

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE USE OF ENGLISH  
TEXTBOOK IN EFL CLASSROOMS  
(A Descriptive Study of EFL Teachers at One Islamic Senior High School in  
Cirebon)**

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the study of investigating the teachers' perceptions towards the use of textbook, their strategies and difficulties in using the textbook in the classroom. The participants of the study were two English teachers at an Islamic senior high school in Cirebon. This was descriptive study using qualitative method as the approach. This study employed three techniques in collecting data: questionnaire, observation and interview. The findings revealed that the teachers perceived positively towards the textbook. The teachers considered that the textbook suited the students' need, teachers' need, syllabus and examination. In using the textbook, the teachers used strategies to make an adaptation on textbook by modifying task, adding and omitting the materials. There were two main difficulties faced by teachers; the level of difficulties of the material and limited aids for teaching. The result of the study is expected to broaden teachers' knowledge about criteria of good textbook and to promote meaningful and communicative purpose for future textbooks.

**Keywords:** *Perception, textbook, and adapting material*

### **Introduction**

Textbooks are important resources in teaching and learning English for teachers and students as they get benefits from them. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), textbooks provide input into classroom lessons in the form of texts, activities, explanations, and so on. Teachers and students will get benefits when textbook is used in teaching and learning process (Harmer, 2007). Both teachers and students can look back from previous learning session to continue the next meeting in the textbook (O'Neill, 1982).

Based on the benefits offered in textbooks, teachers' ways of teaching usually depend on the use of textbooks in classroom. They use the materials on

textbook from the beginning of the school year page by page until the end of the year (Moulton, 1997). While using a textbook, teachers also use workbook for teaching and learning though there is a tendency that teachers just sit and ask students to do an examination and submit it to them (Swan, 1992 cited in Hutchinson and Torres, 1994).

As a matter of fact, textbook is a means used in teaching and learning process and it is important for teachers and students have them. Teachers then consider textbooks to be important in their teaching and learning process that they tend to use textbook in their whole teaching and learning process without selecting and adapting appropriate materials for their students. Thus, it is important for teachers to select a textbook that is appropriate for students. This study is hoped to enrich standardized English textbooks and give contribution to the betterment of using textbooks in teaching English, especially in Indonesia.

The method used in this study was a qualitative approach and employed descriptive method. The study was conducted in the tenth grade classes at an Islamic senior high school in Cirebon. The participants of this study were two EFL teachers of 10<sup>th</sup> grader. They were using a textbook that was recommended by the officials (*BSE: Developing English Competencies*, 2008) for the learning process in the classroom. This research employed three techniques in collecting the data such as questionnaire, observation and interview to obtain the data needed. The data were analyzed by using flow model (Miles and Huberman, 1984, cited in Sugiyono, 2010). There are three main activities in analyzing the data; they are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing or verification. To avoid data bias there are three steps used in this study to make the research more valid, such as triangulation, member checking and rich data.

### **Literature Review**

- Definition of Perception

According to Devito (1997:75), perception is the process when we become aware of many stimuli that affect our senses. Similarly, Sobur (2009:446) proposes "perception is a part of the overall process that produces the response

after the stimulus is applied to humans." From the definitions, it can be concluded that perception is an ability of the overall process of stimuli to make a response and we become aware of something after seeing and understanding something.

Furthermore, according to Rakhmat (2009:55) some factors influencing perception are functional/personal, structural and cultural factors. First, functional/personal factors consist of needs, past experience, motivation, hope, attention, emotion, and situation. Second, structural factors consist of intensity of stimulus, quantity of the stimulus, and the contradiction of stimulus. Cultural factor is a factor in which an individual lives.

- Teachers and Textbook Use

Some experts, such as Hutchinson and Torres (1994), O'Neill (1982) and Kitao and Kitao (1997), emphasize the importance of the textbook. In summary, textbooks have an important role in language classes, that they are an almost universal element of English language teaching as they give a great deal of material served.

Richards (2001) and Ingall (1994) state that there are at least two steps in using textbook. First is to understand the textbooks before beginning class critically and recognizing their advantages and disadvantages of textbooks. As the teacher, you need to understand the textbook from its contents, its structure, and the reasons for its use whether the textbook gives advantages or not. Second is to evaluate the nature of instructional task in textbooks, instructional materials and adapting the textbooks by identifying the current format that can be used to teach or to practice different teaching item.

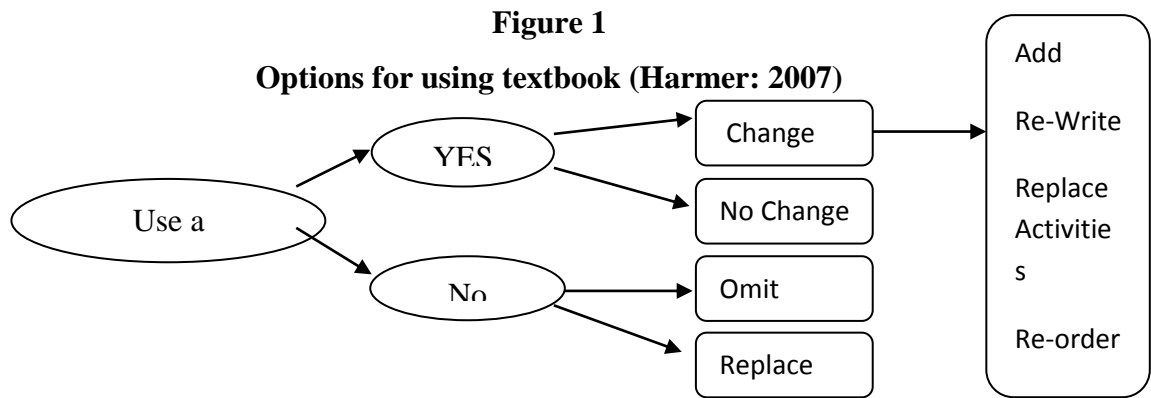
Furthermore, according to Kitao and Kitao (1997), in choosing and selecting textbooks, teachers should pay attention to select textbook and also should know the criteria of good textbooks. First, textbooks should suit the needs, interest and ability of the students. For students, textbooks should be attractive, should reflect students need and interest, and culturally acceptable. Therefore teachers may pay attention to the information of the culture in the textbook and it should be correct and not be biased.

On the other hand, materials on textbooks should be authentic that the students can see that the textbooks are relevant to their real lives. According to Richards (2001), authentic materials have a positive effect on the learner's motivation, they relate more closely to learners' needs and they support a more creative approach to teaching. Textbooks should be acceptable and be balanced between the knowledge of language and its practice of using the language, between the relevant language skills and how to integrate them, and those textbooks should also contain communicative activities.

Second, textbooks should suit teachers. For teachers, textbooks should provide materials equipment such as tapes, workbooks, and visuals. Approach and method in textbooks should be suitable for teachers and students. The textbook also should contain a good and clear teacher's guide with answers and help on methods and additional activities. Moreover, teachers may pay attention to the language in the textbook. The vocabulary and grammar should be controlled for lower level students. Many textbooks use narratives and essays, so that students can learn with different form of texts. The textbooks also should provide information to help students understand the lesson. Therefore, English textbooks should have correct, natural, recent, and standard English (Kitao and Kitao, 1997).

Third, textbooks must meet the needs of official public teaching syllabus or examination. Finally, in relation to the syllabus and examination, textbooks should be recommended or approved by authorities and should follow the official syllabus in a good manner. Textbooks with well-graded contain well-structured and systematic coverage of the language. Activities, contents and methods used in textbooks should be well planned and the materials should be prepared specifically for the examination. Hence, textbooks should contain useful hints on examination technique. In addition, teachers may pay attention to the language level of difficulty on textbooks. Materials should be slightly higher in their level of difficulty than the students' current level of English proficiency so that the students will learn new grammatical structures and vocabularies (Kitao and Kitao, 1997).

Therefore, Irujo (2006) believes that in teaching and learning in the classroom, teachers must have the ability to know how to choose the best material for instruction; to make supplementary materials for the class and to adapt or change the materials in the textbooks. Thus, knowing that not all textbooks are perfect, many teachers make the decision whether to use a particular textbook lesson or not. Richards (2001), Harmer (2007) and Spratt et al (2005) divide such decision making into two options that will be elaborated in the following subchapter.



Based on the figure above, in using a textbook, teachers have two options whether using it or not. If teachers opt to use a textbook, teachers should choose whether they will change the materials or not. If teachers choose to change the material on a textbook, they must know how to change it. In Figure 1, the option to change materials or to adapt materials includes adding materials, re-writing materials, replacing activities, re-ordering, and reducing materials on textbooks. According to Richards (2001), the ability to adapt textbooks is an essential skill for teacher to develop. Meanwhile, the teachers who do not opt to use textbook can choose whether to omit the textbook or to replace it.

### **Data Presentation and Discussion**

- Teachers' Perceptions on Textbook

The study shows that there are three aspects covered on teachers' perceptions on textbook: (1) textbook appropriateness with students' need, (2) textbook suitability with teachers, and (3) syllabus and examination.

(1) Related to the textbook appropriateness with students' needs, the teachers believed that the textbooks used were attractive and interesting for students. The teachers informed that the textbooks were culturally acceptable in Islamic school, reflected the students' needs and interest, and had an appropriate the physical characteristic and authentic materials, so that the students could see that the book was relevant to their real life.

(2) Related to the textbook suitability with teachers' need, the textbooks that were used required little or no time consuming preparation and the textbooks were appropriate for and liked by the teacher colleagues. For some other materials, both teachers did not need much time to set some preparation for teaching and to understand the instructions provided in the textbooks.

(3) Related to the textbook suitability with syllabus and examination, both teachers informed that the textbooks had been recommended or approved by the authorities. The textbooks used had already followed the official syllabus in teaching and learning process in classroom interaction. The textbooks were well graded, so they gave well-structured and systematic coverage of the

language. The textbooks had been prepared specifically for the target examination.

In general, the teachers perceived positively toward the textbooks in use. However, they also consider weaknesses on the textbooks in use in terms of language level difficulty. The textbooks did not provide ancillary materials such as tapes and visuals and the textbooks had no teacher's guidance, answer keys and teaching aids on explaining/applying methods and additional activities

The study showed that the textbooks used showed neither strengths nor weaknesses on the remaining criteria: these textbooks were easy to read for the students, had enough of length, had balance between knowledge about the language and practice in using the language, and had balance between the relevance language skills. The textbooks also provided communicative activities, impression of the content and layout of textbook, and helped for understanding of material, instruction, and illustrations.

There were recommended method and approach suitability on the textbooks, the approach was easily adaptable. The textbooks used spiral approach and the textbooks required syllabus with the addition. They had to be used with well-planned in activities, enough examination practice, and sufficient test and revision. course method would help the students prepare for the exam

The study shows that the teachers had positive perception on the textbooks in use. The teachers' perceptions on the textbooks were in line with Kitao and Kitao (1997) that textbook should suit student, teachers, syllabus and examination. Besides, the teachers' perception was much influenced by their personality and cultural background. Their personality background was their past experience, motivation, hope, need and situation. Their cultural background was their lives in Islamic cultural areas. In line with Rakhmat (2009), perception is influenced by some factors such functional/personal factors, structural factors and cultural factor in which an individual lives.



- Teachers' Strategies and Difficulties in Using Textbook

In general both teachers used a textbook in every teaching material in their classes. There were three strategies used by the teachers in using textbooks. They added materials on the textbooks for teaching when the textbooks' coverage was inadequate. When the teachers found a task that was not suitable for the students' needs or sometimes the textbooks repeated the same task, the teachers made an adaptation by modifying the task or changing the form of the task. When teachers discover inappropriate textbook or material, they may omit the textbook or material (Richards, 2001; Spratt et al, 2005; and Harmer, 2007).

Teachers must have the ability to know how to choose the best material for instruction; to make supplementary materials for the class and to adapt or change the materials in the textbooks (Irujo, 2006). On the other hand, adapting textbook is an ability and essential skill that teachers should develop. In line with Richards (2001), the ability to adapt textbooks is an essential skill for teacher to develop. Textbook-use also helped the teachers to teach a lesson to be more creative and interesting based on students' need (Richards, 2001)

Although it seemed to share positive effects, both teachers still found some difficulties in using textbooks in teaching and learning process. There were two main difficulties in using textbook by teachers:

- (1) The level of difficulty of the materials. The language level of material was slightly higher for students. However, Kitao and Kitao (1997) asserts that materials for teaching and learning process should be slightly higher in their level of difficulty than the students' current level of English proficiency, and it could allow students to learn new grammatical structures and vocabularies. By using slightly high languages, it could make students learn more vocabularies.
- (2) Limited aids for teaching. According to Spratt et al (2005), teaching aids are the resources and equipments available in the classroom; they include cassette recorder, CD player and etc. Aids for teaching might help teachers and students to understand the lesson in the classroom.

## **Conclusion**

The teachers had positive perception on textbook in use because the textbook in use seemed to have more strengths than weaknesses. The strategies used by teachers in using textbook were adding, modifying task, and omitting material or textbook. The teachers opted to use the textbook and changed the materials on textbook by adapting the materials. There were no teachers who relied only on textbook. They did not always follow any instruction and materials suggested by the textbook author. The teachers also did not use the textbook by one page to the next page, but based on the needs of students and lesson plans that had designed. Concerning the teachers' difficulties in using textbook, at least there were two main difficulties faced by teachers; the level of difficulty of materials and the limited aids for teaching. The teachers made every effort to solve the problems or difficulties in using textbook.

From the result of the study, teachers are expected to understand the textbook before beginning class. Teachers should have knowledge about criteria of good textbooks, so this may help teachers select and decide which textbook they may use effectively for teaching and learning in classroom activities. Teachers should also increase their ability and knowledge of adapting materials in teaching and learning process. This may help teachers know the way to solve the problems or weaknesses that they face in using textbook. The study of teachers' perceptions towards the use of textbook might be used as reference to conduct similar research. In addition, the study could make improvement in this field for better development on textbook.

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