EFL TEACHERS' EVALUATION OF TEXTBOOK USED
IN FIRST YEAR FUNDAMENTAL ENGLISH COURSE AT WHITE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Mismatch between the textbook designs and the instructional contexts in which the textbook was used requires EFL teacher adopters to select textbooks carefully. This study reports on the strengths and weaknesses of the commercial EFL textbook as perceived by the teaching staffs of a fundamental English course offered in a public university in Thailand. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. In general, the participants were found to be satisfied with the overall quality of the textbook. They nevertheless agreed on several design issues that need to be modified to accommodate the constraints of their instructional contexts. An examination of these shortcomings leads the researchers to conclude that staff teachers need to collaborate for mutually agreed on guidelines or supplementary materials which would compensate for the limitations of commercial EFL textbooks.

Keywords: Textbook Evaluation, Textbook, EFL Teacher

1. Introduction

Commercial textbooks influence the design of a language course. They are developed in accordance with particular principles of language teaching and learning (O'Neil, 1982). Textbooks often come in packages, including supplementary materials, teacher's guide, workbook, and CDs. To help students develop language proficiency, they present language structures, functions, vocabularies, language skill practices, and instructional activities in a systematic manner (Graves, 2000). EFL teachers often express dissatisfaction with commercial textbooks due to the discrepancy between the assumptions hold by textbook writers and the teaching realities. Richard (2001) and Harmer (2015) describe this phenomenon as a mismatch between textbook designs and particular instructional contexts.

To reveal the quality of the commercial EFL textbook in use at White University (pseudonym), a textbook evaluation study should be conducted at this instructional context. Textbook evaluation is a systematic process which provides empirical information about the actual effects of the textbook. It serves to provide the EFL teacher adopters descriptive information which helps them to compensate for the limitations of the textbook in light of target stakeholders' concerns (Ellis, 1997). Such theorists as Cunningsworth (1995) and Harmer (2015) agree that EFL teachers should consider the following evaluative criteria when evaluating textbooks. Such evaluative criteria can

reveal to what extent the textbook match or mismatch the needs and interests of stakeholders. They include (1) physical characteristics of textbooks (e.g., layout, organizational, and logistical characteristics), (2) aim of textbooks, (3) approach of textbooks, (4) relation to curriculum, (5) language content, (6) cultural and gender component, and (7) relation to students' interests. To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook in use, the researcher of this study adapted a textbook evaluation questionnaire developed by Litz (2005) derived from an intensive review of such theorists.

2. Objective of the Study

The present study was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook in use.

3. Materials and Methods

This section consists of research design, data collection, research setting and participants, research instruments, and data analysis.

Research Design

The mixed-methods study uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods to achieve a thorough understanding of a phenomenon which is not possible by either method alone (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The researcher of this study employed two data collection methods: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

Data Collection

After receiving an approval from the Institute Review Board, Mahidol University to conduct the study, the researcher asked the EFL teachers who agreed to participate to complete a questionnaire and schedule an interview with those who agreed to participate in the interview phase.

Research Setting and Participants

The Faculty of Liberal Arts at White University (Thai public university) offers fundamental English 1 under the supervision of the English Program. It aims at equipping the undergraduate students with speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. This course has 26 EFL teachers and around 3,000 first year EFL undergraduate students, so they render this course as a big course. This course hence consumes a tremendous amount of the university's resources both manpower and faculty/students time.

The entire population of the fundamental English 1 EFL teachers (26) was asked to participate in a questionnaire survey.

Minimally five volunteers of them were asked to participate for the interview. They were selected based on purposive sampling technique, allowing for maximum variations in terms of three attributes of interest: the participants' teaching experience, academic background, and coordinating experience. One or two participants at the maximum from each group were selected under each set criteria.

Research Instruments

The EFL teacher participants were asked to evaluate their textbook employing a five point Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Litz (2005). A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.96 was ascertained from the pilot test. Also, the researcher asked for the EFL teacher participants' clarification of their responses to the questionnaire employing a semi-structured interview.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire survey were analyzed employing descriptive analysis (Mean, SD). The obtained mean scores were grouped into teacher's level of agreement as shown in Table 3.1 below. The qualitative data from the semi-structured interview were analyzed employing content analysis.

Table 3.1 Teachers' Level of Agreement Based on the Range of Computed Mean

Range of Score	Score	Level of Agreement	Interpretation
4.21-5.0	5	Strongly Agree	Strength
3.41-4.20	4	Agree	Strength
2.61-3.40	3	Uncertain	Weakness
1.81-2.60	2	Disagree	Weakness
1-1.80	1	Strongly Disagree	Weakness

4. Results

1) Analysis of Quantitative Data: Questionnaire

Table 4.1 Participants' Ratings on the Strengths and the Weaknesses of the Textbook

Category	Mean	SD
Practical Consideration	3.88	0.89
Design and Sequencing of Language Item	3.75	0.98
Instructional Activity	3.67	0.86
Language Skill	3.56	0.89
Language Content	3.73	0.85
Lesson Subject and Content	4.02	0.73
Overall Characteristic of the Textbook	3.55	0.89

As shown in Table 4.1, the participants rated their level of agreement on the statements relating to seven categories at a high level, indicating the participants' strong agreement with the statements. In particular, they rated most of the statements relating to the generic characteristics of the textbook (whether or not and to what extent the

textbook included or sufficiently included resources) as the strengths of the textbook because they could check the textbook in general and made a judgment.

Firstly, they agreed that the textbook included the following aspects. Under *practical consideration*, they strongly agreed that the textbook was a recent published one. This was because it was published in 2015. Under *design and sequencing of language item*, they mostly agreed that the learning objectives were specified in the teacher' and student's book. Having the learning objectives in both books, they might think that they could know what to teach resulting in their EFL student outcomes. Moreover, under *instructional activity*, they agreed that the textbook incorporated a variety of activities helping their students to practice English language (e.g., individual, pair, and group work). Under *language skill* and *language content*, they strongly agreed that the textbook covered and paid attention to language skills their students needed to practice and presented authentic English language content prepared their students to use in real life situation respectively. They might found that these characteristics of the textbook corresponded with the learning objectives of their fundamental English Level 1 specified in a course syllabus. Under *lesson subject and content*, they agreed that the textbook featured culturally appropriate in the lesson subject and content in each unit. Lastly, from the responses above, they agreed that the textbook corresponded with their fundamental English Level 1 as they rated the statements under *overall characteristic of the textbook*.

Secondly, they agreed that the textbook sufficiently included the following aspects. Under *practical consideration*, they strongly agreed that the textbook came up with sufficient supplementary teaching materials (e.g., teacher's guide, workbook, and CDs.). Under *design and sequencing of language item*, they also agreed that the textbook sufficiently included an explanation and a detail of the language function, structure, vocabulary, and vocabulary list. They might think that it could support their students in learning English language. Under *language skill*, they agreed that the textbook sufficiently practiced natural pronunciation, i.e., stress on syllabus and intonation in sentence, which corresponded with the fundamental English 1 learning objectives.

In summary, the results reveal that the participants think that the textbook can be used as a resource in language instruction.

From the responses above, while they rated the most of the generic characteristics of the textbook as the strengths, they rated a small number of the statements asking about adopting the textbook in their fundamental English 1 as the weaknesses. Such perceived weaknesses were because of a variety of the target EFL student's financial condition, EFL teachers' needs of language instruction, and target class size.

Firstly, they revealed uncertainty with the expensive price of the textbook under *practical consideration*. The reason behind this rating might be that some of their students or their family had limited income.

Secondly, they revealed uncertainty with the insufficient set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions, insufficient sub-skills, and exclusion of diverse range of English registers and accents under *design and sequencing of language item*, *language skill*, and *language content* respectively. The reason behind this rating might be that they were not sure whether the textbook sufficiently covered these existing aspects to teach their students. In addition,

under *overall characteristic of the textbook*, they revealed uncertainly with the failure to stimulate the students' further interest in English language study.

Thirdly, they revealed uncertainty with the unsuitability for adopting the textbook in a class of university with 40-50 students under *overall characteristic of the textbook*. This is because they might think that the textbook writers failed to consider sufficient allotment of time for instructional activities for the large class.

In summary, the perceived weaknesses above were due to the target instructional contexts rather than the weaknesses of the textbook designs. In essence, commercial textbook cannot produce to serve the particular needs and interests of stakeholders in a particular instructional context. The textbook writers, however, should have guidance or other supplementary teaching materials the EFL teachers can use to increase ultimate language instruction.

2) Analysis of Qualitative Data: Semi-structured Interview

The interview transcriptions were analyzed and grouped according to the major themes to complement the descriptive data, the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the textbook.

Areas of Perceived Strengths Related to Authentic Language Content and Culturally Appropriate in Lesson Subject and Content

From the interview, the respondent shared that the textbook included the vocabulary and language structure prepared their students to use English language in their real life situation. Vocabulary found in the textbook related to everyday English use; for example, technology (e.g., upload and download), family (e.g., middle child and older sister), and work (e.g., applied for and employees). In addition, the textbook included language structures can be used to describe oneself and give opinions.

The respondents shared that the textbook presented the lesson subject and content in general and neutral. Because of this, it was culturally appropriate. It was about; for example, workplace, relationship, and animals. In addition, most of the lesson subject and content was up-to-date. To illustrate this, one respondent stated the lesson subject and content "is up-to-date. It is about technology and application". For example, application for reminding what to do and recording speed and distance when workout.

Areas of Perceived Weaknesses Related to Exclusion of Diverse English Accents and Unrealistic Allotment of Time of Instructional Activities for the Target Large Class

The respondents explained that the textbook included only British registers and accents. When teaching, they found that their students were not familiar with such accents resulting in difficulty understanding words when listening to audio CDs. To prepare EFL students to use English in their real life situation, one of them sought to have textbooks which included ASEAN English accents because the students might has an opportunity to communicate with non-native English speakers rather than English native speakers.

During the interview, respondent found that the textbook did not specifically guide how the respondent managed time in a large class. It only implied how to manage time in general class size. Her class had about 40-50

university students. When generating the activities based on the instruction in the textbook, it spent much time. For example, almost of the instructional activities (according to instruction) always asked students to discuss or talk with friends without guiding allotment of time for the target large class size.

5. Discussion

The results revealed that The EFL teacher participants rated the generic characteristics of the textbook at a high level because they agreed that the textbook package included and sufficiently included both supplementary teaching material and contents. The results complied with theorists (O'Neil, 1982; Graves, 2000) in that textbooks are designed based on principles of language teaching and learning in general in order to practice and develop student's language skills. The results corresponded with the previous study of Litz (2005) revealed that the textbook designs (e.g., design of language items and practice of language skills) in general matched with the course objectives, target Korean EFL teacher's needs of language instruction, and target Korean student's needs and interests to some extent. However, the Korean EFL teachers still believed that this textbook could be used as an effective resource for their general English course. Altogether, the results revealed the EFL teacher participants showed frustrations or uncertainty with adopting the textbook in real teaching. Such frustrations and uncertainty were perceived as the weaknesses due to the mismatch between instructional contexts and the textbook designs rather than the weaknesses posed by the textbooks themselves. This complied with the theorists (Richards, 2001; Harmer, 2015) in that no commercial textbooks are suitably designed to serve target class without adapting or supplementing. Because they are produced in other countries, textbook writers failed to consider the specific needs of target class. This supported by previous studies (Punyalert, 2005; Srakang and Jansem, 2012). Punyalert's study revealed that the uses of the textbook were influenced by the EFL teacher's beliefs towards the textbook's effective characteristics. Srakang and Jansem's study revealed that the EFL teachers regarded such mismatches as indirect problems (e.g., target EFL teacher's rationale teaching approach, target EFL student's English ability, and large target class size).

The findings of this study have the implications for promoting teacher collaboration. That is, the EFL teachers can work together and share knowledge. As they expressed mismatch between the textbook design and the target instructional context, they should adapt or supplement their textbook to the needs of their language instruction and the EFL student's needs and interests. Therefore, the experienced EFL teachers can act as mentors to give other EFL teachers advice of how to adapt or supplement textbook effectively. Also, the EFL teacher themselves in subgroup can help each other and share teaching material.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the results showed that the participants rated most of the statement relating to the seven characteristics, especially the generic characteristics of the textbook at a high level. This indicated that they satisfied with the textbook's quality. However, they agreed on several design issues which need to be modified to accommodate the constraint of their instructional contexts. This study pointed to the needs to adapt or supplement

the textbook to accommodate the needs of the EFL teachers' language instruction and the needs and interests of the EFL students.

A further study can be conducted employing an observation. It allows researchers to go into classroom to observe and talk with teachers to obtain insightful data about the uses of textbook.

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