

The criteria for selecting german coursebooks in Indonesian upper secondary schools: Critical appraisal from teachers' view

Aditya Rikfanto* and Retna Endah Sri Mulyati¹

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Curriculum changes directly impact learning objectives, content selection, and the use of coursebooks as learning resources. In reality, teachers tend to choose coursebooks that are different from the curriculum direction. This study aims to determine how teachers view the selection of German coursebooks and what criteria they used to decide coursebooks for teaching in secondary school. Respondents were 20 teachers in Yogyakarta and Central Java. We use a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze interview-based data and records through reduction techniques, categorization, verification, and conclusion. The results indicated that most of the participants wanted to be autonomous in choosing books to use, while the national curriculum guidelines were not considered an obligation. This study proposed thirteen criteria for book selection based on the data analysis obtained from respondents. Teachers can make priority choices from these criteria and apply selected coursebooks to lessons.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received August 12, 2021

Accepted November 24, 2021

Published December 31, 2021

KEYWORDS:

Criteria for Selecting,
German Coursebooks,
Critical Appraisal

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that coursebooks determine the quality of teaching and provide language training for students (van Batenburg et al., 2020). Indeed, in the future, most of the information will be transmitted digitally, while only a small portion will be conveyed through print media. However, books will always have a place all over the country, mainly textbooks related to the development of language skills (Gomez, 2008). Masoomi et al. (2016) argued that coursebooks that determine class activity could affect the teacher's teaching methods and the role of students.

German language teaching has been running for decades in high schools in Indonesia. The curriculum in Indonesia recommends using a coursebook called *Deutsch ist einfach*, written by Kasim et al. (2013). This book is produced domestically and designed appropriately to achieve national curriculum objectives. However, curriculum-based coursebooks are considered less suitable for learning needs and situations. In this case, the teacher tries to pay attention to learning in general and adjust it to the reality of conditions in school. Some teachers choose locally published coursebooks. Others use globally published coursebooks based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

This difference in tendency indicates that teachers have references and criteria in selecting coursebooks for German teaching. Diverse coursebooks encourage teachers to create advanced German language learning based on the learning plans. This situation is a distinctive advantage in teaching German in central Java and Yogyakarta. However, the criteria for selecting the coursebook have never been explored in-depth and put together in a formulation. Besides, studies related to this issue still tend to be rare. This study is critical because it provides practical guidance for curriculum developers and shows good textbook criteria based on the views of language teaching practitioners (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2012). Based on this background, we seek

to investigate the teacher's view of selecting German course books and what criteria teachers use in choosing the appropriate coursebook.

2. Literature Review

Teaching success refers to several factors, including using the coursebook and its teaching methods. Tomlinson (2015) defined a coursebook as a book directed to the learners of a language consisting of information, advice, texts, and activities designed to help them learn their target language. It is usually specific to a particular language level. It typically focuses on learning grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation and developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. It is clear that understanding the coursebook's complex aspects and its tasks is essential in learning a second language (Préfontaine & Kormos, 2015). Zohrabi (2011) stated that teachers are inseparable from their role in evaluating and developing coursebooks to follow the needs of learners. Thus, teachers are accustomed to developing the theory of learning and knowing its application in the classroom. In this way, teachers can discover their potentials, limitations, and abilities to convey knowledge and gain trust in their skills. Tomlinson (2018) stated that language coursebook types include several substances based on communication skills development. He mentioned that some typical examples of practice in language learning include closed questions, open questions, proper word selection, controlled dialogue, matching sentences, completing sentences, rearranging sentences, correcting sentences, listening, and answering questions. However, it should be noted that inappropriate content and the vast scope of lessons cause students to experience difficulty in mastering language skills. To solve this problem, teachers must choose suitable learning materials and resources. Liu (2010) argued that the ideal learning resource components should include valuable learning content, reliability, and ease of access to materials.

On the other hand, İnal (2006) argued that teachers need to consider several aspects of choosing a coursebook. First, subject and assignment content must be relevant to the learning purpose. By understanding the group of learners and knowing the purpose of learning well, a teacher can choose the textbook appropriately. In addition, the teacher should adjust the content scope to the actual situation. Secondly, the content should arouse curiosity. It is essential to consider the needs and interests of the students. They should be motivated to express and discuss their interests while communicating the language. Assignments should get structured in a way that makes lessons engaging. Third, cultural aspects must be taken into account to avoid misunderstanding and culture shock. It is crucial to avoid topics that could inhibit or damage their self-confidence. Text, illustrations, and images should be culturally appropriate. Fourth, the tasks should represent the original characteristics of the community in which the target language exists. In this way, these exercises and tasks would prepare students for real-life situations. Lastly, the language used needs to be appropriate to the student's level of proficiency, and the grammar should be consistent.

Sheldon (1988) completed the statement and mentioned some essential considerations in choosing a coursebook. Coursebooks need to state the objectives for each unit of the study clearly. Learning purpose assists teachers in delivering content and becomes an indicator to identify learning achievement. Moreover, they should also provide information about their publishers, allowing consumers to contact detailed information and provide feedback. Furthermore, specific information about the target group, age group, culture, background, possible learning preferences, and learning expectations is essential. The visual design should also be appealing, and its typography is appropriate. Units and exercises should be related to topics and grammatical development of lexical improvement. In cases where the textbook is insufficiently complete to stand on its own, then it should provide a separate exercise book that can enrich the learning unit. Learning materials in the coursebook should also allow for modifications or adaptations to suit local situations. In this way, teachers can avoid formatting that is too rigid. Besides, course books face the challenge of being low-cost and easy to order. Commercial exclusivity is undoubtedly a constraint on the learning process itself.

Various aspects of this consideration become essential in exploring the reality of course book selection. Hutchinson & Torres (1994) stated that good adequately used coursebooks could provide an excellent and effective change. Besides, the coursebooks can provide the level of learning necessary for teachers and learners to understand and change entirely. However, the above

considerations are not inherently adequate to meet the teachers' needs in designating a specific German coursebook. Additionally, discussions on determining a coursebook are often not based on objective and didactic considerations but on educational and national policy issues. Therefore, investigate teachers' critical perspectives in perceiving an ideal coursebook. In this study, we focus on the essential criteria for teachers in determining coursebooks and who should be the ones to determine the use of coursebooks in German language classes.

3. Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive method, where the analysis focused on records about the teachers' statements. The scope of research was secondary schools in Yogyakarta and Central Java. Data were collected through interviews with open questions, where teachers as respondents provided information related to the topic. We have interviewed 20 corresponding Teachers (T1-T20) in this study. Furthermore, we analyzed teachers' opinions objectively to find out their views on the procedure of choosing a coursebook. Besides, they mentioned the ideal coursebook selection criteria. We analyzed the data with reduction techniques to obtain different important information and found distinctive features in the answers (Jung et al., 2006). Furthermore, the data is processed by categorizing, verifying, and determining conclusions to produce research data that can be accounted for (Silalahi, 2018). If there is a discrepancy in information, a follow-up interview is conducted to explore the facts.

4. Findings and Discussions

Teacher's View in Determining a Coursebook

We divided our interview data into four groups according to their specific answers to decide the coursebook. As shown in Table 1, the teachers have opposing views about who should be the authorized party to designate the coursebook.

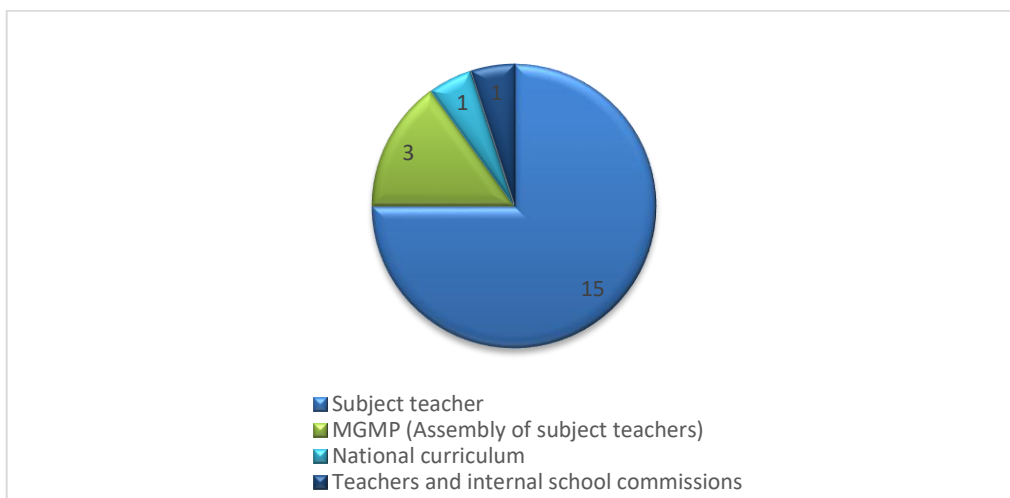


Figure 1. Authority in determining a coursebook according to the teacher's opinion

The data analysis results showed that most teachers wanted to independently select the coursebook, considering the students' conditions and situation. Meanwhile, 15% of respondents said that the coursebook should be determined by a commission appointed by the government-recognized teacher association (MGMP), where it assesses learners' needs and considers curriculum directions comprehensively. 5% of respondents stated that the government should determine the coursebook. 5% of respondents stated that the coursebook should be determined by the teacher concerned with the lesson and by the local school through scientific discussion. This statement is in line with Wette (2009). She argued that teachers could build concepts, plan lessons globally, diagnose student developmental priorities during the teaching process, and assemble coherent lessons from various components according to learners' needs. This situation allowed teachers to apply coursebooks in teaching based on their choice.

Furthermore, we investigated teachers' opinions on the reference for coursebook selection and formulated their answers into applicable criteria. This data shows that teachers can design and plan their lessons independently. They are in a position to review and determine course books responsibly. Their decisions become an essential part of the series of knowledge transfer and building of language skills.

The selection of course books should not be determined absolutely by the national curriculum. The curriculum cannot be interpreted as a binding rule book. However, it is just a learning framework that provides descriptions and suggestions about language skills that need to be achieved (Ende et al., 2013).

Criteria for Selecting a Coursebook

To select and evaluate the coursebook, teachers must first prepare the reference criteria (Müggenburg, 2019). Although these criteria do not have to be met all, the teacher has a general reference in different situations. Based on the reduced data, we propose thirteen criteria listed in the table below:

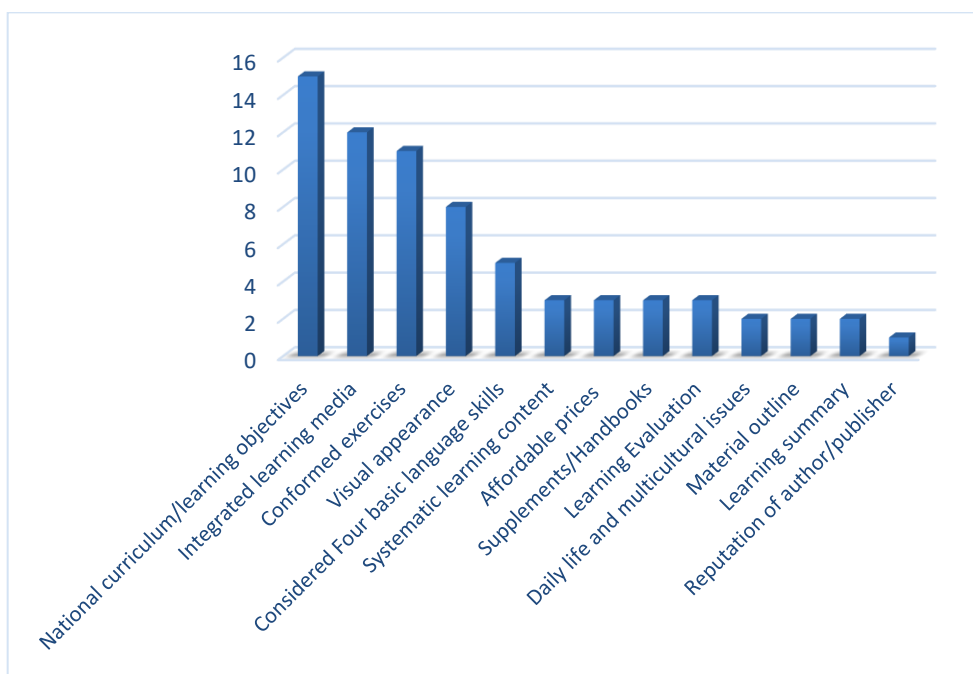


Figure 2. Proposed Criteria for selecting coursebook according to teachers

The above table shows that the spectrum of teacher analyses is quite broad regarding depicting the conceptualized German coursebook. Let us now bring each of these points into a comprehensive discussion.

Conformity with the National Curriculum and Clarity of Learning Objectives

Teachers see it as essential that textbooks should refer to the national curriculum. Curriculum policy has always been debated, but the curriculum has officially represented a series of decisions, policies, orientations on specific values and objectives (Brennan, 2011). The content accuracy, learning methodology, content conformity with curriculum become the most critical sub-criteria (Ho & Hsu, 2011). In the interview, respondent T3 explained that it is essential to review a coursebook before using it. The teaching material should be precise, the learning steps should be sequential, and the material limitation in learning units following the national curriculum guidelines. Another respondent (T5) also added that the suitability of the curriculum may not always be in one book, but teachers can use other sources of course books to fill the gaps.

Ivers (2007) argued that teachers should consider the coursebook's suitability with the purpose of education in the school and the specific purpose of the lesson. The lesson's purpose becomes the target, explaining the various essential competencies expected. However, flexibility in achieving goals

needs to be considered and discussed with learners. In this context, teachers need to implement appropriate metacognitive strategies to explore critical thinking and recognize their strengths. Goal setting, strategy implementation, self-assessment, and self-evaluation that support learning plans should be appropriately determined (Murphy, 2008).

The teacher can apply adaptation techniques to conform to the curriculum or syllabus (Cunningsworth, 1995). Indeed, this technique for some teachers is challenging and can provide more concrete results in teaching their students. However, adaptation requires more resources and time-consuming trials for some teachers, so they tend to focus on the original learning format.

Relation to Daily Life and Multicultural Issues

Coursebooks are supposed to serve as a bridge of knowledge and language skills between individuals and real life. The interrelationship between the coursebook and everyday life topics is essential, where the topic of conversation also indicates social sensitivity and is not offensive (Poole, 1974). Therefore, cultural interrelationship should be present in the teaching process because teaching language without reference to the target culture is undoubtedly complex (Kovács, 2017). Chan et al. (2020) stated that intercultural competence development had become a necessary goal of foreign language learning. If we relate it to respondent T4, this idea is similar to expectations for the quality of course books. He said that the coursebook became a critical medium to introduce the culture of the destination language, in this case, German. In addition, reading materials or learning instructions should not be too difficult.

Topics about daily life should not be limited to the prevailing culture in the target language and the local culture. Indeed, this role also needs to be done by teachers. Ghanem (2015) stated that non-native German speakers tend to discuss their identity and original culture in explaining topics presented in the coursebook. Thus, inter-cultural understanding and daily life become impressive knowledge for learners. McKay (2003) argues that modern foreign languages should allow students to communicate their local culture to others. Coursebooks can be a significant source in introducing culture and producing cultural adaptations in this context. This finding shows that coursebooks that link cultural aspects are essential for foreign language learning (Hatoss, 2004).

Availability of a Material Outline

Coursebooks should provide concepts, meaningful exercises, easy-to-understand summaries, and evaluation instruments to measure student progress. The material outlines serve to introduce the intended learning points in each book chapter. It becomes a quick way for teachers to prepare their teaching steps and strategies well. Thompson (1971) stated that the outline provides descriptive and prescriptive guidance for teachers in determining the direction of language skill development. Thus, teachers can consider developing content based on the students' level of ability. Respondent T6 revealed in the interview that the coursebook needs to map the content of each chapter. Therefore, it is precious if each unit describes a flow of thought, a learning map or a brief introduction.

Conformity of Exercise to the Topic

The coursebook should present exercises that are significantly related to the topic of discussion. In other words, the coursebook should use an appropriately applied Task-supported language teaching (TSLT) model, where tasks and exercises serve as methodological tools for practicing certain aspects of language (Ellis, 2019).

Variations in the types of exercises, both closed exercises with one correct answer and free exercises, which have many possible answers, can be used in coursebooks to improve their language competencies (Jacobs & Ball, 1996). Respondent T15 explained that Studio D, by Funk et al. (2013), tends to be appropriate for his class because it has complete material coverage, varied exercises, and relevant assignments. For example, in this coursebook, Adjectives relate to house topics. Students can practice making variations of words appropriately to express sentences correctly. For example, "Das Zimmer von Ulli ist groß" (Ulli's room is large) and otherwise "Das Zimmer von Rolf ist Klein" (Rolf's room is small).

Availability of Learning Summary

The Availability of learning summaries is an integral part of the coursebook. Young & Riegeluth (1988) stated that a quick way to assess course books' sequence is to check the contents, chapter introductions, end of chapter summaries, indexes, and glossaries. We focused on the summary that describes learning parts or grammatical aspects learned, both at the end of each chapter and the end of the book in general. Respondent T6 conveyed his experience that he felt the need to provide a summary of learning, for example, or grammar that appeared in the lesson unit. He can do that with the help of summaries from the coursebook.

A coursebook that provides a good set of grammar can help foreign language learners effectively, and it also helps teachers in the teaching process (Tammenga-Helmantel & Maijala, 2019). Moreover, other linguistic components that have been taught need attention in the summary section. In addition to grammatical concepts, the coursebook also needs to summarize the new vocabulary. Papajani (2015) stated that including the vocabulary exercises or summaries in each lesson is beneficial so that learners can integrate the new words into their mental lexicon.

Use of Media Integrated With Coursebook

Everyone concerned in language learning and teaching process, whether students, teachers, administrators, book writers, or publishers, should be well aware of the benefits of information and communication technology to provide 'scaffolding' for language development. Integrating ICT tools and applications to all aspects of the language learning process like teaching, learning, curriculum, management, and materials, especially coursebooks as a central medium, is critical to teaching language (Hismanoğlu, 2011). Coursebooks, which are printed media, are part of instructional technology that complements computer media, audio-visual, and other electronic equipment (Kumi-Yeboah, 2014). Therefore, integrating course books and digital media is an essential consideration in language delivery. Examples of exercises are presented orally in audio files and, most importantly, listening comprehension exercises (Wichmann, 2016). Respondent T2 said that books with the most up-to-date language learning methods use supporting media, such as DVDs and digital data. Another respondent (T4) also explained that coursebooks become more interesting if they include additional features such as videos or games with related themes.

However, it should also be noted that teachers should also actively explain the content of lessons in audio-visual media to students. Some learners tend to understand the teacher's explanations easily, rather than seeing the media's views. Sato & Burden (2020) stated that computer-enhanced learning media or internet-based media for foreign language learning does not always produce better learning effects than simple tools.

Adequate Development of Four Basic Language Skills

The concept of four basic language skills has been well-established in teaching foreign languages for the last three decades, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Goh & Wu, 2017). Aydoğan & Akbarov (2014) stated that these four language aptitudes are, in some cases, called the "macro-skills." These communication skills contrast to the "micro-skills" like grammar, vocabulary, articulation, and spelling. The four essential skills are related by two parameters: oral or written communication and the course of communication: accepting or creating the message. Respondent T8 said that it would be great if the coursebook assists learners in developing exercise-based speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills. Students have the opportunity to try various exercises and activities. Therefore, he said that the coursebook he used tended to live up to his expectations because the book featured these matters.

Hinkel (2006) explained that all four aspects of language should be presented integrally in context, not separately in a particular section. Therefore, textbooks that practice all four verbal skills become a priority choice. Sa'aleek (2018) argued that a good book could provide relevant educational activities and allow students to practice the language.

Systematic and Orderly Composition of Learning Content

Jafarigohar & Ghaderi (2013) stated that important criteria in selecting course books should be considered, whether the book uses logical order, proper language, and gradually increasing the structure's complexity. T4 said that the coursebook should show the language learning mindset in sequence. In addition, the exercises should support the development of language skills and do not overlap with each other. This sequence plays an essential role in building the concept of understanding a foreign language as a whole. The order of teaching content concerning linguistic aspects should be in line with the principles of linguistic rules that have become part of linguistic competence in acquiring a second language (Zyzik, 2011). Low-performing students will have difficulty completing the exercise if the discussion arrangement is not sequential (Hobri et al., 2020).

Visual Appearance and Attractive Format

Coursebooks are supposed to present visual illustrations, diagrams, or corresponding tables (Williams, 1983). Thus this visual display strengthens the imagination and encourages creativity in producing languages. Respondent T9 believes that coursebooks meet curriculum needs and provide a colorful visual display. He believes that students can enjoy the picture and understand the context. T 10 also added that a successful coursebook is a unique book. Some of the uniqueness is an attractive appearance and actual material. The images embedded in the book help learners to understand and remember the text, which is a significant component in language learning (Glenberg & Langston, 1992). Even embedded images can reflect the course book's impression, in which era it was produced, and whether it was new or outdated.

Affordable Prices and Availability in the Market

While it may seem unethical to talk about it in an academic context, teachers' and students' financial ability to obtain course books is ignorable. Ease in obtaining textbooks and affordable prices becomes a necessary aspect (Chatman & Goetz, 1985). Nimehchisalem & Mukundan (2015) also argued that cost-effective coursebooks are critical. In some cases, free course books or appropriately priced books could be provided. Respondent T11 said that the purchase price is considered in determining the coursebook. Likewise, another respondent (T 14) also said that the affordable price allows students from various economic circles to buy it. Students think about getting learning materials from various sources for free in this internet era. If learning resources are too expensive, course books will receive less priority, even if they are attractive. Although not directly related to the achievement of learning objectives, price is the primary consideration for teachers and learners to choose the relevant textbooks.

Availability of Handbooks for Teachers

Coursebooks cannot stand independently without informational support for proper use. Lake (1997) stated that the teacher's book provides an introduction and a general curriculum design strategy to assist students in developing more effective learning strategies. Respondent (T6) usually reads essential instructions in the teacher's handbook before teaching. He feels confident and can avoid misunderstanding the exercise instructions and assignments in the textbook. From the information, we can hint that the teacher's handbook is essential in introducing the learning field. At least the instruction manual for the coursebook is available in the coursebook.

The above statement argued that teacher's handbooks could help teachers find the right picture of learning and suggestions for achieving goals. Nevertheless, teachers must still have a plan in conducting lessons. Zohrabi et al. (2012) argued that experienced teachers should have plans for their classes, organize, and make changes to benefit learners. Thus, they can react with interest to effective classroom teaching.

Availability of Learning Evaluation

Furthermore, the coursebook should also provide an evaluation to measure learning success. Usually, a newly published coursebook has a separate set of tests or exercises, but the test book is an integral complement. Respondent T6 said that exercise and evaluation were necessary. They support measuring student achievement. More than that, teachers also need to appreciate the learning process and motivate students. It is very relevant to the preparation of students for the

final school exam well. Another respondent (T3) explained that the German language's lattice of the national exam material often took sources from course books.

Mol & Tin (2008) argues that language learning activities should be integrated with meaning-focused activities. Activities that encourage self-evaluation using various evaluation models should be included. Therefore, the coursebook must present the interrelationship between evaluation and learning activities related to real-life topics.

Reliable Publisher Reputation: Global vs. Local

There are some discussions about learning resources, should schools use internationally published books or local publications? This debate may never be over, as both have potential advantages. Taki (2008) argued that the learning steps introduced in international course books are presented clearly and logically. These books usually focus on contextual aspects of language and explain critical everyday situations. On the other hand, Gray (2010) argued that coursebooks distributed in the global market have a narrow view since they are set to be "one tool suitable for all," regardless of the context of social, geographic, and educational use. This difference in perspective has been a long discussion over the past decade. However, the process of collaboration and adaptation of the concept of global learning is possible for various educational institutions around the world (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020). T2 stated that a locally published book is enough because she can contact the publisher quickly to order a book, for example, or ask for appropriate learning suggestions.

Hughes (2019) stated that some global textbooks are adapted for a region. Publishers work with teachers and institutions to produce region-specific textbooks, generally based on local ministries' requirements. Regardless of these discussions, we consider that choosing a coursebook looks at publishers' reputation and reliability.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

We concluded that the implementation of the curriculum has a direct impact on the selection of course books in German language learning. This circumstance encouraged teachers to select and determine course books that fit the curriculum objectives. The criteria for selection of textbooks include thirteen aspects, such as clarity of learning objectives, conformity with the national curriculum, compatibility with the needs of achievement of essential competencies, association with culture and daily life, Availability of learning outlines, exercises related to topics, a summary of learning, integration of media use with course books, development of basic language skills, structuring of sequenced and systematic materials, visual display and attractive images, affordable prices, ease in obtaining the book, Availability of teacher handbooks, Availability of learning evaluations and reliability of publishers. These findings became the formula for selecting course books, as the guide could explain the selection criteria so that teachers could focus on improving the quality of learning (Dole et al., 1987). Therefore, it is recommended that teachers apply these criteria consistently to select course books. Teachers should choose books independently and make priorities according to these criteria. We could not reach all schools in Indonesia during our research, so we only completed our research on 20 schools in the provinces of Yogyakarta and Central Java. A more comprehensive research radius may provide richer data. In addition, the issue of the European system-based language learning framework (CEFR) has not been identified, whether it affects teachers in setting learning standards and implementing the curriculum in Indonesia. Therefore, we suggest that this topic receive attention for further research.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank Yogyakarta State University for the material and moral support provided during the writing of this paper.

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