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## Celt

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# MAKING THE BEST USE OF A TEXTBOOK IN INDONESIAN TERTIARY EFL READING CLASSROOMS ${ }^{1}$ 

## Anna Marietta da Silva ${ }^{2}$


#### Abstract

Nowadays, EFL reading textbooks have adjusted their level of linguistic difficulties to their prospective users and provide texts about a variety of topics, detailed explanation of reading skills and practices, not to mention the smart lay-out and good quality of paper, all aiming at facilitating both students and teachers to successfully learn and teach reading, respectively. However, having qualified reading textbooks, teachers cannot take for granted that their students will directly appreciate reading and the textbook selected for the course because in some places extensive reading may not be part of the people's routine, and may not be considered to be very important by the authority. This article provides several useful techniques to take a full advantage of textbooks in


[^0]EFL reading classrooms in the aforementioned context.

Key words: reading textbook, Indonesian context, teaching techniques

## INTRODUCTION

It is fairly common to EFL reading teachers to use textbooks given the facts that a vast number of good quality English reading textbooks have been written to meet the demand of the widespread English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading programs or courses in Asian countries, Indonesia inclusively. Excellent books usually present texts of various topics ranging from lifestyles to science, with clear objectives within each unit, texts of reasonable length adjusted to the language proficiency level of the EFL learners, and a friendly lay-out including good-quality paper, colorful pages, big fonts, a complete reading sequence, explicit and comprehensible explanation about each of the reading skills to learn along with various practices corresponding to the learned skills, not to mention the clear instruction. Hence, using a text book, the EFL reading teachers and students may have efficient teaching and learning, as well as the warranty of the language and content of the text-book as presumptively it has been written and edited by the language and teaching specialists.

However, care should be taken when using textbooks in Indonesia, where reading is not a habit, and where English is not spoken as a second language. In many EFL classes in Indonesia, asking students to read is like having a mountain to climb because most students do not appreciate reading even in their own native language. The first root cause of the problem may be the absence of writing tradition in most cultures in

Indonesia: their values and tradition are inherited from one generation to another orally. Therefore most Indonesians are accustomed to listening to and talking about their ancestors and history, instead of reading it.

The second reason can be the lack of critical reading habitude in the national curricula from the New Order in 1966 where the military-background rulers dominated the country until even recently when the civilians came to power since 1998 in what so called the Reformation Era. From the New Order until the Reformation Era the political interference into education in the form of heavy emphasis on rote learning (not critical learning) cannot be avoided.

The result is the low appreciation of reading by most Indonesian students, including the university students. In addition, Indonesians are by and large multilingual people: their first language can be their local language, and their second language Indonesian. English then becomes a third or maybe fourth language; hence its use is very limited, which makes students (even those of the English Department) often feel nervous when they have to converse, read, let alone write in English.

The circumstance, in some way, directly challenges teachers to enable their students go through a process of familiarizing themselves to reading academic English texts (and why not Indonesian texts too) in the textbooks and other sources. Hence, in this paper I will express my personal reflection about using a textbook in teaching Reading courses to first semester students of the English Department, Faculty of Education of Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia.

## DEFINING READING IN AN INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOM

It is undoubted that reading is not simply glancing at a text from the beginning until the end as fast as possible, nor is it gazing at a text word by word carefully. Nuttall (1996: 1, 4) argued that reading is an activity in which a reader is connected with the writer by means of a text: its meaning. That indicates reading requires the reader to be able to figure out the meaning of the text conveyed by the writer (cf. Hudson 2007: 33). Just imagine a painter is connected to a painting lover because of the message spread from the painting. Hence, in the process of understanding the intended meaning of a text a reader may utilize a bottom-up, top-down, or interactive approach. Using the bottom-up approach, (Bloomfield 1933 cited in Dubin and Bycina 1991: 196); (Goodman 1970 cited in Brown 2001, p.298), a reader comprehends a text by making use of her/his language capability (Nuttall 1996: 17), a capability which according to Brown (2001, p.299) must be 'sophisticated', which indicates that the reader is versed in " . . . letters, morphemes, syllables, words, phrases, grammatical cues, discourse markers . . . " of the language used in the text.

The top-down approach, on the contrary, does not rely heavily on the linguistic knowledge. The approach enables readers to get the meaning of the text by relating their schemata to the text and predicting the meaning of the text. Therefore a reader is encouraged to use all knowledge and experiences to approach the reading text (Dubin and Bycina 1991: 97), (Nuttall 1996, p.16), (Brown 2001: 299), and (Hudson 2007: 33). Factually, a reader needs to combine the two approaches because not all readers possess 'sophisticated' linguistic knowledge, neither do they share the same background knowledge or experience relevant to the text, which is why the
interactive approach is applicable. In the approach the bottomup and top-down approaches are complementary: reading is viewed as a 'bidirectional' activity in which the reader does not only read the text thoroughly by applying her/his linguistic knowledge but also uses her/his schemata to make prediction prior to reading the text (Dubin and Bycina 1991: 197); (Hudson 2007: 34) because prediction functions to activate the schemata for an easier comprehension of a text (Nuttall 1996: 13).

In the context my EFL Reading classes, I see the abovementioned notion positively in a way that despite of the low reading habit of most Indonesian students, perhaps including mine, I think those who choose English to be their major have potential capability in learning a foreign language. The clear proof is that they have passed the entrance test required by the English Department. Besides that, I believe that to a certain point, these young adults have been exposed to many readings ranging from Indonesian textbooks, announcements, advertisements, letters, and other texts from which they would perceive the same thing: meaning. So, it may be rather irrelevant for me (and other teachers, too) to always question or debate the low reading habit and the government policy. The most important question teachers need to raise is then how to deal with such situation and at the same time help the students acquire the reading skills. In other words, the most important thing teachers should do is to attract students' attention and generate their motivation to read.

Thus, I think there should be a personal comprehension in recognizing what reading is prior to teaching the subject. The basic idea is to view reading as a relationship between a reader and a writer (Nuttall 1996), as is illustrated in Figure 1. It is shown there that once a person reads any text, she or he is
automatically connect her/himself to the message or meaning of a text, and indirectly to the writer. In the figure the act of the writer's communication of her/his idea is represented by an arrow pointing from the writer to the book, and the reader's action to perceive or interpret the text using her/his linguistic knowledge and schemata is symbolized by an arrow that goes from the reader to the text.

The meaning perceived by the reader is represented by an arrow that goes from the text to the reader. So, reading is always a meaningful two-way communication: every reading material from the simplest to the hardest, always have meaning and messages conveyed by the writer, which will be received by the reader. The implications are first, teachers should make use of as many available day-to-day texts as possible, be it in Indonesian or English, because people are usually more interested in texts that are beneficial for them, i.e. providing factual and actual information that will up-date their knowledge.


Figure 1:
The connection between a reader and a writer

## ACHIEVING THE PURPOSE OF AN EFL READING PROGRAM USING A TEXTBOOK

In the context of teaching EFL reading in a university level, the purpose of a reading program designed by teachers is to enable students to grasp, and interpret the meaning of the text in the foreign language adequately by themselves. Yet, an adequate reading does not compel students to read every word in a text; instead, students simply read what they need in line with their purposes. So in the end of the reading program or course, students are expected to be motivated to read by themselves for any purposes that they wish to accomplish, and to make reading as their habit (Nuttall 1996: 31, 171-172). Nevertheless, to make students read independently needs a lot of effort from both students and teachers, primarily from the students, hence making the best use of a textbook.

In order to create independent readers, students can be exposed to and given chances to learn using a number of reading strategies while reading the texts. A good textbook will clearly present, and explain the strategies, thus enabling students to master them. Therefore, it then depends on how the teachers transfer the knowledge to the students that the students will be reading using the strategies. The first strategy is relating schemata to the text, or asking readers to recall their knowledge and experience with regard to the topic and content of the text. The second way is to skim or to find out the topics and main ideas of the text by reading in a glance each first and last sentence of the paragraph in the text. The third technique is to ask questions about the text in advance, or to stop reading temporarily and ask for further clarification and examples. The fourth way is to predict the content of the paragraph or text. The fifth strategy is to read paragraph by paragraph, or section by section, and to take notes while reading. The sixth technique
is to scan the text to find out important information, details, similarities, and differences. The seventh way is to guess the unknown words using all information available in the text, such as: context, syntax, morphology, and phonology. The eighth way is to study pictures and diagrams provided in the text as they function to explain, to clarify, and largely to make readers understand a text appropriately. The next way is to make inferences from the title and headings. The tenth strategy is summarize the text (Knight et al. 1985), (Padron and Waxman 1988) (Dubin and Bycina 1991: 200), (Gebhard 1996: 199), and (Nuttall 1996: 10). In the end, having practiced reading using a number of techniques, students should be able to automatically choose their preferred techniques to understand the meaning of texts, and will expectantly find enjoyment in reading, even reading the textbook.

Therefore, I suggest that teachers should employ the textbook in such a way that both teachers and students will not be trapped in monotonous teaching and learning process. I explored two ways to make use of a textbook so that will fruitful for students: 1)"make friend" with and 2 )"add a friend" to a textbook. I will explain the first. To "make friend" with the textbook and the text means to get to know more about the content of the book in general before specifically dealing with each text. But for me, making friend here does not merely facilitate students' relationship with the textbook, but also my relationship with my students. So, in the initial session of my Reading 1 Course, consisting of two classes of 14 and 26 students, respectively, I firstly asked my students to observe their textbooks in detail from the front cover until the back cover (Grabe and Stoller 2001: 194) in order to make them familiar with the material they will read for one semester. I expected that my students would have some curiosities about the topics presented in the textbook, which furthermore will
encourage them to read the texts. Another purpose of the activity was to give an overview of the English academic genre, which was absolutely not the same as the genres of the texts my students have been familiar with outside the classroom. In addition, making friend may also mean applying the interactive approach (Dubin and Bycina 1991: 197); (Hudson 2007: 34): using schemata to understand a text. Hence, in every class meeting, I encouraged students to activate their schemata prior to reading because schemata, I think, would directly connect students to the text they will read. Using schemata, students were given a fair chance to comprehend the texts: they were prepared to deal with the text beforehand. So, in the prereading part I always gave my students a wide opportunity to recall whatever they had in mind about the topic text through various activities such as giving them questions, playing short movies, showing them pictures, playing games, having them sharing stories, and experiences or ideas which are relevant to the themes of the texts.

Another feature of "making friend" with the textbook was to read the texts enthusiastically as if one was having a conversation her/his friend, and in groups as if one was having fun together with her/his peers. The underlying reason was that teenagers normally prefer to have fun together with their friends (friends are very important to them, they sometimes may even be more important than their parents and teachers), which I then incorporated in my class. Therefore, I never asked my students to merely read the texts, and do the exercises afterwards, but I require them to read actively (Hudson 2007: 107-111) with their friends: in pairs or in groups of three to four persons (though individual reading was encouraged, too). Reading actively means reading for purposes to understand the meaning of the text by doing some activities while reading the texts. Of course, the activity required an initial explanation
about the objectives of the lesson, including the reading skills to learn in that session. Because each exercise in the text-book used usually focused on one or two particular reading skills, instructing students to do the exercises while reading meant giving them reasons to read as well as facilitating them to acquire the reading skills. The exercises may consist of not only the W -H or multiple-choice questions, but also the mindmapping tasks, table completion, chart organizing, diagram drawing, making or completing tables or graphic organizers, sentence and paragraph completion, matching words with their definitions. Another interesting and fun activity was drawing the texts (Lindstromberg 2004: 101) in which students were asked to draw anything they had in mind about the texts, so they might draw the details, main idea, or summary of the text, and even their interpretation of the text. Actually the primary goals I wished my students to achieve were (1) to familiarize themselves with adequate reading, which in turn would make them able to read selectively to serve various purposes of reading in their daily lives; (2) to train them to comprehend texts holistically by recognizing the detailed and general information in the text to be able to create a mental framework of the text (Dubin and Bycina 1991: 200); (Gebhard 1996: 199); and (Nuttall 1996: 10); and (3) to avoid boredom and sleepiness that will hinder them from getting the meaning of the text.

The last yet, most fascinating feature of "making friend" for me was to know my students' reading habit. So, in our first meetings, I distributed simple questionnaires asking about their reading background (Appendix 1). The main purpose was to avoid holding unrealistic expectation for my students’ success in acquiring English reading skills and to prove my general presumption that students choosing English to be their major should like reading English texts. In addition, I believed that
knowing who my students are in relation to their reading like and dislike would help me design activities suitable for them, at least the ones that are relevant to their interests. Hence, I used the simple questionnaire from Grabe and Stoller (2001: 189190) which listed several questions asking students' favorite texts, reading frequency, and attitude toward reading itself. The questionnaires showed that my students had been accustomed to reading mostly Indonesian texts (not English texts), which include teen magazines ( $25 \%$ ), novels ( $25 \%$ ), comics ( $14 \%$ ), newspaper ( $13 \%$ ), internet articles ( $11 \%$ ), other texts including biographies, books on various topics, and lastly bibles (2\%). Note that most of the teen magazines are the Indonesian versions of world-class magazines, while the novels are generally teenage novels or popularly known in Indonesia as teen-lit (teen literature). Teen-lit were their favorites here because of its choice of topic (usually about love and life of teens in big cities) and the language used: conversational Indonesian used by youths in cities put in printed version. Meanwhile, the newspapers frequently read were those published by an Indonesian's leading newspaper \& publishing group. Next, as has been predicted, not many of the students spend much time to read. Only sixty-eight percent spent 1-10 hours per week to read; another twenty percent spent 11-20 hours, and thirteen percent spent 21-30 hours. The fact did not seem to be relevant with their confession that sixty-three percent of them liked reading (whereas around twenty-eight percent read only once in a while, and ten percent did not like reading), which may suggest further research. However, my students expressed their wishes of being able to read English texts, such as magazines, newspapers, fiction novels, classic literary works, and biographies. Therefore, I held a positive thought: in spite of my students' unfamiliarity with English texts, they had had a certain degree of reading Indonesian texts
and desires to read in English fluently which hopefully would motivate them learning the reading skills in English.

Secondly, teachers can also "add a friend" (inspired by the "add a friend" option in Facebook ${ }^{\mathrm{TM}}$ social e-networking) to the textbook, which in this context means providing supplementary texts relevant to the topics presented in the textbook. In my classes, I always provided students with various real-life texts (Nuttall 1996: 170, 172, 177; Nation 2006: 6) ranging from blurps of novels, advertisement, stories, newspaper or magazine articles, application, goods packaging information which they have to scan, skim, paraphrase, infer, interpret or summarize (Nuttall 1996: 204-206). I gave special emphasis on Indonesian newspaper articles that may directly appeal to students' interest, such as articles about national or international public figures, trendy lifestyles, successful young people, or up-to-date and unique events. There were two reasons for that: (1) I wanted to tell my students that Indonesian newspaper or e-newspaper can be interesting reading materials, (2) I intended to make them befriended with sources from which they can read other issues about the national and global economics, politics, society and culture once they feel the need of knowing such issues, and (3) research has shown that there is a positive relationship between the success in reading in L1 and L2 (Nuttall 1996: 58) and (Hudson 2007: 65-74). In addition, I specifically focused on English magazine articles telling about Indonesian popular stars and whereabouts. My goal was to show to my students that they may start befriended with English texts whose topics they have known, so that they would not feel numb before the texts, nor find it difficult to understand them. On top of that, realizing that they could understand English texts easily (even if they were about common topics), students would unconsciously become
confident of taking the next challenge: dealing with other readings in English.

The last aspect of "add a friend" to a textbook is by having students do the independent reading or Sustained Silent Reading (Krashen 2003: 18); (Nation 2009: 5) for around thirty to forty minutes after they had completed reading the complementary and supplementary texts. Purposively, I supplied my students with around sixty books in Indonesian and English (mostly in Indonesian) such as novels, short stories, poems, plays, biographies, comics, histories, exhibition catalogue, and guide books. The provision of Indonesian books was based on two reasons: first, research has shown that learning L2 can be facilitated by L1 (as I have mentioned in the previous paragraph), and second, students, who are accustomed to Indonesian texts, need relatively some time to be familiar with English texts. Implicitly, I directed my students to be free to decide when they were ready to take the challenge reading the English texts. Hence, students were allowed to bring their own reading materials to read in the classroom during the independent reading session. Besides that, they were also permitted to borrow the books that I collected. All in all, I encouraged students to be familiar with various possible texts they might deal with in their daily life to serve their individual reading purposes.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, reading does not mean understanding a text word by word, nor does it mean loud reading. Reading goes beyond that: to understand the meaning conveyed in a text is the heart of reading. In an EFL Reading Course the purpose is to create independent readers who are highly motivated to read
because they feel the need of and find pleasures in reading. Though making Indonesian students enjoy reading is not something that teachers can do with one hand tied behind their back because of the cultural and political reasons that should not make teachers give up. Instead, with a good textbook available nowadays, teachers need to redefine reading in Indonesian TEFL context. Bearing in mind that reading a text is connecting a reader to a writer through the medium of the meaning of a text, teachers need to employ the texts presented in the textbook and the supplementary texts by active reading and applying a number of reading strategies so that students will not think and feel that using a textbook is tedious. In such effort teachers should always remember that it is the message of the text that students should explore maximally. Hence, textbook should be manipulated in a way that it will ease the teaching learning activities.

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## Appendix 1:

Table of students reading background

| No. | Students | Time spent for readin g per week (in hours) | Materials students usually read | Favorite magazine/ newspaper / book/ others | Attitude toward reading | English texts students wish to read when they can read easily in English |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1 | AB | 3-4 | magazines | Magazine: <br> Slam <br> Newspaper: <br> Jakarta | I enjoy reading because I can get more | Anything |


| No. | Stu- <br> dents | Time <br> spent <br> for <br> readin <br> g per <br> week | Materials <br> (in <br> students <br> usually <br> read |  | Favorite <br> magazine/ <br> newspaper <br> /book/ <br> others | Attitude <br> toward <br> reading |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |

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| No. | Stu- <br> dents | Time <br> spent <br> for <br> readin <br> g per <br> week | Materials <br> (in <br> students <br> usually <br> rears) |  | Favorite <br> magazine/ <br> newspaper <br> /book/ <br> others | Attitude <br> toward <br> reading |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |


| No. | Students | Time <br> spent <br> for <br> readin <br> g per <br> week <br> (in <br> hours) | Materials students usually read | Favorite magazine/ newspaper / book/ others | Attitude toward reading | English texts students wish to read when they can read easily in English |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |  | Book: - | information in my leisure time. | and technology |
| 18 | LWW | 3 | magazines, novels | Magazine: Kawanku, Cosmogirl, other teen magazines Newspaper: Kompas Book: Novels by Raditya Dika | I enjoy reading because it can reduce stress and it's entertaining. | Teenage novels |
| 19 | MCW | $\pm 1$ | magazine, books about interior design, books about psychology | Magazine: GoGirl, CosmoGirl <br> Newspaper: <br> Kompas, <br> Jakarta <br> Post <br> Book:- | I don't enjoy reading because I don't like reading too much. | Books about kids |
| 20 | MLP | 24 | novels, magazine, comic, | Magazine: <br> Gadis, <br> GoGirl, <br> B'Girl, <br> Kingdom <br> Newspaper: <br> Book: <br> teenlit <br> novels, <br> Twilight <br> Saga novels, romantic comics | I enjoy reading. | NA |
| 21 | MS | 3 | on-line magazines, novels, newspaper | Magazine:- <br> Newspaper: <br> Kompas <br> Book: <br> romantic or | I enjoy reading sometimes, depending on the | Shakespear 's work, Harry Potter novels. |


| No. | Stu- <br> dents | Time <br> spent <br> for <br> readin <br> g per <br> week <br> (in <br> hours) |  | Materials <br> students <br> usually <br> read | Favorite <br> magazine/ <br> newspaper <br> /book/ <br> others | Attitude <br> toward <br> reading |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |

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| No. | Stu- <br> dents | Time <br> spent <br> for <br> readin <br> g per <br> week | Materials <br> (in <br> students <br> usually <br> read |  | Favorite <br> magazine/ <br> newspaper <br> /book/ <br> others | Attitude <br> toward <br> reading |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline No. \& Students \& Time spent for readin g per week (in hours) \& Materials students usually read \& Favorite magazine/ newspaper /book/ others \& Attitude toward reading \& English texts students wish to read when they can read easily in English <br>
\hline 33 \& TA \& 3 \& horror comics, running texts, newspaper \& series, books about music Magazine: Intisari Newspaper: - Book: horror comics \& I sometimes enjoy reading, depending on the book/topic. \& NA <br>
\hline 34

35 \& TL

TS \& 9

1 \& newspaper

Yahoo

articles \& | Magazine:- |
| :--- |
| Newspaper: |
| Book: - |
| Magazine:- |
| Newspaper: |
| - Book:- | \& I enjoy reading because I can get much information and intermezzo. I enjoy reading as I can update my knowledge. \& Anything

Newspaper <br>

\hline 36 \& VE \& 14 \& books about art \& | Magazine:- |
| :--- |
| Newspaper: |
| - Book:- | \& I enjoy reading books about art as it inspires my imagination. \& Poems <br>

\hline 37 \& X \& 2 \& magazines, internet, books \& Magazine: Computer Newspaper: Kompas Book: comics \& I enjoy reading because it can improve my knowledge. \& Bible <br>

\hline 38 \& YL \& 4 \& novels \& | Magazine: |
| :--- |
| Cosmopolit an Girl |
| Newspaper: |
| - Book: | \& I enjoy reading as I can know about things I don't know \& Twilight Saga <br>

\hline
\end{tabular}

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| No. | Stu- <br> dents | Time spent for readin g per week (in hours) | Materials students usually read | Favorite magazine/ newspaper / book/ others | Attitude toward reading | English texts students wish to read when they can read easily in English |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |  | Alita at | before. |  |
| 39 | YNA | 3 | newspaper, novels, magazines | First <br> Magazine: <br> any <br> Newspaper: any | I enjoy reading because it trains your | The Count of Monte Cristo |
| 40 | YW | 5 | magazines | Book: any <br> Magazine: <br> Girlfriend <br> Newspaper: <br> - Book:- | brain and test your knowledge. I don't really enjoy reading. | Thick novels |


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ The article has been presented to the Seventh Conference on English Studies (Conest 7), November 26-27, 2010, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia, Jakarta.
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