

Evaluating ‘*English for Economics*’ Textbook in Indonesian University

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate the *English for Economics* textbook used for the first year students of Economics Faculty of Tanjungpura University in Indonesia. It tried to find out the extent to which unit of work reflects the task-based approach to language teaching. It also attempted to investigate relevance of materials to meet the learners’ needs and the goals of the programme in the target situations. The evaluation was conducted as this teacher-generated material has not yet been evaluated. One unit from the textbook was analysed based on Littlejohn’s (1998) framework. The findings indicated that the activities in the *English for Economics* textbook failed to provide adequate skills for learners to use the language in performing the task. Therefore, it is difficult for the materials to meet the learners’ needs and goals of the programme in the target situations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many materials designers develop their own materials on the assumption that the published textbooks do not fulfill the learner’s needs. According to Canniveng & Martinez (2003) commercial textbooks claim that they consider the learners’ needs, approach and the method in language teaching. However, they argue that published materials fail to satisfy learner’s needs in particular teaching contexts. This phenomenon resulted in for teachers designing their own materials which suit a particular group of students.

While it is important to develop relevant materials for the target learners, it is also important to evaluate the quality of materials being developed. Nowadays, many language teachers are encouraged to evaluate classroom materials to determine whether the books they are using meet students’ needs. Evaluating materials involves judging the value of a set of materials to see the fitness of materials for a certain purpose (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Tomlinson, 2003). From the observation of materials which had been evaluated, it appears that most evaluators tend to analyse ready-made materials.

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Materials developers (Tomlinson, 1999, as cited in Tomlinson, 2003; Littlejohn, 1998) have evaluated a number of commercial English teaching materials for general learners, who are learning English for general purposes. Hewings (1990) and Mason (1990) analysed the language of economics using texts from economics textbooks. Evaluating teacher-generated textbooks for particular group of learners, on the other hand, has been neglected.

The present study attempts to evaluate a teacher generated textbook used by a particular group of learners. The book entitled “English for Economics” by Sudarsono (2006) is written to meet the needs of the students of the Economics Faculty of Tanjungpura University in Indonesia. The book is written by one of the English teachers in Tanjungpura University for the use of first year students in the Economics Faculty. Students in this faculty undertake a course in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This textbook has been used since 2006 and has not been evaluated so far.

There is only student’s book which is used as the main source for both teacher and students in the classroom. The textbook comprises 16 units and covers activities to develop language skills and vocabulary. Each unit involves 2.5 hours of weekly classroom time.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the relevance of materials to learners’ needs and goals of the programme. The analysis investigates learning activities presented in the tasks. In order to analyse the tasks, a framework devised by Littlejohn (1998) will be employed. The framework is used to investigate to objectives of the tasks and activities, and what the materials require teachers and learners to do.

2.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Relevance of Materials

Most researchers and materials developers are aware of the importance of designing materials which are relevant to learners. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) argue that the relevance of materials is important because it affects learners’ motivation and the effectiveness of learning. As pointed out by Breen and Candlin (1987), Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Tomlinson (2003) what is being taught should be relevant to learners. Teaching materials are relevant if they are in line with students’ life and experiences or needs, and the objectives or goals of the programme (Hood, Solomon, & Burns, 1996). Learners have different needs and interests that may affect their learning; thus focusing on learners’ needs allows materials designers to design relevant materials.

In terms of learners’ needs and interest, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) classified needs in three types; necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities are determined by “the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 55). The target situation in this study is the Economics Faculty of Tanjungpura University and the workplace. Regarding the faculty, an Economics student needs be able to understand readings related to their area of study. In terms of the workplace setting, a student is required to write business correspondence. As necessities are determined by the sponsor (West, 1994), in this case the Faculty of Economics, the institution has major role in determining necessities.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also argue that necessities cannot be identified without knowing the extent of learners’ knowledge. They pointed out that material developers need to know what the learner knows already, so they can determine what the students’ lack. Similarly, target proficiency

should be matched against learner's current proficiency. The gaps that are identified as a result of this process are referred to learners' lacks. In short, students' lacks decide what materials should be provided to facilitate learners' ability to meet target situation necessities.

The last type of needs are wants. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 57) define wants as "what the learners want or feel they need". Wants are subjective, that is, they are specific and depend on the learners and therefore cannot be seen (West, 1994). When we look at the learners' wants regarding English, every student has their own purpose. Some come to the class only to pass the exam and others want to be able to use the language communicatively. These variations in wants occasionally lead to conflict with students' necessities and lacks. It is often difficult to accommodate all necessities, lacks and wants in a single set of materials.

The relevance of materials is also determined by the goals of the programme. There are two goals of learning English in the Economics Faculty of Tanjungpura University; long term and short term. The long term goal is that students are able to communicate in English outside the classroom and use the language in the workplace (Fakultas Ekonomi, 2007/2008). This goal addresses stakeholders' necessities and wants. Thus, materials developers need to design tasks that will assist learners to develop language skills and abilities related to stakeholders' needs in workplace context.

The short term goal of the programme is that students develop their language skills, particularly reading (Fakultas Ekonomi, 2007/2008). Students of Economics may need to read texts written in English and therefore designing tasks and activities to assist with this goal is necessary.

2. Evaluation of Content of the Textbook

Littlejohn (1998) presents two approaches to textbook evaluation, namely the publication and design of materials. With regard to publication, this section involves all components of a set of materials, including teachers' book, students' book, answer key, and so on. However, these components do not exist in all teaching materials, especially in the case of teacher-generated materials. Due to this problem, this section is beyond my discussion.

Littlejohn also analyses the design of materials. This involves analysis of the aims of the materials, and how the learning tasks, language and content are selected and sequenced. The teaching and learning activities focus on what learners have to do to develop process competence. Finally, the materials are examined to investigate their role as a whole.

In order to analyse the content of the English for Economics textbook, Littlejohn's (1993: 193) framework will be used. The framework is as follows:

1. Aims.
2. Principles of selection
3. Principles of sequencing
4. Subject matter and focus of subject matter.
5. Types of learning/teaching activities:
 - what they require the learner to do
 - manner in which they draw on the learner's process competence.
6. Participation
7. Learner roles

8. Teacher roles

9. Role of materials as a whole

This framework provides textbook evaluators with a valuable tool for evaluating a set of materials. The framework describes the whole process of teaching and learning, making the evaluation process more efficient. The textbook is evaluated on the basis of whether the activities and the tasks meet learners' needs and interest and the goals of the syllabus. Only textbook will be evaluated.

Evaluating the content of a set of materials involves analysing the tasks and activities in the textbook or unit being analysed. To know how the tasks and activities are presented in a textbook or unit, it is useful to investigate the nature of the tasks in task-based approaches to language learning.

Nunan (2004, p. 4) proposes a distinction between the target tasks and pedagogical tasks. Target tasks involve uses of language in the world beyond the classroom, whereas pedagogical tasks refer to those that occur in the classroom. Ellis (2003, p. 16) defines a task as a workplan that requires learners to use the language to achieve the goal and the task is primarily focus on meaning. These definitions of tasks suggest that an activity can be called a task if it calls for is focused in meaning.

3.0 RESULTS

This research analyses activities in English for Economics textbook by using Littlejohn's (1998) framework. Unit 8, which is focused on the text headed The Principle of Insurance will be investigated.

1. Aims

The author of the textbook did not state aims of each unit explicitly. As aims are one of the key aspects in any materials design, particularly in task-based teaching, this lack of aims may raise problems. Learners need to know why they are doing particular activities in the tasks. If there is no clear goal for activities, it is difficult for learners to evaluate their outcomes.

It is also important to investigate the goals of the programme in relation to the target situation, that is, the Economics Faculty and the workplace. As has been mentioned previously, there are two goals of learning English in ESP class, the long term and the short term. The long term goal, unfortunately, is not addressed in the unit. It is difficult to find any activity which links to the workplace. The short-term goal of ESP class is to help learners read articles on economics written in English. With regard to the short term goal, the activities pay little attention to developing the skills that students need for academic readings, including skimming, scanning, identifying the main idea, identifying supporting idea, and reading for specific information.

2. Principles of Task Selection

Task selection relates to how texts in the textbook are selected. Text selection determines activities and tasks that learners work on. Text selection involves considering the basis on which texts are selected and the sources of the texts/passages.

In selecting relevant text, materials designers draw on what they already know about learners, their abilities, the topics that suit them and the goals of their learning (Hood, *et al.*, 1996). In other words, materials developers need to develop materials relevant for learners' needs and interests. The texts selected in the *English for Economics* textbook seem to follow this principle. The reading passages are selected on the basis of relevance to learners' needs and interests which is in line with Hood, *et al.* (1996) suggestion.

As well as being relevant to learners' needs and the goals of the programme, materials designers also need to consider where the materials are from. Most of the texts in the textbook, including the text used in unit 8, are taken from the internet, specifically from Wikipedia. Choosing texts from website is good, as it attracts learners' attention, but materials evaluators need to consider the nature of the internet sources and the organisation of the information in selected texts. Wikipedia allows people to upload articles and change the information if they think the information is not interesting or accurate. In other words, the information presented in Wikipedia may change depending on who uploads the articles and gives new information.

Selecting text from Wikipedia may be useful as long as reading texts included in teaching materials are complete texts. As Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) point out, a text should consist of a complete idea and should be cohesive and coherent. Halliday (1985, as cited in Butt, *et al.* 2000) calls this unity as texture (the way the meanings in the text fit coherently with each other) and structure (the way most pieces of language in use will contain certain obligatory structural element appropriate to their purpose and context). The text in unit 8, however, fails to fulfill this texture requirement. Based on the title of the text, the passage is supposed to explain the principle of insurance and explain types of insurance. The text in unit 8 does not provide this information. The text does not introduce the topic, i.e. the principles of insurance. Rather it starts abruptly with a principle regarding the way in which loss is treated when developing an insurance product.

3. Principles of Tasks Sequence

Task sequence refers to the sequencing of activities or tasks included in materials. One of the important factors influencing sequencing is the characteristics of the tasks themselves. Robinson (2001) refers to this factor in terms of task complexity. The sequence process may lead to grading the tasks with regard to their level of complexity. The activities in *English for Economics* rely on texts as the main input. However, these texts are poorly selected in terms of text structure and organisation, and consequently the information presented is often difficult to follow. The complexity of input has a major influence on task complexity. However, the textbook makes little attempt to sequence activities on the basis of cognitive complexity as suggested by Robinson (2001) and Ellis (2003). For example, learners are not required to justify their position or to give an opinion. Rather than demanding increasing cognitive complexity, it seems that the activities are sequenced by looking at code complexity i.e. lexical and syntactical difficulty (Ellis, 2003). The text in Unit 8 provides low frequency of vocabulary and complex sentence structure.

4. Subject Matter and Focus of Subject Matter

The subject matter is any materials that relate to economics. The focus of subject matter in unit 8 is The Principle of Insurance. In evaluating materials, materials designers need to consider the tasks that the learners need to perform with available input materials.

In Unit 8, it seems that there is an imbalance between the input provided and the output that the learners are expected to perform. The students are asked to produce either written or oral extended discourse; however, there is little input available to assist learners to acquire the skills. For instance, the students need to summarise the passage in the *Summary* activity without being given a clear explanation of the process of writing a summary. Furthermore, at the end of the unit the students are expected to use language orally in the Discussion activity. This activity is quite difficult to achieve since there is no single prior activity that requires learners to speak. To produce language particularly through speaking, the learners need to be exposed to speaking and listening because these two skills are interrelated. The textbook unfortunately fails to provide examples of these skills before doing these activities. This indicates that the activities in the textbook are imbalance between the input and the output of the content.

5. Types of Learning/teaching Activities

In this section, a number of activities from Unit 8 in the textbook are analysed. The section will analyse what the learners are required to do to complete the tasks.

The *Reading Comprehension* activity requires learners to answer the questions based on the text. At this stage, they will use their reading strategies such as skimming and scanning to locate information and need to be able to get the meaning from the context. However, this section fails to develop this strategy. The majority of the questions do not require learners to understand the text to be able to answer the questions. They only need to match the words or phrases which appear in the questions with the words/phrases in the text. To answer question 1, for example, the students only match the word/phrases ‘must’, ‘predict’ and ‘distribution of losses’ in the text. However, it might be difficult for learners to answer ‘why’ question since the text does not provide information why the insurers must predict the rate and distribution of losses. The text provides information as to how this process is predictable instead.

The *Find the Synonym* of the words section, the students are asked to find out the meaning of given words. This activity may be useful when the students read other economics text. However, this exercise seems to make little contribution for facilitating vocabulary learning. This is due to words choice that the activities display. It appears that the learners decontextualize the vocabulary. They take the words and find the words that have similar meaning and then write them to make sentences.

In the *Summary section*, the learners are asked to summarise the text in 10 sentences. This activity may be difficult for learners to complete this activity for two reasons. First, it seems that there is no clear purpose of summarising the text. If the activity is intended to check learners understanding of the text, it can be done in the reading comprehension questions. Furthermore, if the activity reflects activities that they are going to use in their future careers; this is probably not the appropriate activity to employ. The students may need specific skills that help them develop their writing skills in the target situation, for example report writing and business correspondence.

The last activity is the *Discussion*. In this section, the students are asked to discuss the topic in the text and relate it to issues which occur in Indonesian context. This section seems to be the most difficult activity because the topic given is too broad to discuss. Based on the instruction of the task, the students need to discuss the rule of insurance companies operating in Indonesia. They need to find out whether the company and the clients have implemented fair principles of both parties. This question may raise problems. First, there is no specification of which insurance companies the learners need to talk about. Since there are many kinds of insurances available in Indonesia, such as life insurance, health insurance, etc, every insurance company may have different systems and rules to use. Second, as every insurance company differs in running its service, the way the company treats its client may be different from other company. It is, therefore, quite hard to get the information for all insurance companies. Finally, the students of economics have different level of English proficiency making gap when discussing the issue. Students who have in low level of English may be disadvantaged. They are likely to keep silent as they have problem in expression their opinion. For these reasons, the outcome of the task may be difficult to achieve.

6. Participation

Participation refers to grouping the learners to work with other students in completing the tasks. In the textbook, students are encouraged to work individually, in pairs, and in groups. Some tasks, however, do not provide clear instructions whether the students should work individually or in pairs/groups, for example in the reading comprehension, the find synonym and the summary sections. It is assumed that these sections could be done individually.

7. Learner Roles

Role is the part that teachers and learners need to play in accomplishing the task as well as interpersonal relationship between participants (Nunan, 1989; 2004). Richards and Rodgers (1986 as cited in Nunan, 1989; 2004) point out that learner's roles depend on the methodology of the tasks being presented. In all activities in the textbook, the learners follow all activities that the textbook offer. Their role is to participate in carrying out the exercises. They are not given the opportunity to choose activity that they like to do and do not like to do. This is different from the expectation of task based language teaching where it is possible for them to make a choice about what to do and how to do it (Nunan, 2004). However, the activities in unit 8 do not provide this chance because the students only do exercises. The exercises do not give chance for learners to assist their own learning processes.

8. Teacher Roles

Teachers are one of elements that influence students learning besides materials. They help learners develop language skills while the students are learning. In the activities in the English for Economics textbook they have various roles in assisting students to learn. One of their roles is to give clear explanation about the tasks. With regard to helping learners perform the tasks, they are expected to give explanation about how to carry out the tasks. In unit 8, there are no clear instructions about how to do each activity. Neither students nor teachers are provided with clear information of how to

complete the tasks. For this reason, it is important for the teachers to spend their time to explain unclear instruction.

9. Role of Materials as a Whole

As mentioned earlier that materials are also important in teaching and learning process. In ESP situation, the materials are usually used as source of language (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). This also occurs in the *English for Economics* textbook where the textbook is used as the main source in the classroom. The textbook plays an important role in exposing learners to language. The teaching materials need to be able to present language knowledge that the learner require in the target situation.

Another role of the textbook is as the syllabus. Cunningsworth (1995, as cited in Richards, 2001) notes that teaching materials function as the syllabus of the programme. However, the *English for Economics* textbook do not reflect learning objectives that have already determined in the programme.

4.0 CONCLUSION

An analysis of content of the textbook provides useful means of exploring the usefulness of materials. The analysis provides an intensive basis of testing whether learners' needs are matched to the target situations. The textbook is designed based on various stakeholders' needs including faculty, students, and the workplace. With limited time allocated to ESP subject each week, the textbook plays an important role in helping students to develop their skills and abilities in English.

However, the textbook is not an efficient way to develop learners' skills and abilities in learning a language. The textbook does not provide much input to learners to produce language that they may use inside and outside the classroom. There are many weaknesses of the textbook that the learners and the teacher may find from the selection of the readings text to the tasks. In texts selection, the textbook provides various topics and texts. The reading texts taken from Wikipedia have not presented a complete information that may be useful to understand the text. Incomplete texts make the text difficult to read.

The activities presented in the textbook focus on form although there is meaning focused activity primarily the discussion sections. The activities lack some features such as communicative outcome, real world language use that are generally presented in effective tasks. As a result, the activities are 'exercises' rather than 'tasks'. Furthermore, the activities presented fulfil the needs of students rather than the goals of the programme in the target situation. Although some activities may be useful for the students during their study, they are too few to make significant difference. The textbook also fails to provide activities that may be useful for the students' future careers. In conclusion, the students' interest and the goals of the programme have not reflected extensively.

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