

## AN EVALUATION OF AN ESP TEXTBOOK FROM LECTURERS' PERSPECTIVES: THE CASE OF *ENGLISH FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES* BOOK

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**Abstract:** There are sparse studies on evaluating ready-made English books in EFL context. In contrast, evaluating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) books particularly developed by an institution for its own teaching purposes seems to be under-researched. This article describes a study of an ESP textbook evaluation from lecturers' perspectives. It reports a research in which 25 ESP lecturers at *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN) Kediri* were asked to evaluate *English for Islamic Studies* book used in *English Application Program* at STAIN Kediri using a survey questionnaire adapted from Mukundan, Hajimohammadi, and Nimehchisalem (2011) and Alamri (2008). Nine categories were proposed, namely suitability to learners, teachability, physical and utilitarian attributes, tasks, reading, vocabulary, grammar, speaking and writing. The result of descriptive statistics indicated that the lecturers were highly satisfied with the book only in three categories (grammar, speaking and writing). The rest categories suffer from a number of weak points which require awareness and consideration not only by the lecturers but also both the textbook developers and the institution. The result of this study cannot be generalized to other ESP textbooks. However, it provides information that evaluating self-designed textbook is essential for the improvements.

**Keywords:** *Textbook Evaluation, ESP, English for Islamic Studies (EIS) book*

It is commonly believed that textbooks play a pivotal role in a teaching and learning process. This is because textbooks could be a conveyor of the curriculum, a source of language, a learning support, motivation and stimulation, and a reference. (Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In addition, Hutchinson (1987) stated that textbooks are not only media for everyday activity in the classroom used by teachers and students but they are also an embodiment of aims, values and method of the certain teaching and learning situation. Furthermore, Riazi (2003) claimed that textbooks could be positioned as the next important factor after the teacher in the teaching and learning process in the second or foreign language classroom context. Therefore, the use of textbooks in the teaching and learning process could assist teachers to focus on what they should do in the classroom and not having their energy dispersed by preparation of teaching materials.

However, the availability of ready-made textbooks used whether at schools or universities could provide drawbacks not only for teachers or lecturers but also for students. For example for teachers or lecturers, they could be demotivated because they sometimes find that the materials provided in the ready-made textbooks could not be used based on their context and situation. For the students, the content of the ready-made books sometimes does not fit with their background. Therefore, designing textbooks based on the context and situation of a school and a college seems to be the best alternative to obtain what they need.

In Indonesian context, many universities or colleges design their own books for their students because they consider that published books do not fulfill their learners' needs. They claim that published books are not appropriate with a certain teaching context. Therefore, the institutions assign their lecturers to design their own books, which suit a particular group of students.

Even though many textbooks used at universities or colleges are designed by the lecturers of those universities or colleges, however, it seems that many designers are not encouraged to evaluate the quality of the materials being developed. Evaluating textbooks is important because it could be used as a way to find the problems during the use of textbooks in the teaching and learning process and to get solutions from the problems. In addition, the contents of the textbooks generally have significant association with the learning of the students. Rea-Dickins and Germaine stated that "evaluation is an intrinsic part of teaching and learning" (1994, p.4). Therefore, conducting a research on evaluating textbooks developed by lecturers at a university or a college is important. Analyzing or evaluating teaching materials according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) involve judging the material whether it is appropriate for a certain purpose or not. Furthermore, Weir and Roberts (1994) stated that there are two main reasons for evaluating teaching materials. First, it provides evidence concerning the theoretical debate on the guideline to be followed in language teaching or in teacher education. Second, it is used as a tool to know the suitability of particular teaching approaches or techniques under given conditions and whether they meet the claims made for them.

Many researchers have conducted a study about textbook evaluation. For example, Tok (2010) conducted a research about *TEFL textbook evaluation: From teachers' perspectives*. The study was aimed to know the advantages and disadvantages of 'Spot On' English textbook used in Turkey. The study revealed that 'Spot On' textbook actually did not stand up reasonably well to a systematic in-depth analysis and that the negative attributes far out-weighed the positive characteristics. In addition, Baleghzadeh and Rahimi (2011) conducted a research about *Evaluation of an ESP Textbook for the Students of Sociology* at University of Tehran. The findings indicated that the book, despite having merits, was not very suitable for the course. They further give suggestions regarding the kinds of activities, strategies, layout and other important issues.

The present study aimed to evaluate an English textbook used in *English Application Program (Program Aplikasi Bahasa Inggris)* at STAIN Kediri from the lecturers' perspectives. To be specific, it sought lecturers' perspectives about the book based on nine categories, namely suitability to learners, teachability, physical and utilitarian attributes, tasks, reading, vocabulary, structure, speaking and writing. In addition, it is also to find which categories are mostly agreed and positively responded by the participants.

## Method

The research method used in this study is a survey method. It was used to gather information needed by the researcher from the participants. There were 25 ESP lecturers who voluntarily participated in this study. Among 25, 16 were female lecturers and 9 were male lecturers.

A survey questionnaire was used in this study because it could be easily administered and could gather sufficient information from the respondents. It is a closed-response items using 5-point, Likert-type scale. As 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree". The questionnaire was adopted from Mukundan, Hajimohammadi, and Nimehchisalem (2011) and Alamri (2008). Nine categories were used in the questionnaire, namely *suitability to learners, teachability, physical and utilitarian attributes, tasks, reading, vocabulary, structure or grammar, speaking and writing*. The questionnaires were then distributed, collected and coded for further analysis using simple descriptive statistics.

## Findings and Discussion

The following elaborations aim to answer the research questions. It is to know the lecturers' perspectives in terms of its physical and utilitarian attributes of the book, learning-teaching content of the book, teachability of the book and suitability of the book for learners. In addition, it is also to find which categories are mostly agreed and positively responded by the participants.

### *Physical and Utilitarian Attributes*

The main purpose of this category is to know the lecturers' opinion about size, printing quality, cover, layout, illustrations, table of content, glossary and bibliography, title appropriateness, font size and type use, and consistency in use of headings, icons, label, italics etc. of the book.

It could be seen from the findings that among 12 items proposed in this category, seven items elicited positive responses. The details are that 80% participants agree with the consistency in the use of headings, icons, label, italics etc. In addition, 72% participants agree with the complete and detailed table of contents. Furthermore, the printing quality item, the appropriateness of glossary and the font type size were agreed by 64% of the participants and 56% of the participants also stated their agreement in the book size and title appropriateness. However, other five items are considered having negative responses because there were less than 50% agree or strongly agree with the statement. In the items of bibliography, there were only 44% who stated their agreement, 36% in the item of the variety of illustrations, 36% in the efficiency in the use of texts and visuals, 24% in terms of book cover and 20% in the layout item.

It can be said from the above explanation that the physical and utilitarian attributes of the *English for Islamic Studies* book got positive perspectives from the lecturers only in seven criteria or items because more than 50% participants are either strongly agree or agree with the statements, while other five criteria or items are considered unsatisfied because less than 50% participants stated either neutral or disagree with the statements. Therefore, considering those five items to revise is important. Furthermore, improvements to those seven criteria are also needed to make better quality of the book.

### *Learning-Teaching Content*

To know the lecturers' perspectives about the learning-teaching content of the *English for Islamic Studies* book, six criteria were proposed containing 23 items. Those six criteria are tasks, reading, vocabulary, structure/grammar, speaking and writing.

In line with the tasks, the results show that among four proposed items, only one item on *the tasks have clear instruction* got the lecturers' positive response (52% agree and 20% strongly agree). However, the lecturers considered that other three items are unsatisfied in terms of whether or not the tasks objectives are

achievable (40%), the tasks move from simple to complex (36%), and the tasks help students who are under/over-achievers with only 8%. Therefore, it is suggested that the tasks should be revised especially in relation to these three items.

Furthermore, among four proposed items in reading category, only one category got satisfactory results. The item on *the texts are taken from diverse field of study* was supported by almost all participants with 76% of the participants agree and 4% of the participants strongly agree with the statement. However, three items on the statement *the texts are graded* (44%), *the reading activities can motivate learners* (40%), and *the length of the texts is appropriate to the level of students* (36%) are considered having unsatisfactory results. As a result, improvements in reading section particularly in those items are essential.

In terms of vocabulary category, four items were proposed with the result that three items got satisfactory results [*Topics of vocabulary are appropriate to students' background of study* (64%), *Words are contextualized* (64%), and *There is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters* (52%)]. However, there were only 44% of the participants who agree with the item on *the load (number of new words in each chapter) is appropriate to the level of students* and therefore it is not satisfying result.

The next category is about grammar. The results show that all proposed items got positive responses and they are considered having satisfactory results. In this case, each item was agreed more than 50% by the participants [*Grammar topics are graded across the chapters* (64%), *Grammar is introduced explicitly* (52%), *Grammar exercises are graded* (48% agree and 4% strongly agree), and *Grammar topics are appropriate to the level of students* (44% agree and 16% strongly agree)].

Regarding the speaking category, it is known that more than 50% of the participants gave their agreement or strong agreement to all proposed items. The items on *the speaking activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication* (64%), *the speaking activities are balanced between individual response, pair work and group work* (52% agree and 8% strongly agree), and *activities motivate students to talk* (36% agree and 20% strongly agree) are considered having satisfactory results.

The last category in the learning and teaching content of the book is about writing. It can be seen from the findings that this category is considered having satisfactory results because all items were positively responded by more than 50% of the participants. Those items are *the writing tasks have achievable goals* (52% agree and 12% strongly agree), *the writing tasks consider learner's capabilities* (52% agree and 4% strongly agree), and *models are provided to help students to do the tasks* (44% agree and 12% strongly agree).

In short, among six categories proposed in the learning-teaching content, only three categories (grammar, speaking and writing) got totally positive responses or satisfactory results in all items. However, other three categories (tasks, reading, vocabulary) got mixed positive responses on the provided items. Therefore, considering this information to revise the book is important.

### **Teachability of the Book**

Three items were proposed to obtain information whether or not the book is teachable. Based on the findings previously discussed, among three items proposed, only one item, which is considered having satisfactory result. That is the item on *the book helps teachers to minimize their preparation time*. It was agreed by 52% of the participants and 8% of the participants stated their strong agreement with the statement. On the other hand, less than 50% was agreed in the items of *the book helps teachers exploit the activities to meet the students' expectations* (48%) and *the book helps teachers accommodate mixed ability of students and classes of different sizes* (44%). This means that this category didn't got maximal positive responses and therefore improvements in the teachability of the book are needed to make the book better.

### **Suitability of the Book for Learners**

Three items were proposed to obtain information whether or not the *English for Islamic Studies* book is suitable for the learners. The results show that only one item on *the book is culturally accessible to the learner* got satisfactory result with 64% of the participants agree and 4% of the participants strongly agree with the statement. On the other hand, two items got unsatisfactory results. In this case, only 44% of the participants answered that *the book is compatible to background knowledge and level of students* and only 40% of the participants who agree with the statement that *the book is compatible to the needs of the learners*. Therefore, improving this book in relation to the suitability for the learners is essential.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the previous results and discussion, the researcher could conclude that the lecturers' perspectives on the physical and utilitarian attributes of the *English for Islamic Studies* book are not completely satisfying. This is because among 12 proposed items, only seven items got satisfactory results in which more than 50% participants stated their agreement while five other items got unsatisfactory result because less than 50% stated their agreement to the items. Furthermore, in terms of the category on the learning-teaching content,

among six categories proposed, only three categories (grammar, speaking and writing) got totally positive responses or satisfactory results in all items. However, other three categories (tasks, reading, vocabulary) got mixed positive responses on the provided items. Finally, regarding teachability of the book and suitability of the book for learners, among four items proposed in each category, only one item got satisfactory result.

In short, the results of evaluating *English for Islamic Studies* book indicate that among nine categories proposed, only three categories (grammar, speaking and writing) which got totally positive responses or satisfactory results in all items. However, other six categories got mixed positive responses on the provided items. Therefore, revision or improvements to some items, which are considered weak or unsatisfying are important so that the book would be better than before.

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