# Evaluation of *Survival English* Textbook Used in Teaching Speaking for First Semester Students in English Education Study Program

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**Abstract.** Textbooks are one of the important components of language programs. It plays a significant role in providing the basis for the content of the lesson, the balance of skills taught, and the kinds of language practice that students involved in. Due to this circumstance, the use of qualified and relevant textbook is highly required to facilitate learning and bring the actual learning experience to students. In addition to the selection, the evaluation of the textbooks in the EFL context is also of the utmost importance to evaluate whether a particular textbook used in the classroom is a good textbook or not. This study was aimed to evaluate the suitability of the Survival English textbook based on the *Content* and *Context* criteria of a good English textbook. The list of statements in the form of the questionnaire was addressed to identify 50 students' assessment of six topics being discussed in the textbook, which was supported by the qualitative data from the interview session. The results of the study were found substantial as the input to develop further Survival English textbooks.
Keywords:   Textbook Evaluation, Survival English, Speaking

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are one of the important components of the language program. It plays significant roles in providing the basis for the content of the lesson, the balance of skills taught, and the kinds of language practice that students involve in (Richard, Jack C, 2001). Besides, textbooks are also perceived as effective resource for self-directed learning, effective resource for presentation materials (spoken and written), a source of ideas and activities for classroom activities, a reference source for students, a syllabus that reflects pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence (Cunningsworth, A, 1995). These ideas indicate that the pivotal role of textbooks is undeniable. Consequently, the use of qualified and relevant textbook is highly required to facilitate learning and bring the actual learning experience to students.

In addition to the selection, the evaluation of the textbooks in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is also of the utmost importance to evaluate whether a particular textbook used in the classroom is a good textbook or not. This is based on the awareness regarding the role of textbooks as the essential materials which can bring about learner's success or failure (Mukundan, J, Nimehchisalem, V, & Hajimohammadi, R, 2011) as mentioned in (Roohani, A, 2015).

Based on this issue, this research was conducted to evaluate the use Survival English textbook used in teaching speaking for first semester students in English Education Study Program at Pattimura University. This textbook was written as the main reference to be used in Survival English class, which mainly focused on speaking skills. It consists of six practical topics of daily social communication, which also completed with the language expressions, vocabularies, grammar content, exercises, and language tips related to the topics

(Lekatompessy, F, 2017). This textbook was published in the year 2017 and had been used for the last two years in the teaching of speaking in Survival English class.

Evaluation is defined as "a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose" (Hutchinson, T & Water, A, 1987). Regarding the use of textbooks in classroom instruction, the evaluation is intended to make a judgment about the efficiency of the materials for the people using them (Tomlinson, B, 2003) in (Hashemi, R, 2011). It helps the teachers to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material.

For years, the topic of textbook evaluation is quite important to be discussed. It is driven by the needs of having a qualified and relevant textbook to be used in classroom instruction, specifically in the EFL context. In this case, the quality and relevance of the textbook or teaching and learning materials should also correspond to the learner's needs and also should match the aims and objectives of the language-learning program (Cunningsworth, A, 1995).

Sheldon (1988), as cited in Laabidi, H & Nfissi, A, (2016), mentioned that at least two main reasons were justifying the need to evaluate textbooks. First, the evaluation helps the teachers and programmers to make the wise decision of the most appropriate textbook. Second, the evaluation will make teachers familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook. In other words, the evaluation enables the teachers to modify, adapt, or develop materials to be used in further instruction.

The necessity for evaluating textbooks in EFL contexts had driven some researchers to conduct comprehensive studies on this issue. Hashemi (2011) carried out a study to evaluate the three English language textbooks used at high schools in Iran. The fifty experienced high school teachers were involved as the participants in this study. After completing a 46-item questionnaire of five sections of the textbooks, it was found that the English language textbooks that were used in the teaching and learning process did not meet the teachers' expectations.

Laabidi, H & Nfissi, A (2016) also carried out the study to explore English teachers' perceptions concerning the textbook "*Visa to the World,*" which were used in some high schools in Morocco. The result from fifty Moroccan teachers showed their dissatisfaction with several textbook elements, regarding its general appearance, accompanying materials, topic appropriateness, exercises, and activities. While the socio-cultural context, skills development, vocabulary, and grammatical structures, also the teaching methods, were some of the elements that gave satisfactory points from the respondents.

Besides, Mahmud, B, (2018) also tried to evaluate the use of the English textbook "Sunrise 9" from EFL teachers' and students' perspectives in the Northern Region of Iraq. The findings showed that the teacher's participants have a negative attitude towards most of the aspects of the textbook in terms of its language of the textbook, the grammar points, the layout and design, vocabulary items, and the natural sounds and pronunciation. However, the activities of the textbook were considered a good point or strength of the book. The teachers' perspectives were in contradiction with the students' perspectives that showed positive responses towards most of the sections of *SUNRISE 9* except the activities that they have difficulties with it.

Fitriana Nita (2016) also researched to evaluate the English textbook *"Think globally Act Locally"* used in grade IX. By elaborating the two criteria of textbook evaluation proposed by Mukundan and Miekley, the finding revealed that only some of the elements such as physical appearance and suitability with the syllabus that only fitted the criteria while some other important elements such as language skill, grammar, and exercises were not suited with the requirement as a whole.

These relevant previous studies were significant as the guidance to carry out this current study with a similar topic on textbook evaluation, but with different concerns particularly on the level of the textbook used in classroom instruction, the participants, and the textbook criteria. Specifically, this study was aimed to evaluate the suitability of the Survival English textbook from students' perspectives, based on the *Content* and *Contexts* criteria of a good textbook as proposed by Mukundan et al. ( 2011) and Miekley (2005).

## 2. METHOD

This study employed quantitative and qualitative research as the design in conducting the study. The 35 items-questionnaire and structured-interview were used as data collection techniques to explore students' perspectives towards the use of Survival English textbook in the classroom instruction. The questionnaire was adapted and combined based on Textbook Evaluation Criteria created by Cunningsworth, A, (1995); Miekley, J (2005); Mukundan, J (2012). It consists of two major components are Learning Teaching Content and Context.

The *learning-teaching content* covers five important elements, such as general attributes, listening and speaking, vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation, and exercises. While the *context* mainly focused on the appropriateness of the textbook with the curriculum, course goals, students' level, students' needs, and the competence of the teacher. Each of the checklist items was rated in scales (4-Excellent, 3-Good, 2-Adequate, 1-Poor, 0-Totally Lacking). All 50 students who have passed the Survival English subject and have the experience of using the Survival English textbook during their learning process in the classroom were required to answer the items based on the scale they have chosen.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, most of the respondents gave a positive appreciation to the *general attributes* of the textbook. It was indicated by the highest percentage of the findings on the Excellent rate for statements number 1,5,6, and 8. For those statements, sequentially, 31 students (65%) agreed that most of the tasks in the book are interesting, the language in the textbook is natural and real (56%), the situations created in the dialogues sound natural and real (54%), and the textbook covers a variety of topics from different fields (50%). Besides, the Good preferences of most students were given to statements numbers 2, 3, 4, and 9. For this scale, 25 students (50% of the students) agreed that the tasks in the textbook move from simple to complex, tasks objectives are achievable (56%), cultural sensitivities have also been considered in the textbook (42%), the material is up-to-date (58%). Only statement number 9 was an inadequate scale with the highest percentage of 36% of the students who came to an agreement that the book contains fun elements.

The next findings on *Listening and Speaking* section showed majority of the respondents agreed that the instructions for Listening and Speaking in the textbook is clear (72%), activities are developed to initiate meaningful communications (52%), balanced activities between individual responses, pair work and group work (46%) and also the activities motivate students to talk (52%).

The *Vocabulary and Grammar* component also was perceived positively by the students. For the Good scale, 54% of the students approved that a load of new words in each lesson is appropriate to the level, the words are efficiently repeated and recycled across the book (66%), grammar is introduced explicitly (58%), and it reworked implicitly throughout the book (54%). While on the excellent scale, 50% of the students said that the words are contextualized, the grammar is contextualized (60%), and the examples are interesting (52%).

The appealing findings revealed equal preferences on Excellent and Good scale on statement numbers 17 and 20 about the good distribution of the vocabulary and the spread of grammar (44% and 48% in sequence).

Further findings on the *Pronunciation* component showed that the majority of the students (52%) perceived that the pronunciation is contextualized and easy to learn (60% at the excellent scale). For the *Exercises,* the findings indicated that 72% of respondents agreed that the exercises in the textbook have clear instructions and help the students who are under/lower achievers (62%).

Based on these research findings on the language teaching content of the textbook, it was obvious that the majority of the students perceived the content of the Survival English textbook positively. These findings may also imply that the materials on textbooks were authentic that enable the students to identify the relevance of the textbook to their real lives. Richard, Jack C, (2001) in Diniah (2013) mentioned that the use of authentic materials might have a positive effect on the learner's motivation as it relates more closely to learners' needs and supports a more creative approach to teaching. In this case, the balance between knowledge of the language and its practice of using the language in this textbook also encourages the students to communicate actively in classroom activities, especially in speaking practice.

Moreover, the availability of contextualized vocabularies related to the topic was also considered effective in helping the students use the words in an appropriate context and purpose. Ur, P, (2008) mentioned that to be categorized as a good textbook, the new vocabulary should be presented in a variety of ways and repeated in the subsequent lesson to reinforce their meaning and use. In other words, words will be learned better if they are taught briefly at the beginning of a lesson, reviewed later in the same lesson, and again in the next.

Besides, the inclusion of *Did You Know* and *Learning Tip* columns in the textbook was considered good to inform you about the culture. This was also supported by Kitao (1997) that textbooks should culturally acceptable. It means that the information of the correct and not biased culture should get the attention in textbook selection.

The *context* component has been elaborated into six questions items. The findings on this component showed that most of the respondents chose Excellent scale to show their agreement that the textbook is appropriate for the curriculum (52%), coincide with the course goals (62%), and meet the students' need for learning English especially speaking (50%). While 48% of the students preferred the Good scale when being asked about the suitability of the textbook with the students who use it, and about the proficiency of the teacher in using the textbook.

Concerning the textbook and curriculum, Diniah, S (2013) stated that the textbook should follow the official syllabus in a good manner. Here, activities, contents, and methods used in the textbooks should be well planned, and the materials should be prepared for the examination too. It was true that the development of the Survival English textbook was at first started by designing the syllabus that linked with the curriculum applied in the study program. The well-planned syllabus that was also attached to the last page of the textbook intended to give a clear portrait for the students that the content of the textbook was all well-prepared and designed based on the official syllabus.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the students' perception in evaluating the textbook "Survival English" that was used in teaching speaking for first semester students in English Education Study Program at Pattimura University in Ambon. The results from the questionnaires that

were also supported by the findings from the interview showed that most of the participants have positive attitudes toward the Survival English textbook, specifically in terms of the Learning Teaching Content and the Context. The consideration of students' needs, the use of authentic materials, and suitability with the syllabus may become some of the important factors that drive the writer to develop the materials in the textbook.

The result of this study may imply that the evaluation process is highly important to assess the quality of a textbook. In this case, the *content* and *context* criteria of a textbook might be used as a guideline to evaluate, which then leads to the selection of a relevant and qualified textbook to be used in the teaching and learning process.

However, as this current study only focused on evaluating the use of the textbook from students' points of view, then it is suggested for further research to also cover teachers' perspectives in order to get a comprehensive and fair assessment of the use of a particular textbook. Consequently, it is expected that the evaluation process on the textbook from both students' and teachers' perspectives may become a solid foundation for the selection of a qualified textbook to be used in the classroom.

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