

THE EVALUATION OF ENGLISH COURSEBOOK CHALLENGES 1 FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate teachers' perspectives on the suitability of the English coursebook *Challenges 1* and the strategies employed by the teachers at International Language Programs (ILP). Through qualitative research, it was found that the coursebook provided a balanced syllabus and guidance for teachers. It presented language skills, language content, and various topics for students. The teachers also perceived that the coursebook provide clear aims to follow. However, there were negative perspectives believed by some teachers on several items such as the coverage of speaking skills, the suitability of activities with the students' preferred classroom activities, and the suitability of topics with students' level. The data from interviews also indicated that the teachers adapted the materials by adding, deleting, and modifying the materials to meet their target learning needs and to make the materials more relevant to the teaching context. To some extent, it shows that the coursebook contains areas that need to be developed.

Keywords: *Coursebook Evaluation, Teachers' Perspectives, Materials Adaptation*

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INTRODUCTION

Education has a crucial role to play in improving students' level of proficiency in English. The Indonesian government has attempted to introduce changes to the curriculum a number of times in order to offer some support to the development of education as a whole in the 2013 curriculum and *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The design of the 2013 curriculum for English is in a communicative framework (Ariatna, 2016), that was hoped to develop students' communication competence. It was created to revise the previous curriculum (the school-based curriculum) in which communication skills were given in limited portions in the classrooms (Putra, 2014). Similarly, the newest curriculum which is *Kurikulum Merdeka* also places English as an optional subject at primary levels. The policy aims to enable students to gain proficiency in their native language first (Indonesian) before becoming proficient in the foreign language. This condition can have an impact on increasing students' interest in English courses to get additional assistance because their study time at school may not be sufficient.

With that being said, the researcher was interested in investigating the teachers' perspectives on the suitability of the coursebook *Challenges 1* used at ILP (International Language Programs). The researcher's firsthand experience of teaching was the rationale to evaluate the coursebook because there has never been

any research related to the coursebook evaluation at language course contexts. The teachers have always been expected to accept the coursebook set by the school without being allowed to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it is immensely important to find out the voices of teachers.

Similar studies have been investigated by previous researchers regarding coursebook evaluation in Indonesia. Handayani et al. (2018) investigated teachers' perspectives on the *Think Globally Act Locally* coursebook and found that the coursebook was perceived 'good' for the physical and utilitarian aspects, but the shortcomings were the unnatural coursebook illustrations, lack of teaching aids, boring exercises, lack of vocabulary building, and lack of audio materials for pronunciation practice. Another researcher who investigated a similar topic is Hanifa (2018) who applied document analysis to discover the strengths and weaknesses of two coursebooks used from two different curriculums. The first coursebook was *When English Rings A Bell* from the 2013 curriculum and the second coursebook was *English on Sky 1* from the school-based curriculum. She found that both the coursebooks had strengths in the layout, designs, instructions, methodology, language skills, and topics. However, they also had some weaknesses in the authenticity of listening materials for the *When English Rings a Bell* coursebook and the lack of additional materials for *English on Sky 1*. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Setiawan (2021) also investigated the effectiveness of the English coursebook used in online learning, and the results showed it was suitable. Based on the relevant empirical studies mentioned above, the major gap is the lack of investigation into teachers' strategies for how they develop the materials. Therefore, this study attempted to cover the gap by not only investigating the teachers' perspectives more deeply but also exploring their strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of a Coursebook

To investigate teachers' perspectives on coursebooks, it might be best to start by understanding the notion of a coursebook. A coursebook is designed for use on a particular course of study. Coursebooks are also claimed as a salient element in ELT which have been produced in million copies and utilized by many teachers in different countries around the world to support their teaching (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). They are also published with the increasing quality of the materials (complete packages) such as offering clear indications for teachers and students and providing classroom time to structure the teaching and learning process (Littlejohn, 1998). This indicates that most teachers believe there are some benefits they can get from the coursebooks for their classes. Besides, Cunningsworth (1995) argues that coursebooks are resources that have particular aims and objectives which contribute to the context of language teaching and learning. Similarly, Woodward (2001) also remarks that it is a book that facilitates teachers with ready-made resources and a balanced syllabus.

Understanding teachers' perspectives on coursebooks are immensely important because they have an impact not only on the way teachers use coursebooks but also on the attitudes of students towards their language classrooms and the learning process as a whole (McGrath, 2006). The materials and tasks provided in the coursebook may not engage the students and make them reluctant to learn. Therefore, teachers should be able to understand what coursebooks are

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used for and how to use them effectively. In general, (McGrath, 2002) mentions three general themes which represent teachers' perspectives on coursebooks: 'control', 'choice', and 'support'. In the first theme, teachers perceive that the materials found in the coursebooks are important for their students and the information provided by the authors should not be questioned (Richards, 1998). Thus, they believe that the materials do not need to be changed or modified. These teachers see the coursebook as a holy book in which the function is to control how they teach in the classroom. Second, teachers see the coursebook as a choice where they assume that the materials in the coursebook should be carefully selected to correspond with the teaching context (McGrath, 2002). These teachers are aware of the needs of their students and critically engage with the coursebooks to suit those needs. Last, the presence of coursebooks can be a support for teachers which provides them with some guidance and directions regarding the actual teaching procedures. McGrath (2002) says that teachers with this perspective see coursebooks as a tool to control and provide choices for them. This variety of perspectives on coursebooks implies that they have both advantages and disadvantages in ELT which are essential for teachers to understand so that they can use the coursebooks more effectively in their classes.

Coursebook Evaluation

The ability to evaluate coursebooks plays a pivotal role in ELT (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). Mishan & Timmis (2015, p.57) say that it is "a powerful professional development" which means teachers engaging in coursebooks evaluation will expand their knowledge and skills in the teaching profession. In general, coursebook evaluation is a procedure of where judgments are made by the users to assess its potential values (Tomlinson, 2003). Tomlinson adds that what becomes a major concern in evaluation is the users and their judgements which means it tends to be subjective. Regarding this subjectivity, Graves (2000) points out that teachers' teaching experience, the established beliefs, and their understanding determine their evaluation. In other words, context is the key to the evaluation process to consider before using the coursebook. Therefore, coursebooks evaluation can have different purposes and types as explained in the following section.

The Purposes of Coursebook Evaluation

Generally, the purpose of coursebooks evaluation is to estimate the suitability of materials following the existing teaching and learning context (Mishan & Timmis, 2015). Contexts can refer to many aspects, such as teaching aims, students' interest, and students' language skills. In other words, teachers should be able to reflect their personal beliefs and experiences when evaluating coursebooks. Other researchers provide different names for purposes. For example, Cunningsworth, (1995) who categorizes the purposes of coursebook evaluation into two types which are the evaluation for potential (i.e., a general evaluation without considering a specific group of learners) and the evaluation for suitability (i.e., an evaluation intended to suit the coursebooks with particular context). These two purposes assess the coursebooks in order to enable teachers and students to use them optimally and reach the goals of the teaching programs at schools. Meanwhile, (Ellis, 1998) mentions that coursebook evaluation has to do with macro-evaluation

which aims to assess the accountability and developmental purposes of the coursebooks, such as administrative and curricular aspects and micro-evaluation which aims to assess more specific administrative and curricular aspects. In essence, all purposes of coursebook evaluation mentioned by the scholars orientate to point out general and specific aspects of evaluation.

Three different types of coursebook evaluation are also mentioned by Cunningsworth, (1995) and Tomlinson (2003). These types rely on the time of the evaluation conducted. The first type is a pre-use evaluation that is when the evaluators assess a new coursebook to see the potential performance in the future. Second is whilst-use or in-use evaluation which refers to the evaluation when the coursebooks are still being used and last is post-use evaluation or assessment on the coursebooks that have been used for a period of time and attempts to see the effect it brings and whether the coursebooks can still be used in the future. In this study, the coursebook investigated (Challenges 1) has been used for more than four years at ILP and is still in use. So, the research involves whilst or in-use evaluation which attempts to seek for the suitability of the coursebook for students in 'Step up' 1-3 classes at ILP.

Materials Adaptation

Three major elements in ELT are materials, teachers, and learners (Maley, 1998). As such, what has to be considered when adapting the materials are the implications they bring to teachers and learners. With this regard, materials adaptation is defined as "a very practical activity carried out mainly by teachers to make their work more relevant to the learners" (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p.85). So, the purpose of material adaptation is to make the materials more suitable so that learners can learn more effectively from their coursebooks. The reasons for adaptation are also varied depending on the teaching context. In their adaptation on three different coursebooks, (Islam & Mares, 2003) designed an adaptation with three different purposes. First, on a coursebook *New Horizon 1* which was used in Japan for junior high school students aged 12-13 years old, they modified the materials to be more communicative by adding a total physical response (TPR) stage to have kinesthetic and auditory activities. Second, in a class of a private school in Spain with students aged 18-40 years old on a coursebook *New Headway Pre-Intermediate*, they expanded the vocabulary task by adding a pair work activity to activate students' background knowledge. Finally, on a coursebook *Interchange 3*, they modified the materials by adding some questions for a discussion activity before the main stage (listening section) to raise students' interest and they also modified the post-activity by adding prompts to help students produce the language. Thus, it can be concluded that materials adaptation involves various principles and techniques that can be applied by the teachers in their coursebook.

Material adaptation also has various techniques that can be used by the teachers. Islam and Mares (2003) list some techniques of adaptation that they conclude from the other researchers such as McDonough & Shaw (2003) and Cunningsworth (1995). First, teachers can make a quantitative change by extending the activities with similar type of materials, for instance, adding five more questions instead of ten for the grammar task or make a qualitative change by providing more activities which have different type of materials to support students' learning, for example, teachers teach how to pronounce past simple verbs while teaching the

formula of this tense. Second, teachers delete the activities quantitatively to make the material shorter, for instance, cutting five questions in a task or delete the activities qualitatively to the material which is unimportant for their learners, for example, teachers delete the task about pronunciation which may hinder students' fluency. Third, teachers simplify the activity, for example by rewording the instruction to be more understandable for their learners. Fourth, teachers reorder the sequence of tasks according to the level of difficulty and the stages of the teaching approach they adopt. Last, teachers replace the material which is more relevant to their context by taking from other sources such as the internet, newspaper, and videos.

In addition, (McDonough & Shaw, 2003) add one more technique called modifying. In this technique, teachers modify the material to be more relevant, for example by changing the reading passage into a listening section or they also can modify the material by restructuring the activities so that they can be implemented in their class, for instance, modify a pair work activity into group work. Above all, any techniques used for their materials adaptation, teachers should reflect on their context so that the adapted materials can produce better input for their students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative method. The qualitative method is the approach which describes and explore the understanding and interpretation of the data with words (Lichtman, 2006). The researcher chose this method because it can manifest in-depth descriptions and explore the understanding and interpretation of the data. The research aims to find out teachers' perspectives on the coursebook and analyze the strategies that the teachers used to make the material more suitable to the teaching context.

The coursebook evaluated was written by (Harris & Mower, 2007), and it has been used for more than four years at ILP. This coursebook is used in Step up 1-3 classes or equivalent to junior high school level at formal schools. There are 129 pages and 10 units. ILP divides the units into three levels: level 1 is Step up 1 which covers units 1, 2, and-3, level 2 is Step up 2 which covers units 4, 5, and-6, and units 7, 8, 9, and-10 are for level 3 or Step up 3. Each unit has three different topics with some exposures to language forms (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and sentence builder) and language skills. In terms of teaching approach, ILP adopts communicative-based teaching that is in line with the 2013 curriculum framework used at formal schools.

The participants involved in this research were teachers at ILP who have distinct teaching experience and backgrounds. The selection of participants in this study was purposeful in the sense that the researcher purposefully selected teachers at ILP who had experience teaching using *Challenges 1*. Therefore, these samples can be referred to as non-probability samples or samples whose participants are selectively chosen for specific purposes to meet the needs of the research (Cohen et al., 2007). To identify and analyze patterns in semi-structured interviews in qualitative data, thematic analysis was used. Braun & Clarke (2006) remark thematic analysis is theoretically flexible in the sense that it can be used within a range of theoretical framework and it does not require compliance with certain language theories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Teachers' Perspectives on the Coursebook

To maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the teachers, the researchers did not reveal their real names. Instead, a pseudonym is used. Wiles et al., (2008) regard confidentiality in research means not giving information about participants to others and presenting findings in ways that participants cannot be easily identified. Therefore, the researcher used T1, T2, and T3 in naming the teachers in which T stands for teacher. The following are the findings from gained from interviews.

After the process of familiarization and generalization data from the interviews, themes have been searched and reviewed. Then, it was found out that the interviewees had similar perspectives on the importance of coursebook for their teaching which was the first question in the interviews. In this light, they gave different reasons on why a coursebook should be involved in their teaching.

It's very important because the coursebook contains students' exposures and exercises for a daily meeting. (T1)

Coursebooks are important. Why? They are learning resources for students and teachers. They also have materials for teaching and syllabus. They have clear directions. (T2)

The coursebook is always important because it tells what the teachers should teach. (T3)

The second question of the interviews referred to the design and the organization of the coursebook. It was found that the coursebook was criticized for their complexity. The information was too much and a little monotonous.

There is too much information on every page, so it is not focused. (T1)

In one lesson there are a lot of different target languages, so it is not focused. (T2)

... the materials are a little monotonous. I have seen the other coursebooks such as intermediate coursebook. The intermediate coursebook offers students to be active learners, but the Challenges 1 coursebook is more like to study. (T3)

The correspondence between the aims of the coursebook and the teaching programs at ILP was addressed in the fourth question. Surprisingly, the teachers stated that even though the coursebook provided clear aims, yet they felt the aims were not in line with the schools' learning goals.

... the contents are not suitable for the students at ILP. (T1)

So, the coursebook has clear aims, but again, we do have our own aims which are different. (T2)

I think Challenges 1 is exactly opposite of the principle applied by ILP in the teaching process. (T3).

Related to the target learning needs of the coursebook (question five), among language skills, speaking was the area which became their main concern. The participants believed the coursebook required adaptations for the speaking activities.

Well, the speaking practice is not really emphasized, so the teachers should improvise to create speaking activities. (T1)

Speaking should be more active and creative, but I cannot find that in the coursebook. (T2)

Not for speaking. (T3)

Another adaption should be made in the topics because when they were asked for their opinions about the distribution of topics in the coursebook (question six), the teachers stated that some topics were outdated, so they needed to be updated with more recent ones.

For example, the theme that I mentioned before about Olympics which happened a long time ago. The students are not familiar... (T1).

So, there are some topics which are suitable and some other topics which should not be used (xxx) because they are outdated. (T2)

... the topics are interesting. The topics are good. (T3)

Lastly, they explained that the coursebook was easy to use because it came with the teacher's book which clearly provided information about how to teach with it.

I use teachers' book, students' book, and workbook. (T1)

... the teacher's book is guidance. It offers some ideas to teach although we have our own ideas, but their ideas can inspire us, right? Or combining the ideas from the teachers' book. (T2)

Oh yeah. If I teach with Challenges 1 coursebook, I use students' book because it helps the teaching more interesting. (T3)

They basically gave similar ideas on the benefits of teachers' book. They realized that the complete set of the coursebook components was important for them to teach. So, the coursebook not only provided ready-made materials but also guided and inspired them to teach (Ur, 1996).

Teachers' Strategies

In the eighth question, the teachers were expected to explicate how they executed the tasks in the coursebook. They recognized the tasks were easy to follow, yet some changes were made when necessary.

Some tasks are easy to follow and some are not. I more often cut the tasks. (T1)

Uh.. no. Not all tasks in the coursebook I follow. (T2)

I follow, but I have additional materials from outside. (T3)

As seen below, various strategies (question nine) were adopted by the teachers which were adding, cutting, and modified the tasks.

I more often cut the tasks. (T1)

The technique I mostly use is adding the tasks. Following PPP approach, I usually use the coursebook to do practice and production stage in pair work and group work. But, I modify little bit the worksheets. (T1)

*I have to tailor it with my teaching approach and with what I teach. So, not giving tasks which are not in line with the topics or the materials. (T2)
I follow. But, I have additional materials from outside. (T3)
I will teach with that if there are no mistakes. (T3)*

The rationales for the use of strategies were addressed in the ninth question. The T1 chose to personalize the materials following his teaching context.

Because if we don't improvise. The tasks will be boring. The students will be bored. So, to make a unit with interesting target languages, we must improvise to address students' needs. (T1)

Similarly, the T2 argued that the strategies were employed to engage the students and made his class more effective. He preferred to modify the materials and deleted unnecessary parts.

*I modify the lesson, not following the tasks based on the orders. Sometimes, I jump and select the tasks. (T2)
As far as I am concerned, when we modify the lessons with various activities, the students will be happy, motivated rather than studying by following the tasks which are boring. (T2)*

In addition, the T3 believed that adding the materials was able to improve his teaching with the coursebook.

For example, the coursebook discusses Present Perfect tense, then I will look at the coursebook if the material is not that much or detailed. I will prepare the material from outside. (T3)

From the findings above, research reported that the participants found some strengths and weaknesses in the coursebook, but they had strategies to compensate the weaknesses.

Discussion

Teacher's perspectives on the coursebook

T1, T2, and T3 agreed that the coursebook was an important part of teaching such as providing them with ready-made materials, learning resources, and guidance as stated by Woodward (2001) and Ur (1996). However, in terms of aims and approaches, three interviewees perceived that the coursebook had some shortfalls.

For some teachers, the coursebook seemed not matched with the learning contexts at ILP where students were expected to be active in the classroom. The coursebook also provided a lot of information which might complicate teachers in presenting the language items to students.

It also could be concluded that the coursebook presented good syllabus for students' learning. However, to some degree, those were not relevant to what the teachers expected because ILP may have different learning objectives and syllabus for their students.

ILP seemed to emphasize more on communication skills as their main learning objectives while the coursebook might only present speaking activities in small portions because it attempted to embrace all language contents and language

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skills together. So, they believed that speaking tasks should be added. Meanwhile, regarding topics in the coursebook, one of the interviewees had different perspectives.

T1 and T2 had the same opinion regarding topics. They concluded that the topics were rather outdated and they may not be suitable with the students' era. In other words, some information may need to be modernized and changed to make it more relevant. However, the perspective of T3 was different, he thought that the topics were good and suitable for his learners. The different views on this could be because of his teaching experience, beliefs, and understanding about the learners (Graves, 2000) at ILP. However, for the 'Teachers' Book' criterion, all interviewees agreed that it was important and the complete set of coursebook was also helpful for their teaching.

Teacher's strategies

Initially, T1 and T2 claimed that they did not follow the tasks provided in the coursebook while T1 seemed to follow it but he was also concerned about making changes to the materials. This shows that they are aware of making adaptations in the coursebook. T1 and T2 seemed to be selective in preparing the materials for their students. They were aware of their students' needs and level, so they chose the tasks that they believed their students could do them successfully. While, T3 seemed to believe that the coursebook provided a good structure for his teaching, therefore he said that he followed the tasks. Yet, he was also aware of adapting the coursebook to make it more suitable such as by adding the materials from other sources. Thus, it can be concluded that the interviewees regarded material adaptation was important for their teaching. Then, regarding the strategies of material adaptation, the interviewees gave various responses.

As seen from their responses in the previous section, the strategies they applied followed the techniques of material adaptations explained by (Islam & Mares, 2003) and McDonough & Shaw (2003): adding, deleting, and modifying. The following is what T1 said more about his materials adaptation.

To make the coursebook more relevant, T1 tended to add, delete, and modify the materials. For the reasons, T1 further explained that he adapted the coursebook in order to meet his learners' needs and to make it more interesting. In other words, T1 personalized the coursebook which is one of the principles of material adaptation (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). Similarly, T2 argued that his adaptations were to make the materials more interesting.

T2 believed that the tasks in the coursebook were less interesting for his learners. He concerned about creating a fun class where it could motivate his learners to study. Therefore, he personalized the coursebook by modifying the materials and deleting the tasks that he believed they were not important for his learners. Meanwhile, T3 had different perspectives about his strategies. T3 tended to add the materials as his strategy or technique of materials adaptation (Islam & Mares, 2003). He might add the materials both quantitatively and qualitatively which aimed to cover up the shortcomings in the coursebook. But, compared to T1 and T3, T2 had the simplest technique of adaptations because he did not mention modifying or deleting the materials to make the coursebook more relevant with his context.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

With regard to the teachers' responses in the semi-structured interviews, the coursebook has been able to provide teachers with clear frameworks and ready-made teaching materials. It consisted of clear aims and flexibility for teachers to modify the materials. However, to some extent, the teachers felt that there were several aspects which were not covered in the coursebook. This means, despite its strengths, the coursebook had some weaknesses. The coursebook seemed not matched with the teaching situation at ILP which adopted communicative-based teaching. The speaking skills were not sufficiently covered in the coursebook. Also, it was found that the activities provided in the coursebook could not engage the students to be active learners. Some critics were also given to the topics provided in the coursebook. Some teachers argued that it was rather outdated and not suitable for the students' level.

Suggestion

This investigation has been able to see the suitability of the coursebook Challenges 1 used at ILP. Therefore, it seems valid to repeat this research at other schools, institutions, or universities to find out the suitability of a coursebook by investigating teachers' and students' perspectives through coursebook evaluation. Evaluating the coursebook plays a very important role in ELT because it can increase teachers' knowledge and skills in the teaching profession. The future investigation could be conducted in a larger sample size such as at public schools which have a greater number of teachers and students. The larger sample size could provide greater reliability and more sophisticated statistical data.

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