taught by the teachers as well. These definitions indicate that they differ one another and is assumed that it is affected by the use and context in which the course-books are used. However, there is one thing they have in common that course-books are considered to be sources of information for both the teacher and the learner in teaching and learning. The above definitions of coursebooks looks like a suitable term for the current evaluative study.

Coursebooks are frequently considered as a main source for teaching, learning and classroom activities. As the matter of fact, the published coursebooks are often used by majority of teachers in their teaching career (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). The followings are the advantages of coursebooks used by teachers:

- 1) For general language courses, McGrath (2002) states that, coursebooks have many supplementary components like workbooks, teachers' guides, tests, and other audio-visual devices. They may be beneficial in providing the useful and necessary classroom activity.
- 2) Based on Tomlinson (2003), course-books give assist to 're-skill' than 'de-skill' teachers. It is because of the instructions in the coursebooks. Course-books, with the teacher's manuals guide, give teachers detail instructions on how to teach the lessons. They also help teachers to save time on the preparation of the lesson and the production of the materials, as some coursebooks give activity sheets and pictures to introduce the learner with the new language.
- 3) Course-books ease teachers to save more time to think about producing an interesting and effective classroom activities to students based on the given content of knowledge (Bell and Gower, 2011).
- 4) Course-books are often considered as a clear map for the teacher and learner to follow during the teaching learning process. They indicate where the teacher and learner are, what they have learnt, and what needs to be improved to reach a certain course target. They may also help the students review and practice what they have done (McGrath, 2002).

In English Language Teaching, course-books are intended for many purposes (Cunningsworth, 1995, cited in Tsiplakides, 2011, p. 758).

- 1) A resource for presenting material both in spoken and written.
- 2) A source of many activities for learner to practice, communicate, and interact.
- 3) A reference source.
- 4) A syllabus.
- 5) A resource for self-directed learning.
- 6) A support for less experienced teachers.

However, many experts point out the disadvantages of published coursebooks. They say that published coursebooks are commercial products. They argue that coursebooks may have the following limitations:

- 1) Coursebooks can not encounter all teachers' and students' needs because they are not relevant to all teaching and learning situations. They may not cover the diversity of students' backgrounds. A coursebook which is suitable for a class is not a guarantee to be suitable to be used in another class. A book that is designed for a class with small number of students in a big city, may not be suitable for a class with large number of students in rural areas (Jolly and Bolitho, 2011).
- 2) Course-books decrease teachers and students creativity and exploration in teaching and learning. The creativity of teachers might be robbed if they are over-reliance on a course-book. It will make the teaching more rigid and uninteresting. Thus, the teacher just follows the role of a person who obeys the course-book writer's intention and the teacher's role looks like to be disempowered. Course-books also hinder the students from opening their horizon widely because they just limit the students based on what is given (Littlejohn, 1998).
- 3) Course-book publishing is a business. The publishers just want to concern with the profit as the primary goal (McGrath, 2013).
- 4) A course-book is written by limited number of authors that limit the extent of the course-book. Since we know that the students have different background and teaching and learning culture or even context.

To sum up, the role of course-books is varied depending on the teachers' experiences and pedagogical views. The best solution is to use coursebooks as the additional servant for teachers and students, and not as the master (Cunningsworth, 1995). Christenbury and Kelly (1994) state that almost all educational systems depends on course-books use world wide, but that is not because of how great the course-books are written. Teachers and students have to ensure that they use course-books wisely since too much reliance on them does not broaden the mind, on the contrary, it will limit it. Because course-books just supply the core of a course, they do not cover all the students' needs and teachers' creativity. Thus, teachers should use course-books wisely and enhance the teaching learning process with supplementary materials to encourage the students.

2.2 How to Evaluate a Coursebook

According to Tomlinson (2003), evaluation has different aims. For example, if the objective is to search the causes of problem that is happening when the students use the coursebooks, the evaluation is to improve the materials in the coursebooks. The materials evaluation should use accurate, principled, and systematic procedures in order to ensure that the materials are chosen and adapted in valid and countable ways. For the sake of this study, the researcher designed the evaluation criteria based on Tomlinson's (2003) framework. Three stages of evaluating a course-book based on Tomlinson (2003):

- 1) Pre-use evaluation

The stage aim is to get a quick impression and predictions toward the potential value of a course-book. The physical appearance and content pages will be the concern of the evaluator to evaluate the book in this stage.

2) Whilst-use evaluation

This stage will be more reliable than pre-use evaluation. It engages with deeper evaluation of the materials content (i.e. the layout; activities and tasks; vocabulary and grammar; flexibility; etc.). Whilst-use evaluation takes classroom observation and feedback from the teachers as the users. It also involves exploring: organization and structure; activities and tasks; vocabulary and grammar; supporting resources; and language level.

3) Post-use evaluation

This stage is designed to search how helpful the course-book for the teachers. The teachers' feeling toward the coursebooks will be explored. The teachers will also be asked whether the course-book really aids them in teaching learning process and whether the coursebooks deserve to be recommended to be used again.

The course-book evaluation concerns on 7 parts including overall evaluation; organization and structure; activities; vocabulary and grammar; language level; supporting resources; and practical considerations, physical appearance, and content pages. For the evaluation of the physical appearance and content pages, the researcher will apply Tomlinson's framework first stage, pre-use evaluation. The whilst-use evaluation will be applied to dig more about the overall evaluation; organization and structure; activities; vocabulary and grammar; language level; supporting resources; and practical considerations. Finally, the post-use evaluation will be applied to obtain teachers' recommendations toward the course-book.

2.3 English Coursebook in Curriculum 2013

Curriculum refers to a set of planned activities which is designed to implement a particular educational objective in terms of the content to be taught and the knowledge, skill, and attitude to be fostered (Whinch, 2002).

The latest curriculum in Indonesia is Curriculum 2013 (hereafter C13). It has been implementing in Indonesia since June 2013 based on the regulation of education ministry of Indonesia number 22 in 2006. This curriculum replaces the previous one, KTSP (Educational Unit Level Curriculum). Not all schools and grades applied C13. On the first implementation, this curriculum was applied in selected schools as the pioneers and for grades 1, 4, 7 and 9 only. By the end of 2018, all schools had to apply this curriculum for all grades with no exception.

There are many new essences included in Curriculum 13. It consists of core and base competencies. There are four competencies in the core competence integrated with religious and moral conduct which are

conceptualized in the base competence. This current curriculum deploys three main aspects in its core competencies. They are attitude, skill, and knowledge. C13 performs thematic and integrated concepts of the syllabus.

This curriculum is equipped with a course-book for an English subject namely "When English Rings The Bell", for eighth graders of Junior high school written by Siti Wachidah and Asep Gunawan and published by Ministry of Culture and Education of Indonesia in 2014. No explanation is provided as to how the course-book gains its name. It consists of six chapters for each semester and of 228 pages.

For seventh graders, the course-book covers six points. Firstly, it covers an oral text to express responding and greeting, leave-taking, thanking, apologizing and other language features. Secondly, it covers oral and written texts to express and respond introduction, text structures, and language features. Thirdly, the course-book covers spoken and written texts dealing with day, time, month and date. Fourthly, the course-book concerns on names of animals, things, and public places. Then, it continues with texts to make names in labels and lists. Finally, it focuses on describing personal characteristics, animals, and things.

2.4 Previous Research

Many studies have been done toward the course-book evaluation throughout the world. The studies mostly represent the great importance of course-books in language teaching and learning.

Litz (2005) conducted a study on *English Firsthand 2* used in all beginner EFL classes in one of the universities of Suwon, South Korea to see the appropriateness for the intended language program. The study found that the course-book was quite interesting for many English language teachers and students. Litz concluded that the course-book was generally communicative. The coursebook followed an activity approach towards teaching and learning.

In Turkey, Hamiloglu and Karliova (2009) investigated five selected English language course-books that focus on vocabulary choices and teaching techniques that they implemented. Adopting content analysis method, Hamiloglu and Karliova found that the course-books integrated lexis into their syllabuses. They also implemented separate headings and additional sub-headings such as vocabulary, word formation, and word building concerning with the vocabulary knowledge.

In Indonesia, there have been several attempts of course-book evaluation. Haryanti (2013) investigated the course-books used in a Private Elementary School in Cimahi. She determined their appropriateness for 4th and 5th graders and found out teacher's and student's opinions about the course-books. Al-Munawwarah (2015) conducted a study on EFL course-book entitled 'Bahasa Inggris SMA/MA/SMK/MAK Kelas X'. She investigated whether the coursebook is suitable for English in

Curriculum 2013 and determined whether the coursebook represents the suitable English foreign language criteria.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study applies a mixed methods approach. Tashakkori and Creswell (2008) define mixed methods as a research in which the investigator collects and analyses the data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods.

A quantitative research is useful to summarize a large amount of data and reach generalizations based on statistics (Babbie, 2008). On the other hand, a qualitative method approach is employed to collect in-depth information for broad understanding of the evaluation and suggestions for improvement. In this study, the researcher firstly formed a detailed understanding of the issues; continued by giving a general portrait of trends; and then analyzed the data through words; reported detailed views of respondents; and finally, conducted the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Using quantitative methods alone do not guarantee in-depth data collection, therefore a qualitative method is also used to give further evaluation of the book and better suggestions for its improvement.

The study was carried out in Bengkayang district, West Kalimantan province, Indonesia. The selected material for the evaluation was English coursebook entitled "*When English Rings The Bell*", an English coursebook for eighth grade of Junior high school. The book was written by Siti Wachidah and Asep Gunawan and published by the Culture and Education Ministry of Indonesia in 2014. The research subjects were 15 English teachers selected by the convenience sampling method. The subjects were chosen based on the most accessible schools. The instrument of the research was a questionnaire. To collect the quantitative data, the researcher provided questionnaires to teachers containing 8 parts: overall evaluation, organization and structure, activities, vocabulary and grammar, language level, supporting resources, practical considerations, physical appearance, and content pages. The qualitative data collection was in the form of teachers' recommendations for the sake of the coursebook improvement. The data were analysed by interpreting the teachers' statements written on the questionnaires. Part of the study was the research procedures started by spreading the questionnaires to participants, collecting the participants' answers as quantitative data, and interpreting the data. The qualitative data procedures were to interpret and conclude the teachers' recommendations.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

Based on the data obtained through questionnaires, the study found as follows.

1) Overall Evaluation

Most teachers perceived the course-book positively. The data revealed that 80% teachers agreed that the course-book helped them cover the syllabus, 67% agreed that the course-book helped the teachers save time and energy in preparing the lesson, and 67% thought that the course-book helped the teachers prepare and conduct the lesson effectively. The course-book was also considered appropriate to be used again (67%) and suitable for the particular language teaching and learning context (87%). The teachers evaluated that the course-book helped their students use English to communicate in a certain situation (67%). In addition, 73% teachers thought that the course-book was appropriate for language learning objectives. However, the surprising finding was that 67% teacher disagreed that the course-book help their students prepare for the test. The teachers mostly recommended that the course-book provided many assignments for test preparation.

2) Organization and Structure

Most teachers perceived positively the organization and structure of the course-book. 67% teachers agreed that the course-book was well-organized and 60% agreed that the lessons in the course-book were well-connected. The teachers mostly recommended that chapters within the course-book needed to be well-connected.

3) Activities

Most teachers indicated positive perceptions toward activities within the course-book. 73% teachers stated that the difficulty of the activities and tasks suit their students' level of understanding. 60% teachers were doubt that the course-book skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) were distributed appropriately. The recommendation was that the course-book integrated the four skills proportionately.

4) Vocabulary and Grammar

Most teachers agreed that vocabulary and grammar corresponded to the students' needs. The sequencing of the vocabulary and grammar was considered appropriate. Teachers recommended that the course-book varied in vocabulary and introduced grammar exercises that fully corresponded students' need.

5) Language Level

80% teachers agreed that the language level used in this course-book was relevant to students understanding and 67% agreed that students were able to read and comprehend the stories in the textbook comfortably. The recommendation concerned about increasing a vocabulary level of difficulty.

6) Supporting Resources

The book was easy to obtain and accessible for copying, particularly exercises on students' worksheets. The course-book contained easy, clear and detailed instructions. The only negative response was about the audio and visual materials. Teachers (67%) stated that it was uneasy to access audio and video materials. The teachers recommended a possibility of having audio and video materials.

7) Practical Considerations, Physical Appearance, and Content Pages

The positive responses were toward the book in terms of its accessibility, its appropriate size, its topics, and the overview of its content page. The teachers stated positively that the books were interesting and the aims, as well as the audience, were clearly stated. 67% teachers agreed that the book cover was eye-catching due to beautiful pictures and good quality paper. The summary of the practical considerations, physical appearance, and content pages was found in table 3.7.

8) Summary of Recommendations for Improvement

The teachers' key recommendations can be concluded as follows. Firstly, the course-book needed to be simplified in terms of its instructions. Secondly, it needed to add some tasks to help the students prepare for the test. Thirdly, It reduced time consuming writing exercises. Fourthly, It added more grammar tasks. Finally, Its content put concerned with students' age, culture, and social background.

4.2 Discussion

Most teachers perceive positively the course-book quality. Firstly, overall evaluation reveals that the course-book covers the syllabus demand and helps teachers save time and energy in preparing the lesson. The course-book is contextually appropriate and suitable for language teaching and learning, especially to achieve students' particular communication situations. Secondly, the coursebook are well-organized and -structured. Thirdly, the activities are relevant to students' difficulty. Fourthly, the vocabulary and grammar correspond to the students' needs. The language use is at the relevant level. Moreover, the course-book is easy to obtain. Finally, the positive responses also go to the practical consideration, physical appearance and content pages.

Even though the course-book is considered appropriate in some aspects, however there are still some parts of the book that needs improvement. The negative perceptions are as follows. First, the course-book is inappropriate for language learning objectives. Second, the course-book is less help students for the test or exam. Finally, it is less-accessible in terms of audio and video materials.

The teachers recommend that the course-book needs to be simplified in instructions. It should add some tasks like grammar and reading in order to help the students prepare for the test and reduce time-consuming writing exercises. They also recommend the content that should concern with students' age, culture, and social background.

Because of problems in distance and time, a number of research subjects are limited. It is necessary to invite more subjects for the sake of universality of the findings demonstrated in the study.

5 CONCLUSION

It can be summed up that most teachers perceive positively toward the quality of the coursebook. The

positive perceptions are in line with the coursebooks in terms of its overall evaluation, organization and structure, activities, vocabulary and grammar, language level, practical consideration, physical appearances, and content pages. The coursebook is considered appropriate in certain aspects, nevertheless there are some parts that still need improvement. The negative perceptions are about the learning objectives, the tasks for the exam, the accessible audio and video materials in the coursebook. The teachers recommend that the coursebook needs to be simplified in terms of its instructions, includes more tasks like grammar and reading, and are in line with students' ages, culture, and social background.

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