



A Meta-Analysis of Students' Perceptions on the Readability of Learning Materials in TEFL Classes: Are Original Textbooks Effective?

Sri Handayani¹

Abstract

This study aimed to describe students' perceptions of the readability of learning materials in the Method of Teaching English as a Foreign Language course. The study addresses the issue of how students perceive the readability of the instructional materials they use. This qualitative research investigates the phenomenon of students' perceptions holistically, presenting the results in the form of words and sentences. Thirty-eight students from two classes enrolled in the Method of Teaching English as a Foreign Language course this semester were selected as the research subjects. To collect qualitative data, questionnaires, interviews, and observations were employed. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive qualitative research methods, which include data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the majority of students have a positive perception of the readability of the learning materials used. Students felt that the instructional materials were easy to understand and helped them grasp the concepts being taught. However, some students pointed out that certain parts of the materials were too complex and required further explanation. Based on these findings, it is recommended that instructors take into account student feedback regarding the instructional materials and make adjustments as necessary. Instructors are also advised to provide additional explanations or supplementary materials for sections that students find challenging. Furthermore, it is crucial for instructors to continuously evaluate and update the learning materials to ensure they remain relevant and easily accessible to all students. By doing so, the learning process can be more effective and efficient.

Keywords: *Learning Material, Textbook, Readability, Perception Method, TEFL*

A. Introduction

The perception toward what we have to read, and what we have to master is crucially to be built. Including how learners' perception of textbooks is used by lecturers in delivering material. As we know Textbooks play a vital role in teaching English because they form the fundamental of language input learners acquire in classroom (O'Neill, 1982; Kirkgoz, 2009) textbooks play a vital role in teaching English because they form the fundamental language input learners acquire in the classroom (O'Neill, 1982; Kirkgoz, 2009). For this substantial reason, it is necessary to be aware of the importance of evaluating textbooks for reading development, which enables teachers to exploit a textbook effectively for the benefit of their language students. Sari S.D (2020) states that One of the important factors that influence education in creating meaningful learning is reconstructing the knowledge possessed by students. Ethnoscience-based learning is expected to be able to bridge the blend of student culture with scientific culture in

¹Slamet Riyadi University, Jl. Sumpah Pemuda, No.18, Kadipiro, Banjarsari District, Surakarta City, Central Java 57136, Indonesia.

schools so that it will be able to realize a process of developing the quality of students as the next generation of the nation in the future, which is believed to be the main factor for the growth and development of the nation. This implies that students's knowledge about lessons is important to be considered to be successful in learning material.

How the students perceive the all texts in a textbook can not be separated from their activity in reading. According to Dadzie (2008), reading is the ability to understand words in a document and utilize the knowledge for personal growth and development. It means that reading is about understanding written texts. The selection of an appropriate reading text is crucial. Furthermore, Cunningsworth (1995) in Richards (2001) listed eight criteria in evaluating textbooks. The criteria suggested include: 1) Aims and approaches, 2) Design and organization, 3) Language content, 4) Skills, 5) Topic, 6) Methodology, 7) Teachers' books, and 8) Political considerations. If the chosen part is inappropriate for any reason, the chances of success for that particular lesson are substantially diminished. Textbooks serve as a reference to help teachers track their success and focus on the teaching process. The best way to reach goals with the help of students is to consider textbooks as a source for students' needs. Readability is commonly defined as comprehension difficulty. It is necessary to present the teaching materials according to the ability and level of the student.

According to Richards (1992), readability means how easily written materials can be read and understood. This depends on several factors including the average length, the number of new words contained in sentences, and the grammatical complexity of the language used in a passage. Those are the parts to measure the readability level of the reading text. The reading text must have quality to attract students' attention from the first line to the last line of written discourse. Readability research was done by experts and librarians who tried to find a way to provide the right book in the hands of the right reader. Education generally connects people and books, so it should be suitable for readers of all education levels. In other cases, it is based on small-scale observations by researchers, with differences in student results that are documented in textbooks and can be caused by external factors such as readability and text readability levels. In addition, some private publishers have produced and published English official textbooks for schools. Assuming publishers guarantee the overall quality of a book, including readability, most teachers take the book for granted. In dealing with the readability of a textbook as learning material, it is important to measure students' perception as basic data to guarantee teaching learning activities will run smoothly.

The effectiveness of teaching materials is a pivotal factor in the success of educational programs, particularly in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Understanding students' perceptions of the readability of these materials is essential for enhancing the learning experience. This meta-analysis explores students' views on the readability of learning materials used in TEFL classes, with a focus on the effectiveness of original textbooks. Readability, which influences how well students can engage with and understand the content, is crucial in TEFL classes where students must navigate both language and content learning. Materials that are too complex can impede learning, while those that are clear and accessible can significantly enhance comprehension and retention.

Despite the widespread use of original textbooks in TEFL courses, there is ongoing debate about their effectiveness in meeting diverse student needs. Some educators advocate for original textbooks, citing their comprehensive and authentic language learning experience. Others argue that these materials can be too challenging and may not align with students' proficiency levels or learning styles. This meta-analysis synthesizes findings from various studies to provide a comprehensive overview of students' perceptions of the readability of original textbooks in TEFL classes. By examining collective insights, this study aims to determine whether original textbooks effectively support students' learning and identify common challenges or areas for

improvement, ultimately guiding educators and curriculum developers in selecting and designing better-suited materials for their students.

B. Literature Review

Action-Based Theory Perception

Action-based accounts of perception proliferate diversely. To be a perceiver it is necessary to know what O'Regan and Noë call the laws of sensorimotor contingency—"the structure of the rules governing the sensory changes produced by various motor actions" (O'Regan & Noë 2001). Two sources of motivation for theories that make knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies necessary and/or sufficient for spatially contentful perceptual experience. The first is the idea that the visual system exploits efference copy, i.e., a copy of the outflowing saccade command signal, to distinguish changes in visual stimulation caused by movement of the eye from those caused by object movement. The second is a long line of experiments, first performed by Stratton and Helmholtz in the 19th century, on how subjects adapt to lens-, mirror-, and prism-induced modifications of visual experience. Perceiving a stable visual world establishes the platform on which all other visual function rests, making possible judgments about the positions and motions of the self and of other objects. (Gangopadhyay, 2010)

Factor Effecting Perception

As human beings discipline, the factors affecting perception develop from time to time. Two important factors exist in perception, namely: the factors that come from an individual that depend on personal psychology such as thought, feeling, willingness, sex, motivation, attention, etc. Every human being has different characteristics and temperaments which are also shaped by an individual's family and individual environments. Meanwhile second factor comes from outside of the individual such as stimulus, environment culture, and belief. Our life relates to the environment, both physical and social environment.

Several studies have been conducted about students' perception toward learning material focusing on different aspects, As Widyantoro, A., Jamilah, & Purnawan, A. investigate Text difficulty vs text readability: Students' voices. Their research result shows that there was a difference in the student's perception of the difficulty of the text and the readability level as being calculated using different readability formulas. One way of knowing whether texts developed or chosen by lecturers match the students' proficiency level is by analyzing the text's readability. Another study was conducted by Sultan et al. (2020). The objective was to investigate textbook discourse readability among junior high school students with poor reading ability based on gender, reading interest, and family socio-economic status. Another study was conducted by Sari, S.D (2022) about students's Perception of Readability of Comic-Based Physics Ethnoscience Learning Media on Sound Wave Material Using Microsoft PowerPoint Application. This study shows that the comic-based physics ethnoscience learning media on sound wave material using the Microsoft PowerPoint application is very good based on the perceptions of students. From this study, it is understood that students' perception toward textbooks was similar, they have average perception. One more interesting research dealing with students' perceptions is conducted by Jin (2012). This research shows that To provide an evaluation of the suitability of reading texts from the perspective of students in a university-based intensive English program, this study examined 53 international ESL intermediate learners' perceptions of reading texts for 14 weeks of reading proficiency lessons. Features evaluated include content, readability, exploitability, and authenticity of the reading texts.

The participants responded to a textbook evaluation questionnaire to express their perceptions concerning the features of the reading texts. Results indicated the extent of the appropriateness of the reading texts incorporated in the program's reading textbook used by intermediate learners of English. Further consideration must be given to text selection by including the aspect of authentic text presentation. Meanwhile, Nurdin all studies state that the students's perception toward the learning material and learning strategies in Writing Class showed a positive influence that the application both of Teacher-Centered Strategy and Students Centered Strategy in teaching writing had positive effects on students, it motivated and made the students enjoy in learning writing. Differing from previous researches, s research, the researcher wants to describe students' perception toward the readability of learning material in the Method of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. How the students perceive textbooks as learning material using the target language should be examined to know how they achieve the goal of teaching the learning process.

C. Methods

This presented study, uses a descriptive qualitative research design. This takes 38 students in the fourth semester of English Language Education at Slamet Riyadi University. This subject was taken purposively by those who take Method of TEFL Courses. The questionnaire was used as the instrument of this study to collect information about the perception of readability in learning material from the respondents. The implementation of an online survey would allow the researcher to distribute the questionnaire and collect the information of respondents at the same time (Tull, 1978). According to (Babbie, 1990) which was cited in (Creswell, 2012), the purpose of the survey was to obtain the data from the generalization of the respondents to create the conclusion, the characteristics, the behavior, and the actions of the respondents. The subject of this research must fulfill 20 close-ended statements that are going to be investigated. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants by using an online questionnaire: a series of questions specifically structured to gather survey data about a target audience or group of people conducted online.

The distributed questionnaire was given after all respondent completed their study for the Method of TEFL course. Those parts aimed to answer the first and the second research questions of this study. The collected data then be analyzed by applying the Likert Scale. Bowling (1997) on (McLeod, 2008) state that the Likert Scale was implemented in the research instrument that used fixed choice response formats and it was designed to measure attitudes or opinions. In this study, the choice of Likert Scale that was offered to the participants applied a choice of four pre-coded responses. The choice of responses consists of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree". In this study, each response had a score that was used to measure the participants' attitudes. Below is the score of each response within the participants' questionnaire. After the question was distributed and returned.

D. Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted by giving questions to students about their perception toward the readability of learning material that the respondent must master to be successful in taking Method of TEFL courses. The textbook is used in the Method of TEFL class entitled " Approaches and Method in Language Teaching by Jack C Ricard and Theodore S Rodger. This textbook consists of three

parts. Part I discusses Major language trends in twentieth-century language teaching. In general, this part explains the theory of language and theory of learning, the history of the development in methods of language teaching, also differentiation between the old method and modern method, and the difference between competence and performance. Part II Alternatives approaches and method. This section discusses the kind of method in language teaching. Part III Current communicative approach. This section serves theory of how to conduct communicative activities in foreign language classrooms.

It is important to dig into students' perception of the learning material, since psychological factors in learning English as a foreign language. In this study, the perception of learning material readability was investigated in six aspects.

Comprehensibility of the Learning Material

In this statement, the students investigated their perception of the Comprehensibility of the Method of TEFL Learning Material learning material. From the two statements given and five criteria consisting of (Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)), the percentage obtained for each criterion is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Comprehensibility of the Learning Material

Statement No (SD)	(SA)	(A)	(U)	(D)
1 5	9	3	5	3
10 4	8	3	5	5
8 4	15	1	3	1
17%	42%	9%	17%	24%

The table shows that 42% of students responded with "strongly agree," 9% responded with "agree," 17% responded with "undecided," 24% responded with "disagree," and 17% responded with "strongly disagree" regarding the comprehensibility of the TEFL learning materials. This data indicates that a significant portion of students have a positive perception of the clarity and understandability of the TEFL instructional materials. However, there is also a notable percentage of students who either feel neutral or have negative perceptions about the comprehensibility of these materials. Overall, it is evident that while many students find the materials clear, there is room for improvement to address the concerns of those who find them challenging to understand.

Vocabulary Familiarity and Technical Terms

To find students' perceptions toward vocabulary and technical terms used in the textbook used as learning material for the Method of TEFL course, the students were invited to choose options about the vocabulary difficulties, the familiarity of vocabulary, and the technical terms used in the textbook used as learning material. The result can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Vocabulary Familiarity and Technical terms

Statement No (SD)	(SA)	(A)	(U)	(D)
2 2	13	2	4	4
3 2	14	1	3	5

5 2	7	2	5	16
7 1	20	1	1	2
	34%	12%	20%	20%
				14%

The table shows that 34% of students found the vocabulary and technical terms in the textbook used in the Method of TEFL course to be very familiar, 12% found them quite familiar, 20% were undecided, and 20% perceived them as quite unfamiliar or very unfamiliar. This indicates that while a significant portion of students are comfortable with the terminology used in the textbook, there is also a considerable number who either feel neutral or find the vocabulary and technical terms challenging to understand.

Sentence Complexity

This research also investigates about sentence complexity of the learning material of Method of TEFL, as learning material of Method of TEFL course. To expose students' perception about it, the researcher gives close statements about sentence complexities. And the result can be seen in the following table.

Statement No (SD)	(SA)	(A)	(U)	(D)
4 2	13	2	4	4
6 8	12	1	2	2
20%	50%	6%	12%	12%

The table shows that 50% of students answered "strongly agree," 6% answered "agree," 12% answered "undecided," 22% answered "disagree," and 20% answered "strongly disagree." From this data, it is evident that students' perception of the readability of the textbook used in the Method of TEFL course is generally high. Most students (42%) comprehend the content well. They found the vocabulary and technical terms to be quite familiar, despite the sentences being complex. Many of the sentences in the textbook are compound-complex, which can be challenging. However, students employed skimming techniques to grasp the general ideas of the passages. The textbook's use of clear cohesion devices also helped students understand the learning material. This finding is supported by Stephen Krashen's comprehensible input theory of second language acquisition. Krashen posits that instructional material should be slightly above the learners' current level of understanding to be effective. The language used in the textbook aligns with this theory, providing content that is challenging yet understandable. Understanding how students perceive learning materials is crucial for lecturers when selecting textbooks and preparing classroom instruction. This feedback helps ensure that the materials chosen are effective in supporting students' learning and comprehension.

E. Conclusion

This study investigated students' perceptions of the readability of learning materials in a Method of Teaching English as a Foreign Language course. The results indicate that the majority of students have a positive view of the instructional materials. They found the materials to be clear, easy to understand, and beneficial for grasping the concepts being taught. However, a few

students highlighted that certain sections of the materials were overly complex and required further clarification. Based on these findings, it is essential for instructors to consider student feedback regarding the readability and clarity of the instructional materials. Adjustments should be made to address the areas identified as complex by students. Instructors are encouraged to provide additional explanations or supplementary resources for the challenging sections to ensure all students can follow along effectively. Furthermore, it is crucial for instructors to continuously evaluate and update the learning materials to keep them relevant and accessible to all students. By incorporating student feedback and making necessary adjustments, the learning process can be significantly improved. Ensuring that instructional materials are readable and understandable will enhance students' overall learning experience, making it more effective and efficient. Continuous improvement and adaptation of learning materials based on student perceptions will contribute to a more engaging and supportive educational environment. This proactive approach will help students better understand and retain the course content, leading to improved learning outcomes.

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