
Evaluating an EFL Textbook: A Good Fit, Adequate Fit, a Poor Fit or Totally Wrong?

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate an evaluation of an EFL textbook for senior high school students entitled “Functional English for Senior High Schools” written by Sugeng and Zaimah (2007). The book was published in 2007 by *Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri, Solo*. The researchers used a qualitative evaluation checklist, namely “Evaluation of the Fit” by Byrd et al. (2001) by evaluating the fitness of textbooks through three aspects: curriculum, students, and teachers. The evaluation results are: (1) considering the curriculum aspect, the book was categorized as a good fit, (2) considering the fitness of the book with the students’ needs. It was categorized as a good and adequate fit. However, (3) considering the teachers’ aspect, the book was considered a poor fit because it was not completed with supplementary teaching materials, such as cassettes or CDs and manual supports for teachers. The conclusion showed the textbook was categorized as an adequate fit for the curriculum, students, and teachers, and it needed manual and technological support for a more beneficial function.

Keywords

EFL, evaluation of the fit, objective evaluation criteria, textbook evaluation, qualitative evaluation checklist

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Introduction

Instructional material has much influence on the teaching and learning development. It is a communication medium, such as audio-visual aids, television, radio, and textbooks used by educators and learners to develop learning. Selecting the materials given to the learners is the educator's duty (Wulandari et al., 2016). Zokaeieh et al. (2019) stated the materials support learners in conceivable shortages, such as educators' epistemic knowledge. A disorienting quantity of new coursebooks spread the worldwide EFL market year by year, making it ever more problematic to select the accurate book for class. In many non-English speaking countries, coursebooks or textbooks become the only source necessary for an actual language-teaching program in most schools (Kayaoglu, 2011). According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006), the textbook is a comprehensive learning resource in print or electronic form, or the combination of print, electronic, and non-print materials collectively designed to support a substantial portion of the curriculum expectations for a specific grade and subject in elementary school or for a course in secondary school, or the expectations for a learning area in the kindergarten program. The resource is intended for use by an entire class or group of students.

Textbooks are essential tools for the promotion of explicit types of curricula. They are structured purposefully, and consequently. Their content and structure are very significant for the specific vision promotion of a curriculum (Okeeffe, 2013). Sheldon (1988) stated textbooks are the visible heart of any ELT program, and they offer considerable advantages for students and teachers when they are being used in the ESL/EFL classroom. Textbooks survive and prosper primarily because they are the most convenient means of providing the structure of the teaching and learning activity. From the definitions before, the conclusion is that a textbook is an organized, physical manual for instruction to cover various topics in a specific subject area.

Currently, there are two foremost causes why textbooks are widely used. First, for educators, developing material on their own can be a very difficult and demanding job. There are loads of considerations throughout the development. Second, the teaching is time-consuming. Therefore, educators often do not have adequate time to develop new materials (Fuyudloturromaniyyah, 2015). The role of the textbook differs impressively from classroom to classroom and teacher to teacher. However, Okeeffe (2013) provided a basic outline for the textbook below.

- To teach and encourage students to construct new knowledge,
- To balance detail and precision of information,
- To provide logical and consistent mathematical systems,
- To bring about new questions,
- To provide students with active, creative, many-sided information,
- To teach and encourage students to construct new knowledge,
- To balance detail and precision of information,
- To provide logical and consistent mathematical systems,

- To bring about new questions,
- To provide students with active, creative, many-sided information,
- To teach and inspire students to build new knowledge,
- To balance the detail and accuracy of information,
- To deliver logical and reliable knowledge systems,
- To bring about original questions,
- To provide learners with active, inventive, numerous-sided information.

Furthermore, [Alemi and Rezanezhad \(2013\)](#) stated that textbooks made a great change where it seems a teaching-learning situation is not complete until it is accompanied by a relevant textbook. Textbooks can be classified as artifacts. They are part of schooling that many stakeholders have to examine and understand (or misunderstand). Meanwhile, the quality of EFL textbooks has improved dramatically in recent years, but selecting an appropriate textbook process has not become easier for most teachers and administrators ([Miekley, 2005](#)). Every publisher claims that their textbook is the greatest that has ever been published. The publisher uses the up-to-date method in organizing the content of the books. Their resolution, probably, is to enhance students' English achievement, but they are also eager to get some profits. Educators may choose the best book suitable for their purposes. However, it can be a blunder if educators are not careful in choosing and selecting the book.

Nowadays, many educators do not use textbooks from the government but from private publishers. There are reasons to do so. Educators think that students need more English supplements to achieve their goals. However, few educators still use the book because of financial reasons ([Wulandari et al., 2016](#)). However, not all English textbooks are good teaching materials ([Sari et al., 2018](#)). Many adult EFL classes around the world today are using coursebooks that were not chosen by the careful application of objective evaluation criteria. The ongoing failure to create and use objective criteria when selecting coursebooks is an abdication of the responsibility of schools and teachers to provide learners with materials that are as relevant as possible to their needs and to ensure that learners' investment of time and money in research is fully justified. According to [Hutchinson and Waters \(1987\)](#), textbook evaluation is a straightforward, analytical matching process: matching needs to available solutions ([Sheldon, 1988](#)). Evaluation of textbooks is also considered to function as a kind of educational judgment.

Classroom teachers spend much time using textbooks in class, so choosing an appropriate one is essential. One effective way of ensuring that the needs of learners are given careful consideration when choosing course books is to apply a written checklist of appropriate selection criteria to potential course books. [Jusuf \(2018\)](#) defined the term "checklist" as a tool that assists practitioners in assessing course books in an operational and practical method. The checklist is to identify whether each feature is present ([Fuyudloturromaniyyah, 2015](#)). It is to help one not to forget information or jobs meant to be done. It can also be referred to as a type of informational job aid used to reduce failure by compensating for potential limits of human memory and attention.

Two categories of checklists that can be used to evaluate textbooks. They are qualitative and quantitative checklists ([Mukundan et al., 2011](#)). A qualitative checklist consists of open-

ended questions as the measures to obtain the information and to score the quality of each criterion by using the scale that has been set. Through a qualitative checklist, educators can also get an in-depth evaluation. The quantitative checklist uses a range of scales on each criterion that has been developed by the educators. The scale range is usually built by using the Likert style (Budiarsih, 2022).

According to the Indonesian state standard (Government Regulation No. 25 of 2016 on Education), a textbook that is endorsed by the curriculum must have some appropriate criteria. The evaluation of textbooks in Indonesia should give awareness for choosing appropriate materials and familiarize the teacher with the textbook element. Therefore, a textbook comprehensive evaluation is detrimental to the body of knowledge and beneficial to teachers' professional development (Firmansyah, 2020). Based on the background mentioned above, this research investigates an evaluation of an EFL textbook for senior high school students. Evaluation is widely acknowledged as a powerful means of improving the quality of education (Wahab, 2013). Textbook evaluation is a small but distinct subfield of applied linguistic research aimed at examining textbooks as curricular-cultural artifacts that communicate important meanings through their content and design (Weninger, 2018). An evaluation can be used to judge whether the educator keeps using the book or whether it needs to be substituted with a new one (Budiarsih, 2022). Textbook evaluation in Indonesia is an important thing to be conducted since EFL teachers showed a dependency on textbooks in the classroom (Handayani et al., 2019). The novelty of this research is the evaluation checklist for analyzing the textbook, which is "Evaluation of the fit". The issue that is addressed in this research is in a textbook evaluation system which covers the fit between the materials and (1) the curriculum, (2) the students, and (3) the teachers.

Methodology

This research is descriptive evaluative research. Descriptive research describes a phenomenon, condition, activity, or event and so on in which the results were described in a report. Meanwhile, evaluative research describes the phenomenon of the studied object by comparing it to the criteria. Furthermore, it depicts whether the studied object has been compatible, less compatible, or incompatible with the criteria. Evaluation is a matching process: matching needs to available solutions. Sheldon (1988) maintained that since no set of criteria applies to all different situations, researchers can only commit themselves to checklists or scoring systems. The evaluation sheet consisted of a list of factors such as rationale, availability, layout, rating (poor, fair, good, and excellent), and comments, which were given in the corresponding space by the evaluator. The whole process of textbook assessment is inevitably a subjective activity.

The research object, collecting, and analyzing the data

In this research, the researchers analyzed a textbook for SMA/MA students entitled "Functional English for Senior High Schools". The data were taken through documentation techniques. The book was designed for students in physical science and social sciences majors

in the XII grade. The authors of the book were Sugeng and Zaimah (2007). The book was published in 2007 by *Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri, Solo*.

In analyzing the book, the researchers used a qualitative evaluation checklist, namely “Evaluation of the fit” adapted from a template by Byrd et al. (2001). When the aspect inside the book is in line with the checklist, then the item is considered a good fit, and vice versa. The evaluation of the fit covers some levels in scoring the textbook:

“Evaluation of the fit”

Yes (a good fit)

Perhaps (adequate fit)

Probably Not (a poor fit)

Absolutely Not (wrong for curriculum/students/teachers)

Findings and Discussion

The fit between textbook and curriculum

Generally, the first area included in the textbook analysis is the fit between the materials and the curriculum. For large educational systems, publishers create materials based on published curriculum statements. Byrd (2001) stated that textbooks must be selected based on features other than curriculum, so the text becomes the curriculum. On the other hand, textbooks are unlikely to be found that are completely congruent with the pedagogical goals of the program, and the purpose of the selection process must be to find books that fit as possible with the expectation that the textbooks will need to be adapted and supplemented with additional materials to support the curriculum.

In the checklist used by the researchers, the items included in the *fit between the textbook and the curriculum* were as follows:

- Fits curriculum/goals;
- Has appropriate linguistic content;
- Has appropriate thematic content;
- Fits the pedagogical philosophy of the course.

The book that the researchers analyzed used KTSP 2006 (School-Based Curriculum). On the cover, it was written that the book was based on the Decrees of the Minister of National Education No. 22 Year 2006 concerning the Standard of Contents and No. 23 Year 2006 concerning the Standard of Graduate Competence. It was also completed with a Curricular Scheme of the book, which referred to KTSP 2006. The researchers already checked the standard and basic competence of KTSP 2006 and matched them with the Curricular Scheme of the book. The result showed that the book was fit to the curriculum at

that time. Therefore, the researchers considered a “Yes” for the fit between the textbook and the curriculum since it was a good fit.

In linguistic and thematic content, the researchers analyzed each unit of the book. Every unit has listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar (language used) activity. Linguistically, the language used in this book was quite adequate for the students of XII grade. Moreover, each unit has its theme. The book’s authors were consistent in arranging one theme into another. The topic/theme of the material was matched with the activities and the tasks, for example, in Unit 1, the theme was “Something about Economy”. Since the theme was related to the economy, the activities and the tasks were also about that theme. The speaking activity, for example, was related to the situations in BANK; the reading text was about the economic background of a family; the grammar points were about the determiners or quantifiers, etc. In general, the fit in the linguistic and thematic content was good and adequate. The content of the material presented in the book fits the philosophy of the book. On page iii, the book’s authors stated that the philosophy was “Learn Life whilst Learning English”. With this philosophy, the book was intended for the student’s personality and social, intellectual, and emotional growth. The book did not only provide the students with English learning material but also the knowledge and experience of the world. In this case, the book was considered a good fit.

The fit between textbook and students

Textbooks are for students. To meet their needs, the textbook must not only have the English language or communication skill content demanded by the curriculum, but it must also fit the needs of students as learners of English. Textbooks include three primary elements: content (and explanation), examples, and exercises or tasks (Byrd, 2001). The items included in *fit between the textbook and students* were as follows:

- Explanations are understandable/usable for the students.
- Examples are understandable/usable for the students.
- Activities are appropriate for students.
- Thematic content is understandable and culturally appropriate.

To the writers’ analysis, the explanations and examples in this book were understandable and usable for students. The language used by the authors was not complicated. The directions and examples were clear and easy to comprehend. The explanation would help the learners understand what they need to learn the material. The examples fit closely to the concepts they were supposed to be explaining. It could be seen from some of the activities in the book, e.g. page 15:

3. Writing

Students will be able to

- use punctuation correctly;
- develop paragraphs of narratives

In first grade, we studied the uses of punctuation. Actually, we use punctuation all the time. In this lesson, we review some of them and learn other kinds of punctuation.

a. Capital Letter (A, B, C)

Capital letters are used to begin sentences and names of persons, places, times, and events.

I met Miluh last Sunday in Surabaya.

b. Full Stop (.)

It is used to end a sentence and mark most abbreviations of names, titles, degrees, and others.

Functional Eng SMA 3B IPA/S R1

British English	American English
Mr and Mrs Rozaq	Mr. and Mrs. Rozaq
BC AD st	B.C.A.D. St.

c. Comma (,)

It is used to present a list, mark adverbial constructions, mark introductory items, present direct speeches, and mark parenthetical items.

Sofia bought pencils, books, and paper clips.

We'll, it's over now.

The Lady answered, 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way.'

The girl, however, forgives him.

In addition, generally, the activities were appropriate for the students. The level of difficulty of the material varied from the easiest to the most difficult one, but of course, it depends on the student's mastery or understanding of the material itself. The activities (exercises/tasks) provided enough variety to meet the needs of different kinds of learners in the classroom. The illustration and other graphical and design elements were appropriate for the age of the students and educational level. The printed text was easy to read and was appropriate for the student's reading level.

Pair Simulations

Work in pairs. Your partner and you will take turns as the interviewer or interviewee. Use one of the cards below to help you with ideas for questions. Take the card randomly.

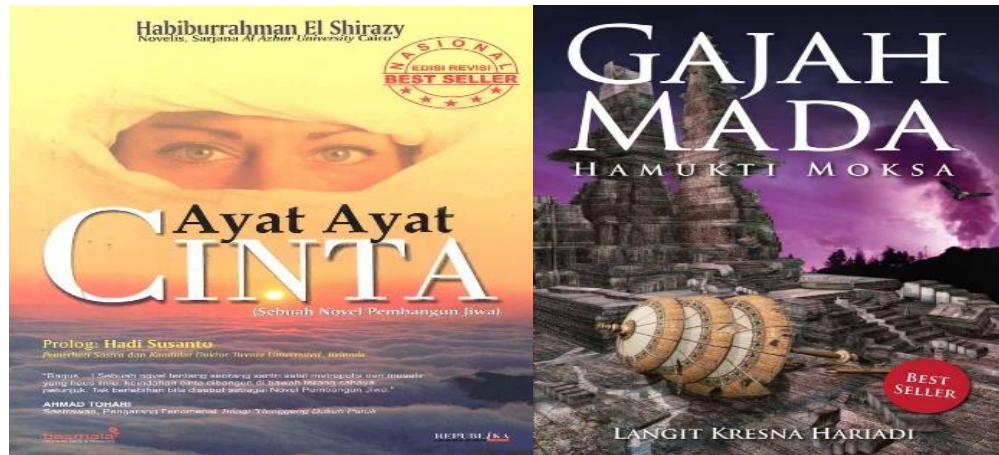
a

1. Greet him or her.
2. Ask him or her to tell about their family.
3. Tell him or her to say why they want to work here.
4. Ask why he or she is a good person for the vacancy.
5. Ask and discuss whether he or she
 - has many hobbies
 - likes to work in a team
 - is dependable
 - likes to travel
6. Ask about salary.
7. Ask if he or she has any question about you, about interview, or about the company.

b

1. Greet him or her.
2. Ask him or her to tell about their family.
3. Tell him or her to say why they want to work here.
4. Ask why he or she is a good person for the vacancy.
5. Ask and discuss whether he or she
 - drives
 - is a hard worker
 - likes working with people
 - is a creative person
6. Ask about salary.
7. Ask if he or she has any question about you, about interview, or about the company.

Furthermore, the thematic content was also considered understandable and culturally appropriate. The local and western cultures were presented appropriately based on the activity and the task.



In each unit, the book tried to use local content as much as possible, but also could not avoid using western culture to keep the authenticity of the material because there are some expressions in English, especially in speaking, that cannot be localized by using local culture, such as expressing anger, disappointment, etc. Once students learn a language (English), they will also learn the culture. To support the statement above, further research is required to see the students' real perceptions toward the explanation, examples, activities (exercises and tasks), and thematic content provided by the authors. For those items mentioned before, the researchers considered the book to be a good fit.

The fit between textbooks and teachers

Teachers seek three things from textbooks: content/explanations, examples, and exercises or tasks. The evaluation of the selection process needs to know whether the textbook can be used effectively by the teacher who will be assigned (Byrd, 2001). Their basic questions will always be: "Can the teachers handle the materials? Will the teachers find that the textbook meets their needs and preferences for teaching materials?" The list of items included in the category of *fits between the textbook and the teachers* were:

- Provides explanations usable by the teachers.
- Provides examples usable and expandable by our teachers.

This book was used by the teacher and student, so there was no further explanation and guideline provided for the teacher to do what s/he should do in presenting the activities in the book. The explanations were usable for the teachers, but they still required the teachers' creativity and knowledge in interpreting the direction of material, exercises, and tasks. In this case, the teachers needed to know what the authors' intention in writing the explanation and the direction provided in the book. In each unit, the examples provided were usable for the

teachers. They provided enough things for the teacher to give his or her students to do for the period to be covered by the course.

In one unit, for example, if the reading text or the activity and task were considered too difficult for the students, the teacher could expand the content, modify, adapt, and even change the material based on the needs, the student's interests, and the lesson purpose. It shows that the illustrative material provided the teacher with various teaching opportunities, and the material content with its illustration was closely correlated.

Reading

Students will be able to

- learn about figures of speech;
- study 'poem' meaning.

Uphill

Christina Rossetti

(English, 1830 - 1894)

Does the road wind uphill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take a whole long day? From morn to night, my friend

But is there for the night a resting-place?

*A roof for when the slow dark hours begin. May not the darkness hide it
from my face? You cannot miss the inn.*

Shall I meet other way farers at night? Those who have gone before.

Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?

They will not keep you standing at the door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

Of labour you shall find the sum.

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?

Yea, beds for all who come.

Concerning the answer key provided by the textbook, there was no answer key found for discrete answers, such as grammar drills or vocabulary activities. For listening activity, the book provided the teachers only with the listening scripts (No answer key found for listening exercises). In short, the fit between the textbook and the teachers was considered an adequate fit. As additional information, the researchers also analyzed the textbook by using an adapted *evaluation of fit* which covers *the fits of the needs and preferences of teachers*. The items included in this criterion were:

- Is this a book that you would like to use?
- Provides in-book or instructor's manual support for teachers.
- Provides technological support (CDs, Website, CNN, NPR, etc.)

Based on the analysis, this book could be used as one of the teaching materials, but still, it should be completed with other materials. Teachers might not rely on only one book and use the whole part of the book, so they could select some relevant materials which fit the lesson objective, the needs, and fit to the curriculum, students, and teachers. By having a review of some aspects of the book based on the interests of the students and the teachers.

One of the weaknesses of this textbook was about the book or instructor's manual support for teachers, and the technological support. This book did not provide any book or instructor's manual support for teachers. The only book that the teacher had was this book. It was not completed by other manual supports or special guidelines for the teachers. There were no cassettes, CDs, or other websites given by the book as the tool for the listening activity. Based on the discussion before, in this item, the book was considered not an adequate fit (a poor fit), and even may be considered wrong for the teachers and students if further research and data have been collected. It is suggested that the book should be filled with cassettes, CDs, and some useful websites to make the teaching and learning activities more useful for teachers and students. For the researchers' overall evaluation and analysis of *the fit of the book*, the textbook entitled "Functional English for Senior High Schools" could be classified as a textbook with an adequate fit to the curriculum, students, and teachers.

Conclusion

Evaluating a textbook can be done in various ways. Using a checklist can be one of the effective ways. A checklist, namely *Evaluation of the Fit* was beneficial for analyzing a textbook entitled *Functional English for Senior High Schools* about its fit to the curriculum, students, and teachers. By having a review on some aspects of the book based on the checklist, the book could be classified as a textbook with an adequate fit to the curriculum, students, and teachers. Manual and technological support were required for a more beneficial function of this textbook. Whenever necessary, teachers can expand, adapt, modify, and even change the material presented in the textbook with other materials that fit the curriculum, the student's interests and needs, the teachers themselves, and the teaching and learning goals.

Disclosure statement

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