A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE ON VALUES AND DILEMMAS IN TEXTBOOK

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Abstract

Teaching and learning English in the context of English as a foreign language requires materials that can support the process of learning English. Regarding the content of the materials, it is believed that one of the most vital aspects of a textbook is to engage learners with the content they are dealing with. Previous studies reveal that there are several issues with the use of textbooks. Gender, ideology and culture representation, critical thinking, and pluralism are several issues that arise regarding the content of textbooks. Thus, this study examined the values and dilemmas in the textbook from the teacher's perspective including how the teacher encountered the issues found in textbooks and in the process of learning and teaching. A narrative inquiry was applied to collect stories and experiences from an EFL teacher of a Madrasah Tsanawiyah through semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that the mentioned issues were found in Can Do English textbook that the teacher used so the teacher made some adjustments to the materials when the content did not fit with values that underpinned the school. Moreover, a few issues were still acceptable to the participant's view as a teacher and not considered as serious problems. Furthermore, providing students with a textbook that could attract students to engage with its content was the main consideration the teacher made in selecting the textbook for the students.

Keywords: Teacher's perspective; textbook selection; values in textbooks

INTRODUCTION

The English textbooks are identified as resources for presenting the materials, practicing and doing the activities such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Cunningsworth, 1995). However, the urgency to use textbooks is not only for the content-purposed but also for the various explanations and activities (Ayu & Indrawati, 2019). To sum up, a textbook is meaningful to both teachers and learners as a guidance based on the designed curriculum to provide opportunities for learners, that is to engage in the content and activities for achieving the goals or objectives of learning.

There are several advantages to using textbooks. First, as they enable students to gauge their development, textbooks can be psychologically significant to them (Haycroft, 1998). As a result, textbooks are cost- and time-effective and allow for student customization and adaptation (O'Neil, 1982). The ability to assist teachers in lesson planning is another benefit of textbooks (O'Neil, 1982; Sheldon, 1998). Additionally, textbooks work well for self-directed learning (Cunningsworth, 1995). Finally, Richards (2001) argues that textbooks can be helpful by providing structure and a syllabus program, helping standardize instruction, maintaining quality, providing a variety of learning resources and effective language models and input, training teachers, and appearing visually.

Besides their advantages, textbooks also have disadvantages. Allwright (1981) argues that some textbooks might promote overinvolvement of teacher and under-involvement of learner. Furthermore, in using textbooks, little time is given for careful analysis of students' needs (Allwright, 1981). In

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addition to the textbook disadvantages, Richards (2001) states several weaknesses of using textbooks. First, textbooks may contain inauthentic language because the texts, dialogs, and other written aspects are not representative of real language use. Second, textbooks may distort content or fail to represent the real issues. Third, textbooks may not reflect students' needs. Fourth, textbooks can de-skill teachers because their roles are reduced. Finally, textbooks can be expensive as they can be a financial burden for many students. To conclude, knowing the advantages and disadvantages of textbook can help teachers and schools do modification, selection, and adjustment.

The criteria of good textbooks
The selection of textbooks for learning should consider the effectiveness to achieve the learning goals and meet the learning demands because textbooks are useful as advice for teachers and students independent of curriculum and levels of education. Before choosing a textbook, it is important to keep in mind that, despite being published by a reputable publisher, there is no such thing as a perfect book (Grant, 1987).

In this regard, choosing the right textbook could be one method of giving students the resources they require. In order to choose textbooks that can achieve the objectives, correspond with learners' contexts, and address other factors, a textbook evaluation may be conducted (Ayu & Indrawati, 2018). The selection of textbooks should take into account a number of factors, including the needs of the students, their ability to use language effectively, their facilitation of the learning process, their role as a clear learning support, their goals, layout, methodology, and organization, as well as their consideration of macro-language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), micro-language skills (grammar, vocabulary, etc.), and the language forms. (Cunningsworth, 1995; Cunningsworth & Kussel, 1991; Harmer, 1991; Ur, 1996; Zabawa 2001; Mayfield, 2001). On the other hand, financial concerns still significantly impact the textbook's appearance when it comes to Indonesia (Fernandez et al., 2011 as cited in Fariz, 2014). Therefore, schools and teachers should take great care when setting the standards for a good textbook when choosing one.

The issues related to textbook uses
Previous studies on textbooks reveal that there are several issues with the use of textbooks. First, gender issues are found in textbooks. Lee and Collins (2008) review several gender problems in textbooks, such as masculine generic construction, female and male domestic roles, omission of gender appearance, titles, and order of mention.

The second issues are ideology and cultural representation. Thomson (as cited in Zhili, 1999) defines ideology manifested in language and culture as the domination and power to pursue one's aims and interests. Therefore, English textbooks can transmit the ideas and values of ideology and culture to shape the learners' identities (Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Zhili, 1999). The culture and ideology might be the representation of the authors' cultures. To this, teaching English as a first/second language would be imparting the ideology and culture of the dominant class who is native is English; however, for teaching English as a foreign language, the prejudice of other cultures and ideology seem to be distorted. A study of ideology and culture by Zhili (1999) revealed several findings, such as the perspective of super-power western characters, the curiosity of western people, the rapid growing science and technology in western countries, the perspective of beautiful western countries despite the damages, and domination of young people and children's characters in readings.

The following issue is critical thinking. Critical thinking skills are believed to be skills that can be taught by implicit questions to the materials in texts. Some studies revealed that critical thinking can be manifested in the activities in textbooks, such as reading and listening activities, with Bloom's taxonomy to see the order of thinking skills manifested in the questions (Es-Salhi & Elfatihi, 2019; Ilyas, 2018; Birjandi & Alizadeh, 2012).

The fourth is the issue of pluralism. The English textbooks could provide pluralism values in their content/readings such as the different cultures, religions, and celebrations. Hick (2015) argues that textbooks could promote pluralism by providing various texts containing an aspect of different religions and values to minimize discrimination and persecution.

Based on the issues mentioned above, the present study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How is the teacher's perspective in using English textbooks related to the issues of gender, cultures and ideologies representation, critical thinking, and pluralism?
2. How does the teacher encounter those issues found in textbooks and in the process of learning and   teaching?

METHODS

This research examines textbook's values and dilemmas from a teacher's perspective. The researcher would like to explore the teacher's experience in dealing with values and dilemmas in the textbook. To answer the research questions, this study employed narrative inquiry. This approach typically focuses on the lives of individuals as told through their own stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Also, narrative inquiry emphasizes interpretive-reflective on the individual's backstory and recreating the individual's life experience in a situational context. This research design was expected to comprehensively describe the teacher's perspective on the values in the textbook and the dilemmas based on the teacher's experience. It provided an in-depth description and analysis of the issues investigated in this research.

The interview was conducted with an English teacher of a *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* in Cimahi, West Java. The teacher used a textbook entitled "Can Do", published by Asta Ilmu Sukses. The participant was voluntarily participating in this study. The participant had several years of teaching experience in non-formal and formal institutions and employed various kinds of textbooks in the teaching-learning process so that the participant was proper to be the source and reference of the research. As the participant had been teaching in an Islamic school that applied Islamic values in the English materials, this could be interesting and fruitful in finding some issues with using textbooks. The school, however, used imported English textbooks and adjusted to the context of Indonesia's education. Therefore, the participant could potentially be the source of data collection through the interview.

A semi-structured interview was applied in this research. Semi-Structured interview employed a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions (Adams, 2015). The interview questions were adapted from the relevant theories and previous research. The interview was conducted through a zoom meeting. The list of questions was arranged in advance, but the questions were asked in a flexible order and the wording was adjusted to be more contextually appropriate (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The questions were formulated to collect the data related to the issues of using textbooks, as elaborated in the introduction. In the interview, even though the participant could speak English well, the interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia rather than English. It was intended to obtain more detailed data, avoid miscommunication, and form a cooperative agreement with the participant to be more comfortable and express their arguments thoroughly (Filep, 2009).

The result of the interview was recorded and transcribed in order to obtain more precise data. The stages in analyzing the data in this research were:

1. Collecting and reducing the data from the interview. The data were gathered, determined, and focused on the specific information needed by referring to the research questions and objectives.
2. Displaying the data. The data that has been reduced were embodied in sentence form. The data were displayed and presented through well-ordered sentences.
3. After displaying the data, a 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 (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The prominent role of using textbooks in English Language Teaching (ELT) led both schools and teachers to carefully select textbooks as the guidance in achieving their aims and objectives of the course. Looking at the content of textbooks published by a specific publisher, the author's values and

culture might be represented in the textbook. Regarding these issues, what the teacher perceived about the chosen textbook used in the class was portrayed in the following sections.

The role of textbooks

Most teachers believed that both teachers and students commonly use published materials like textbooks (Johnston, 2003). In this case, either teachers or students spend most of their time with them. Along with this idea, the data revealed that the teacher in this school also stated the same idea by saying: "Textbook really helps me to guide what I'm going to teach and to keep the teaching aligns with the curriculum. But I use textbook not as a single source to teach. Beside the main source that is selected for students, I also use different kinds of textbook and compose materials that suitable with students."

This finding goes with the idea that textbook plays an essential role in classroom teaching, especially in foreign language context where it is considered the main source of linguistic input after the teacher (Shahmohammadi, 2018). Therefore, this teacher placed the textbook as the guideline by which it set direction, content, and how the lesson taught through its usage was accompanied by other sources.

The benefit of textbook

In relation to the introduction of this study which conveyed the role of the textbook in the school, the benefit of using the textbook also shared a similar notion on the statement about textbook as a guideline saying:

"I go with the scheme provided in the textbook since it contains interesting topic to be used for students, yet, I should change some parts of it which is not aligned with the school value."

What the teacher tried to convey regarding the statement above was pretty much similar to the statement by Mares (2003, cited in Shahmohammadi, 2018) which mentioned that textbook gives cohesion to language learning and teaching process through direction, support, and specific language-based activities to provide learners with more practice. It means that the textbook has already given the scheme and suggestions on how the content materials should be taught in the class. Yet, what the teacher referred to about the mismatch between school and textbook value will be discussed in the third section of this part.

Providing teacher with adjustable materials, textbook should also provide materials that meet some specified criteria as well as attract learners' interest and attention to be fruitful (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). The finding under this section also revealed that the teacher felt easier to go along with the textbook since the textbook provided up-to-date topics that were close to students' interests.

The dilemmas lie in textbook

As has been explained at the beginning of this part stating that every textbook might represent the values and culture of its author, the findings also revealed that there are some issues regarding this textbook since those two aspects shared a quite different case that somehow needs to be adjusted during the class session. There are four issues that would be discussed in this section, namely (1) Gender (2) Ideology and Culture Representation, (3) Critical Thinking, and (4) Pluralism.

Gender

There is no specific issue that is presented in the textbook. The teacher said that the book is gender-neutral, where the differentiation is only found in the characters' names, such as Alice for female and Eric for male. There are no particular problems found in the textbook such as masculine generic construction, female and male domestic roles, the omission of gender appearance, titles, and order of mention (Lee & Collins, 2008). Furthermore, the participant has experienced some cases in which the textbook presented gender stereotypes in the texts. For example, women are supposed to cook and clean the house and men are the ones who work and make money for the family. This issue is still acceptable to the participant's view as a teacher and is not considered a serious problem.

Ideology and culture representation

Since the school was *Madrassah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) type, where Islamic values were underpinned in almost all aspects, the use of international textbook publication had to be adjusted in some parts of the

materials. The teacher said that some contents in the textbook did not fit the *madrasah*'s values. One of the topics was Halloween. The finding revealed that the teacher still delivered the materials instead of skipping the topic. This teacher believed that students should know why this celebration did not fit the Islamic values underpinning the school. The teacher confirmed that this was an effort to understand why they should not celebrate this day which was popular recently in the country.

Moreover, the teacher realized that the textbook might represent the author's culture. Therefore, there were some modifications that the teacher made to adjust to the school's values. Changing instruction from making Halloween greeting cards to the Islamic New Year celebration was one of the teacher's modifications.

Critical thinking

Regarding stimulating critical thinking, the teacher said that the textbook had several activities that promoted students' critical thinking. As several studies mentioned, critical thinking skills can be taught by implicit questions to the materials in the text. The questions such as 'What do you think about?" triggered students to find out the answer and think critically. Some studies also revealed that critical thinking could manifest in activities such as reading and listening activities aligned with Bloom's taxonomy.

Pluralism

Promoting pluralism is one of the critical issues that might underpin a textbook. According to what the teacher perceived on this issue; the book supported pluralism even though it was not explicitly stated. *"The pluralism issue is not in the form of text, but it is represented by some illustrations and pictures. One of the examples is the characters in the book that vary from different races."*

What is stated from the explanation above still matches with the idea about pluralism, saying that textbooks could promote pluralism by providing various texts containing an aspect of different religions and values to minimize discrimination and persecution. The textbook the participant used provided and supported the pluralism aspect not only from the text but also from the picture and illustrations. The form of pluralism was found when the textbook illustrations showed that some children of various races gathered and held each other, proving that diversity was harmonious. Moreover, some pictures in the textbooks also presented some religious diversity. Therefore, the students would be aware of the difference and be more harmonious with each other means that it is in line with what Hick (2015) stated that textbooks could promote pluralism by providing various texts containing aspects of different religions and values to minimize discrimination and persecution.

The role of the teacher in the textbook selection process

By getting involved in the textbook selection process, it is believed that this teacher understands what Grant (1987, cited in Rosyida, 2016) proposed about textbook selection, saying that a perfect textbook does not exist, yet textbook selection is aimed to find out what the best possible one that will fit and appropriate to a particular student group.

Furthermore, the teacher highlighted several considerations that the teacher made in selecting specific textbooks. Providing students with a textbook that could attract students to open the book was the final consideration the teacher made in selecting the textbook for the students. What underpinned the teacher's perspective is similar to the finding in the study conducted by Tok (2010). It says that when students like their textbooks, they also like the course and become active participants in the lesson.

CONCLUSION

It is acceptable for teachers to modify the contents and adjust the use of the textbook if the teachers teach all the skills and competencies the students need to obtain. Furthermore, the teacher should recognize the textbook's roles and benefits so that optimal outcomes would be attained if the teacher can use the textbook thoroughly. Moreover, teachers should be aware of the current issues that exist in textbooks, such as gender issues, pluralism issues, the cultural reflection presented in the textbook, and

the critical thinking activities supported in the textbook, and should understand how to deal with those problems. Teachers should also be knowledgeable of their roles in the textbook selection process as teachers are a crucial filter of the textbook that would be delivered to the students.

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