SILVER LININGS TEXTBOOK: 
AN APPRAISAL OF 2013 CURRICULUM-BASED COMMERCIAL ENGLISH COURSE BOOKS 
FOR SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: Textbook is an important element in language learning activities since it provides a set of guidelines, alternatives, and resources (Harmer, 2007:181). In Indonesia, varieties of commercial textbooks have been disseminated by private publishers which resulted in no course content uniformity. Therefore, the emerging 2013 curriculum is accompanied by government’s endeavours of bringing an educational homogeneity by promising a textbook called *Buku Babon* – which is supposed to be delivered by April 2013. The delay of *Buku Babon* has given back the opportunities for commercial publishers, such as Erlangga and Yrama Widya, to release 2013 Curriculum-based English textbooks for senior secondary school students. This paper aims at evaluating those course books using an adaptation of Mukundan’s et al. (2011) Checklist for Textbook Evaluation and a systematic approach of course book evaluation by Nation and Macalister (2010). The evaluation will reflect the books’ suitability with the elements of 2013 Curriculum. Gains will come in the form of advice for English teachers to choose the appropriate materials, to make modification, or to look for another alternative. Theoretically, this evaluation will show how the textbooks can be improved or justified. Feedbacks for the policy makers concerning the provision of English textbooks will also be given.

Keywords: commercial English textbooks, 2013 Curriculum, textbook evaluation

Last year, the Indonesian government officially announced a plan to implement a new curriculum i.e. the 2013 Curriculum. Some innovations in teaching and learning activities, as well as assessment procedures, require the government to reset almost the whole education system for primary and secondary school. The government promised to provide basic components of teaching and learning process, such as textbooks and lesson plans. But, almost a year after the curriculum has been tried-out, the textbooks were only ready for some subjects in some levels of education. For instance, English textbooks for the senior secondary school students have not been distributed yet. Consequently, many teachers choose to use commercial textbooks due to the absence of *Buku Babon*.

Varieties of commercial textbooks have been disseminated by private publishers in relation to implementation of the Indonesian 2013 Curriculum. For example, Erlangga and Yrama Widya are two of the private publishers that released English course books based on the current curriculum. These course books need to be evaluated because they are chosen by many schools in Indonesia. Besides, Lawrence (2011:4-5) acknowledges that the result of textbook evaluation will give an advantage in enhancing the effectiveness of the course books use since it helps the teachers to find out and recognize which areas need further modification or adaptation. Thus, this paper intends to evaluate those two commercial course books. It is expected that fitness of the two course books with elements of the 2013 Curriculum (character building, scientific approach, and authentic assessment) can be reflected. Also, feedback for private publishers to improve or justify their products will be gained.

**2013 Curriculum, Scientific Approach, and Textbooks**

Scientific approach in the 2013 Curriculum is pretty new for the Indonesian teachers. Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (2013) explains that scientific approach derives from Krathwohl’s Affective Domain Taxonomy, which consists of receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterization by value set. Besides, Bloom’s taxonomy is also considered as the basis of scientific approach in the 2013 Curriculum since it is a model of classifying thinking by six cognitive levels of complexity.

Textbooks (*Buku Babon*) are then promised to be provided by the government. The textbook for every subject is aimed at guiding the teacher in manifesting the scientific approach in their classroom. However, the English textbooks have not arrived yet. This condition led the teachers to choose commercial textbooks that promote the 2013 Curriculum.
The use of textbooks in the classroom can really help the teacher deliver the materials and the students to better understand the lessons. Richard (_____:1-2) explains eight advantages of textbook in a language program: (1) a syllabus is usually attached in a textbook and is used as the base of organizing the lessons, (2) if the same textbooks are used, uniform assessment can be administered as the students in different classes receive similar material, (3) students experience high quality learning if good textbooks are used, (4) textbooks are usually accompanied by CDs and other media, and thus provide various learning sources, (5) they save time as the teacher and the students can readily use them, (6) teachers who speak English as a second or a foreign language especially benefit from textbooks as they provide an effective language model and input, (7) teachers can ‘train themselves’ and learn from the textbooks as well as teacher’s manual, and (8) textbooks are usually designed sophisticatedly.

As advantageous as textbooks are, they can be unsuitable if used in different settings. For example, one textbook may be perfect for one course, but not for another course because the content does not match the need of the students. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate a textbook against particular criteria. Focusing on textbooks for language programs, Richard (2001:258), citing Cunningsworth (1995), suggests some criteria as set of guidelines which also indicates the characteristics of an appropriate textbook for a language course i.e. textbooks should (1) match the curriculum (i.e. the aims and the objectives) of the language courses, (2) should contain material and teach language skills that students will use during and after completing the courses, (3) consider students’ needs and support their learning processes with flexible methods, and (4) have a strong role, like teachers who bridge between the target language and the students.

Evaluating the Two Commercial Textbooks

A checklist for evaluating the two commercial textbooks has been developed by adapting Mukundan’s et al. (2011) checklist for textbook evaluation complemented with systematic approach of course book evaluation proposed by Nation and Macalister (2010). The adaptation made is the insertion of the elements of the 2013 curriculum (e.g. scientific approach, authentic assessment, and character building) into the evaluation criteria. After the checklist has been developed, the writers asked three senior secondary school teachers in Denpasar and Palangka Raya to give their judgments. Their judgments and suggestions were used to revise the checklist. Fixed checklist is then used by the writers to examine the two course books. Result of evaluation will be in two forms or sections i.e. (1) strengths and weaknesses and (2) areas for improvement.

Evaluation Result of Erlangga’s Course Book for Grade X

The textbook entitled “Pathway to English for Senior High School Grade X” consists of eleven chapters. Each chapter contains lessons for the four English language skills, grammar and a text genre, values, cultural awareness, and expression (except in chapter 8 and 9). The activities are organized according to some steps such as observing, questioning, exploring, associating, and communicating. Furthermore, the textbook looks fancy with its colorful soft cover, durable paper, and strong binding. The layout is attractive with black, white, and orange accent. The texts and visuals are displayed efficiently because every part is clearly sectioned. The price of the textbook is quite expensive i.e. Rp. 62.000. However, for some people the price might be reasonable enough since they can get a well-printed textbook like this.

Having been evaluated further, this textbook matches the specification of the syllabus. Most (approximately 75%) of the learning experience mentioned in the syllabus are included in the textbook. All materials demanded by the syllabus are covered, except song lyrics. Moreover, the activities in the textbook can be carried on using various methodologies in ELT. Generally, most of the tasks are achievable, interesting, and graded from simple to complex. Cultural sensitivities have been considered. In fact, there is a section called Cultural Awareness inserted in almost every chapter of the book. In addition, the language and the situation in the textbook sound quite natural and real.

Regarding the four English language skills, the tasks have well-defined goals. They are mostly appropriate, interesting, and adequately graded according to complexity. The activities for listening are close to real situation while the activities for speaking are adequately developed to initiate meaningful communication. As for reading, the language in the texts is contextual and sounds quite natural. However, the tasks for writing barely consider students’ capabilities. The activities for all skills are not balanced. The individual response outnumbers the peer and group work.

As for the language components, the materials for vocabulary and grammar are all covered, but the material for pronunciation and intonation is very limited. The vocabulary load is appropriate to the level and distributed well across the whole book. Moreover, the spread of the grammar is quite achievable. The grammar is contextualized with real-life tasks and is introduced explicitly in a section called Grammar in Action and reworked incidentally throughout the book. In contrast, pronunciation and intonation are only provided in one chapter of the textbook.
The exercises provided in the textbook seem to be learner friendly. They measure students’ competence adequately covering the Bloom’s taxonomy. Students are not only required to remember information but also to understand and apply the concepts, to analyze and evaluate the examples, and to create their own piece of work. Furthermore, the various exercises help both under-achievers and over-achievers.

This textbook is also evaluated against the criteria for the aspects of the 2013 Curriculum. Each chapter in the textbook facilitates character building. The social competences (KI 2) to be developed are especially included in the textbook map and are reflected in the lessons. On the contrary, religious competences (KI 1) are not included in the lessons. The activities across the textbook are developed and organized based on scientific approach. The learning processes are based on discovery, inquiry, or problem. In addition, students are given various projects by which they will gain feedback from their teacher or peers. Moreover, the section Share Your Experience in the beginning of each chapter adequately activates the students’ prior knowledge before learning new materials. In regard to the assessment, the textbook assesses both product and process through the projects to be done by the students. The textbook also provides self assessment through K-W-L (what I know, what I want to know, and what I learned) table and self-reflection for learning journal.

**Evaluation Result of Yrama Widya’s Course Book for Grade X**

Physically, the layout of Yrama Widya’s course book for Grade X is attractive. It has an eye-catching hardcover with a photo of some foreigners wearing Indonesian traditional costumes who are playing Indonesian traditional musical instruments (angklung). The texts and visuals are carefully arranged. In addition, the book is also produced by using durable paper. An audio CD is also presented to assist teachers in using this book. It is cost-effective but compared to Buku Babon – which is planned to cost not more than Rp 15.000 – this book can be considered pretty expensive.

This English textbook for Grade X has matched the specification of basic competencies in the syllabus. The book accommodates activities which allow the students to introduce self and others, show care, make announcements, tell recounts, describe linguistic features in songs as well as describe persons and places. Since it completely contains basic competencies as stated in the syllabus, the book is compatible to the needs of prospective users i.e. the X graders. The author of the book begins every chapter with a section that allows the students to do brainstorming. He provides several questions and pictures to activate the students’ prior knowledge about issues or topics going to be learned in the chapter. In some chapters, the students are encouraged to finish project works with their teams. Obviously, this is in line with scientific approach as proposed by the government.

Furthermore, the activities can also be exploited fully by teachers through various methodologies in ELT. The book gives chances for the teacher to create variation of classroom speaking and writing activities. Speaking classes can be done by holding mini drama, role play, problem solving, group and class discussion, interviews, and monologues. Meanwhile, the writing activities are in forms of writing letters and/or messages in Facebook chat rooms, and greeting cards. Both under-achievers and over-achievers are helped by these exercises since in doing them the students will not only rely on themselves but also on others. The under-achievers can get assistance from the over-achievers. For the time being, the over-achievers’ ideas can also be flowed to the right medium.

Looking at texts and tasks included in the book, compatibility of it to the age of the learners is ensured. The tasks cover Bloom’s Taxonomy. In addition, the author of the book considered cultural values in designing them. He also pondered the authenticity of reading articles, texts for listening, and samples of writing. The book has appropriate and adequate listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks with well-defined goals. Tasks for listening, speaking, and writing included in the book are interesting. Unfortunately, the reading activities are provided monotonously – in forms of multiple choice tests only. The reading activities could use more varied exercises such as short answer items and matching items.

Both texts and tasks for the four basic skills are graded efficiently from the simplest to the more complex ones – written in natural language and real context use – and thus, the book helps the X graders to achieve all of the objectives. These contextual texts and tasks fulfill the needs of the students in the future. For instance, in Chapter 1, the students are asked to identify and find detailed information from people’s identity cards. This is a real-life scene which may be encountered by the students in the future.

Speaking activities are developed to introduce meaningful communication to the learners. Most of the activities are created to be pair and group works. This is in line with KI 2 or social competences which also contribute to the students’ character building. But, individual responses are not treated in appropriate number. The activities are not balanced between individual responses, pair work, and group work.

Additionally, vocabularies are organized in good distribution, from simple to complex, across chapters in the whole book. New words are presented in each chapter in appropriate level. Those new words are also efficiently repeated and recycled across the book. The distribution certainly helps the learners to remember as well as use them in practices. Ideally, the loads of new words should be accompanied by pronunciation sections.
However, only one pronunciation section is included in the book. The section is learner-friendly with no complex charts but again it is not sufficient.

Following the vocabulary distribution, grammars (or structures) are also distributed fairly. They are contextualized with real-life tasks although some of them are not introduced explicitly. In the beginning of grammar sections, the author gives several interesting examples which are supplemented by several guiding questions to lead the students in understanding the structures. However, the structures are not reworked incidentally throughout the book. They are only presented in certain chapters.

Although the book is written with the label of “2013 Curriculum”, some elements of the current curriculum are not inserted into it. First, the book does not contain tasks which enable the students to achieve a crucial goal mentioned by government as religious competence. Second, the authentic assessments are not included in the book. The government has suggested that the textbook should add the way of assessing the students through authentic assessment. The textbook should contain those elements so that the students will be able to evaluate their learning progress.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The overall result of the evaluation indicates that the strengths of both commercial textbooks outweigh the weaknesses. However, some changes and additions would be necessary to improve the books. More pronunciation activities are needed especially when new vocabulary and expressions are introduced. In addition, religious competences (KI 1) need to be included for they are the core of the 2013 curriculum. Regardless of the evaluation results, teachers can still follow the national syllabus by adapting, adopting, or even creating their own material and assessment.

References