Pre-service Teachers' Perspectives on English Coursebook for Senior High Schools in Indonesia

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Abstract

A textbook is an inseparable part of the teaching and learning process. This research aimed to discover pre-service teachers' perception of the ELT textbook; *Buku Bahasa Inggris for Students grade XI*. This qualitative study involved eighteen pre-service teachers who were doing their teaching practicum in different senior high schools in *Manggarai*, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The researchers deliberately selected the participants who are willing to participate in semi-structured interviews to provide their viewpoints on the English textbook they used during their period of teaching practicum. The findings indicated diverse viewpoints and mixed responses among participants, which were shaped significantly by their educational objectives and preferences. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of cultural awareness, interactive activities, and feedback mechanisms in enhancing their learning experience. The findings and implications of this study were benefit educators and coursebook designers in creating English coursebooks that enhance students' motivation, engagement, and language learning results.

Keywords: *Perception; Textbook Evaluation; Teachers' Perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are important resources for teachers to assist students in learning since they guide teachers in conveying the materials they teach to the students. A textbook can be considered as a major source for both instructional support and student learning. Mahmood (2009) explains the vitality of textbooks as the primary instrument for interpreting and implementing curricula. Textbooks are crucial for supporting language training as instructional materials that facilitate the teaching and learning process.

Richards (2001) highlights the importance of textbooks by stating that many language programs worldwide rely on commercially available resources for their sustainability. Tomlinson (2011) contends that materials have been primarily created to enhance learners' understanding and offer them chances to engage with language in practical contexts. In other words, ELT textbooks can help teachers facilitate students' acquisition of new knowledge in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, English language textbooks are essential tools in classrooms worldwide, valued for their validity, usefulness, and ability to efficiently meet a wide range of needs (Gholami et al., 2017).

Given their perceived significance in teaching and learning, textbooks should adhere to specific criteria and standards. Tomlinson (2016) points out that in order to affect ELT, the contents should stimulate students' curiosity, interest, and attentiveness. He also recommends that learners feel at ease, which should be achieved by carefully

designing the textbook. Learners feel more comfortable with materials in textbook, if the content is approachable. Besides, the materials should assist learners in establishing confidence concerning both their capacity for language learning and their self-identity as language learners. In addition, Tsiplakides (2011) asserts that textbooks should help students develop their self-confidence.

It is essential to evaluate the textbook material at all levels of the educational process to figure out its flaws and make necessary adjustments. In this regard, evaluation is seen as a technical aspect of instruction and a part of the teaching and learning process that offers ongoing feedback to ensure continuous improvement. The textbook evaluation also aims to determine if the textbook material should be adopted in the school during teaching-learning activities. It also means that textbooks will be evaluated to improve the quality of ELT textbooks and ensure they are suitable for students' needs. Moreover, the primary objective of evaluation studies is not only to assess but also to collect valuable information for enhancing the textbooks that can aid in evaluating the students' accomplishments. Evaluating textbooks and other materials is an inherent and essential aspect of the teaching and learning process. Nimehchisalem & Mukundan (2015) state that textbook evaluation aids in picking the best book for a language course, considerably influencing the learning and teaching process. Evaluation enables teachers to make required textbook adjustments, increasing their efficacy and matching them with the requirements of their students.

Research on the evaluation of teaching materials has been carried out in recent years. Satriani & Resmini (2021) who examined students' perceptions of ESP textbook activities and assignments revealed that students did not experience boredom. The activities in the book enhanced students' creativity and engagement in the classroom. A study by Le et al., (2021) on teachers' perceptions of the *Skillful - Reading & Writing 02* book identified its strengths as colorful illustrations, numerous online learning resources, engaging topics, updated content, and strong learning skills component. However, the study also noted a weakness in the book's writing sub-topics not aligning with the program's overall objectives. Similarly, there were drawbacks related to the relatively small font size and lengthy listening exercises.

Another study evaluated the English book "When English Rings the Bell" by Karsudianto (2019) and found that the teachers had a favorable opinion of the textbook while offering some suggestions for enhancement. Tyas & Safitri (2019) evaluated an English textbook for senior secondary education, focusing on content, grammar, level, materials, and methodology. They concluded that the book was structured effectively and promoted students' independence in learning and utilizing the language.

Solhi et al., (2020) found that basic English textbooks in Turkey lacked several crucial elements of language acquisition. These textbooks prioritize precision and repetition over producing desired results, meaningful interaction, and sustained language learning. The activities in these textbooks often focused on practice rather than encouraging productivity among learners and autonomy (W. Setyawan, 2024). Furthermore, the lack of customization prevented these textbooks from utilizing the prior experience and knowledge that students bring to the classroom. Learners were rarely required to engage in critical, creative, or analytical thinking in most activities. The textbooks failed to promote self-directed English learning, resulting in a lack of motivation for independent learning. Learning was confined to the classroom setting and did not

develop optimally. Moreover, a study conducted by Bahman & Rahimi (2010) found an unequal representation of men and women in textbooks, with men appearing more frequently in names, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and reading passages.

Solangi & Memon (2020) examined the reading and writing skills, cultural representation, and content organization in English textbooks for undergraduate students in Pakistan and found that 'English for Undergraduates' textbooks met only medium to low across these areas. Moreover, Supriyanto (2019) researched teachers' perceptions of an English textbook for early childhood entitled English Chest. He found that the book was classified as a good English textbook and appropriate for early childhood learning English as a foreign language. Furthermore, the syllabus in English Chest aligned well with the 2006 Education Unit Level Curriculum. Arfiandhani (2016) explored the communicative aspects of textbooks for senior high school students in Indonesia. She observed that while the textbook adhered to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles in its objectives, several elements, particularly the tasks and activities, required further refinement.

Having considered the results of the studies, it can be concluded that no single textbook can be perfect, as it's challenging for a textbook to address the varied needs of learners, differing syllabi, contexts, and teaching methods. Nonetheless, textbooks are often a compromise between what is needed and what is available (Richards, 2001). Thus, the selection and use of specific textbooks are key to educational decision with direct implications for the quality of student learning. Hence, the evaluation of textbooks becomes very important to achieve the goal of effective learning outcomes.

Referring to previous research, many studies focus on content, organization, and some focus on language aspects such as vocabulary or language skills contained in teaching materials used by teachers in schools (Setiawan, 2021; Supriyanto, 2019; Tyas & Safitri, 2019). However, there is a noticeable gap in systematic research that addresses pre-service teachers' viewpoints during their teaching practicum. Therefore, this study evaluated the English textbooks through the lens of pre-service teachers' perceptions of compulsory English textbooks used at the senior high school level in Indonesia. By involving pre-service teachers in this teaching materials evaluation research, the underlying objective of this study was to discover how these pre-service teachers perceived the English textbooks they used during their teaching practicum.

METHOD

This qualitative study investigated pre-service English teachers' perceptions of the English textbook, *Bahasa Inggris Kelas XII SMA/MA/SMK/MAK*, in the senior high schools where they completed their teaching practicum. This study involved 18 pre-service English teachers. They were English study program students who conducted their teaching practicum in senior high schools in *Manggarai,* East Nusa Tenggara Province. Participants were chosen purposefully and volunteered to take part in this study. To gather the data, the researchers applied semi-structured interviews (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The interview aimed to explore in-depth perspectives of pre-service teachers on the English textbooks they used in their teaching. The researchers then analyzed the data thematically. The researchers addressed the following steps in data analysis. First, the researchers wrote down the interview transcription. Second, the researchers attempted to organize the data. Third, the researchers made some codes and categorized the data to draw a theme and conclusions based on the emerging themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to explore how pre-service English teachers perceived and evaluated their textbook, *Bahasa Inggris Kelas XII SMA/MA/SMK/MAK,* in terms of content, design, and usefulness for their language teaching and learning. The results showed that they had mixed opinions about their textbooks, ranging from positive to negative, depending on various factors such as their learning objectives, preferences, expectations, and experiences.

Varied Opinions and Mixed Reactions

Research participants had mixed opinions about the books they used, ranging from positive to negative. Some students expressed satisfaction with certain aspects of the textbook, such as the relevance of its content or its visual design. In contrast, others voiced concerns about its effectiveness for achieving their learning objectives. The following section presents excerpts of participants' viewpoints:

"Oh, the textbook we're using? It's pretty good, I guess. I like how it's laid out with all the diagrams and stuff. It makes following along easier, you know? But sometimes I feel like it doesn't go deep enough into some topics. Like, I'll read a chapter and still feel a bit confused" (TYM).

"I actually really like our textbook. The content is super relevant to what we're learning in class, and it's helped me a lot with my assignments. Sure, it's not perfect, but overall, I think it's a solid resource for the course" (AN).

"Well, the book looks nice, I should say. But when it comes to learning from it? Not so much. I often feel like I'm just memorizing facts instead of really understanding the material. It's not terrible, but I definitely wouldn't say it's helping me achieve my learning goals as much as I'd hoped" (MRJ).

This divergence of viewpoints highlights the complexity of students' perceptions. Students held different views based on their personal learning goals and preferences. The study also found that students value cultural information and contextually relevant material, and that they want more interactive and engaging activities in textbooks. This might be because one textbook cannot easily meet the varied needs of students, differing syllabi, contexts and teaching styles. Nonetheless, textbooks are often a compromise between what is required and what is available (Richards, 2001; Soeprajitno et al., 2019).

Influence of Learning Goals and Preferences

Research participants' perceptions of textbooks were strongly influenced by their learning goals and individual preferences. Students aiming for proficiency in communication tended to value interactive activities and authentic materials, while those focused on exam preparation preferred more structured content. The participants' perceptions are shown in the following excerpt.

Well, for me, it really depends on what I'm trying to achieve. I'm mostly interested in being able to speak the language, you know? So, I tend to prefer textbooks that have lots of dialogues and real-world examples. Those are more helpful to me than memorizing grammar rules (YN)

To be honest, I find most traditional textbooks pretty boring. I'm much more engaged when I'm working with materials that feel relevant to my life. Like, give me a textbook that teaches me how to chat on social media or understand song lyrics, you know? That's the

kind of language I actually want to use. But I know some of my classmates who are really focused on acing their exams prefer the more structured, traditional approach (KLA).

This suggests that aligning textbook features with students' goals can significantly influence students' overall evaluation of the materials. The results of this study are also consistent with previous findings. For example, Solhi et al. (2020) discovered that students with specific learning objectives tended to be more satisfied with textbooks than those with broader goals. The study also found that students who favored interactive and engaging activities were more satisfied with their textbooks than students who favored more traditional activities.

Cultural Awareness and Information

Many research participants highlighted the importance of including cultural information and contextually relevant material in textbooks. They emphasized that exposure to cultural nuances and real-life contexts would enhance the language learning experience, helping them connect more deeply with the language and its practical applications, as seen in these excerpts from the participants:

I strongly believe that textbooks should reflect real-life contexts. When I see dialogues or reading passages that mirror everyday situations in the target culture, it helps me connect with the language on a deeper level. It's like, 'Oh, this is how I'd actually use this phrase in a real conversation.' That's invaluable (MRJ).

For me, the most effective language learning materials are those that go beyond just teaching the language itself. They should provide a window into the culture, you know? Like, including snippets about local customs, popular media, or even current events (AN).

The results of this study are consistent with the previous studies. Davidson & Liu (2020) noted students exposed to cultural information in their textbooks were more likely to report increased cultural awareness and better understanding of real-life contexts. The study also found that students exposed to cultural information were likelier to report enjoying language learning and feeling more motivated to learn.

Interactive and Engaging Activities

The students generally desired more interactive and engaging activities in the textbooks. They believed that hands-on tasks, group discussions and collaborative projects will foster active learning, improve retention and make learning more enjoyable.

The textbooks are okay, but they're kind a dry. I wish they had more activities where we could apply what we're learning. That'd make it more engaging and help us see how the stuff we learn actually matters (PWT).

You know what would be cool? If our books had more interactive elements. Like, maybe QR codes that link to videos or online simulations. Anything to make it less about passive reading and more about actively doing something with the information (YN).

The results of this study are consistent with earlier findings. For example, a study by Aulia et al., (2024) reported that students who participated in interactive activities were more likely to experience higher motivation and better learning outcomes. The study also found that students who engaged in interactive and engaging activities were more likely to report enjoying learning and feeling more motivated to learn (Mukhibat et al., 2024; W. H. Setyawan, 2015).

Feedback Mechanisms

A recurring theme was the need for effective feedback mechanisms in textbooks. Research participants expressed a desire for clear and constructive feedback on their performance, which allows them to track their progress, identify areas for improvement, and build confidence in their language skills.

I think effective feedback is crucial in language learning. When I use a textbook, I want to know not just if I'm right or wrong, but why. Constructive comments on my performance would really help me identify my weak spots and focus my efforts where they're most needed (ASM).

One thing I've noticed is that a lot of textbooks just give you exercises without really helping you understand your mistakes. I'd love to see more detailed explanations for wrong answers. That way, I can learn from my errors and not just guess blindly next time (AYA).

The results of this study align with previous research findings. For example, a study by Brown & Abeywickrama (2004) stated that clear and constructive feedback plays a vital role in successful language learning. The study also found that such feedback improves motivation, learning outcomes and confidence. Overall, the findings of this study provide valuable information for textbook developers and teachers. By understanding the factors that influence students' perceptions of textbooks, developers can create materials that are more likely to be effective and engaging.

Based on the findings and literature review, several implications and recommendations can be drawn for developing and using EFL textbooks. Firstly, EFL coursebook developers should consider student voice as an important source of feedback and evaluation for their products. Students' voices can provide valuable insights into what works and what does not work for them in terms of the content, design, and usability of the coursebooks. Second, EFL teachers should adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to using coursebooks. Teachers should not rely solely on coursebooks as the main source for language teaching but should supplement them with other materials and activities appropriate to students' needs, interests and levels. Thirdly, EFL learners should take an active role in their own language learning by using the coursebook as a tool, not as a textbook. Learners should not passively follow the coursebook instructions, but rather explore the coursebook content critically and creatively, and look for opportunities to practice their language skills beyond the boundaries of the coursebook.

The limitations of this study include the small sample size, the single case study design, and the subjective nature of the qualitative data. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other contexts or populations in line with statements (Shalahuddin et al., 2021). Future research could use a larger sample, multiple case studies, or mixed methods to obtain more reliable and valid data on student voice in EFL textbook evaluation. Future research could also investigate other aspects of students' voices in EFL curriculum and instruction, such as their expectations, preferences, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, strategies, challenges, achievements, and general attributes. Common attributes are characteristics or qualities that describe or define someone or something. Concerning EFL learning, common attributes may include cognitive ability, linguistic competence, affective factors, motivational orientation, learning style, and personality traits. These common attributes can influence how students perceive, evaluate and use their EFL textbooks and how they interact with their teachers, peers, peers and their learning environment. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore how

these common attributes influence students' voice in EFL curriculum and instruction, and how they can be considered in designing and implementing learner-centered EFL textbooks.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into pre-service teachers' perceptions of English textbooks used in senior high schools in Indonesia. The results suggest that pre-service teachers value textbooks that contain culturally relevant content, interactive activities, and clear feedback mechanisms. Their perceptions are shaped by their learning goals and personal preferences, indicating that no single textbook can meet the diverse needs of all learners. The implications of this study can inform the development of more effective and engaging EFL textbooks that better cater to students' diverse needs.

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