

# Chapter I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Selecting appropriate textbooks has always been a difficult task for English teachers around the world, and for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in particular. The senior high school English teachers in Taiwan are no exception. English textbooks in Taiwan used to be compiled and published by National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT). The policy of using a nationwide standardized textbook to teach English had lasted for the past decades until the year of 1999 when several educational innovations were implemented; two of them were to lift the ban on the textbook compilation and to empower each individual senior high school to select its own English textbook.

Ever since the control on the textbook compilation was released by the Ministry of Education (MOE), there have been numerous publishers producing English textbooks. However, without relinquishing the duty for the textbook compilation, the NICT, instead, plays the role as a textbook compilation censor, and the nongovernmental publishing companies are responsible for the textbook compilation and publication. Consequently, the English textbooks currently

circulating in the market have passed the censorship to get the publishing license. And, it is roughly estimated that up to the year of 2004, there has been ten sets of English textbooks available<sup>1</sup> in the market.

In order to select an optimal English textbook, schools have developed different textbook selection procedures. No matter how diverse the procedures may be, two kinds of procedures are surely involved in the selection process. The first procedure as mentioned above is conducted by NICT, which chiefly censors the contents of the textbooks to examine if they correspond to the Curriculum Guidelines for the Senior High School. The Curriculum Guidelines consist of many essential requirements such as increasing students' four language skills<sup>2</sup>, developing students' effective English learning strategies, making students more conscious of foreign cultures and so on. Only when the textbooks pass the censorship can they be published in the market.

The second procedure is conducted by each individual senior high school, which may have certain kinds of selecting mechanisms depending on the school's policy. Normally, the school authority will form a textbook selection committee to

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<sup>1</sup> The ten sets of textbooks available in the market are Nan-Yi, Far-East, Tung-Hua, San-Ming Hsieh version, San-Ming Sung version, San-Ming Chen version, Lung-Teng, Kang-Hsi, Han-Lin, and Chien-Hung.

<sup>2</sup> In the present paper, the "four language skills" refer to the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

decide which textbook will be adopted. The members for the textbook selection committee may vary from one school to another. The possible combinations of the committee members may be the principal, teachers, and parents; or the principal, teachers, and students; or teachers, parents, and other school faculty. No matter who the committee members are, teachers, no doubt, are the core members to determine which textbook will be selected.

In the selecting process, teachers may consider various factors such as the rationale of the textbook compilation, students' English proficiency, parents' expectations and so on. The factors teachers may take into consideration for textbook selection can broadly be divided into two types, *internal factors* and *external factors*<sup>3</sup>. The former refers to the factors related to the design and rationale of the textbook compilation per se, and the latter refers to those related to the entire educational environment and the people concerned<sup>4</sup>. The interplay between the two types of factors influences the English teachers' decision. The present research is, therefore, aimed at investigating factors affecting the English teachers' decision in selecting their English textbooks.

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<sup>3</sup> More discussion on these two factors will be revealed in the next two chapters.

<sup>4</sup> In the present paper, "the people concerned" refers to the people, who may have the influence on teachers' decision on textbook selection such as students, teachers themselves, parents, the principal, or school faculty.

## 1.2 Motivation of the Study

The present study is motivated by one of my experiences in 2001 when I was still a junior high school intern teacher. Just like other teachers, intern teachers had to attend every meeting concerning English teaching. I could still clearly remember one of the meetings I attended was related to English textbooks selection.

In the beginning, I was very excited to be able to participate in the textbook selection meeting, because it was the first time for the junior high schools to select their own textbooks<sup>5</sup>. However, to my disappointment, the selection process did not meet my expectations. Before the meeting, English teachers examined the potential textbooks based on the criteria provided by the school. The criteria only dealt with some basic internal factors such as how much vocabulary was provided, how grammar was introduced, and how the practice and exercise were presented, etc. After a rough examination and a short discussion, teachers, then, voted to single out the most favored textbooks. The whole process seemed sensible, but I was of the opinion that the criteria provided by the school authority were too simplified to include the entire factors teachers would have to take into account.

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<sup>5</sup> In order to cater for the first graders of the junior high school, who would be the first students receiving the nine-year integrated curriculum (2001), there were several new policies carried out in my school, one of which was to allow teachers to select the new textbooks.

As Sheldon (1988) indicated, selecting an appropriate textbook was such a complicated task that it should involve not only all the salient internal factors but also a large proportion of external factors. In fact, external factors play crucial roles in teachers' decision-making on textbook selection. The possible external factors include governmental educational policy, school principal's leadership, school faculty's efficiency, school spirit, teachers' background, parental pressure, students' English proficiency and so on. Noticing there were still many other aspects English teachers should consider in selecting textbooks, I was motivated to conduct the present research.

Initially, I intended to choose the junior high school English teachers as my research subjects but then I changed my subjects into the senior high school English teachers for the following reasons.

First, before the English teachers of the junior high school began to select their own English textbooks in 2001, their counterparts in the senior high school have already experienced it since 1999. Therefore, choosing senior high school teachers, who are more familiar with the textbook selection, as the subjects of the present study may facilitate the research more.

Second, there are a greater number of private senior high schools in Taipei. Thus, choosing the senior high school English teachers as the research subjects can show the different consideration patterns between the English teachers in public and private schools.

Third, through the screening of the Academic Attainment Testing (基本學力測驗), students studying at the same senior high school tend to have a similar English proficiency, which can also facilitate this research.

### **1.3 Purpose and Research Questions of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to identify senior high school English *teachers'* considerations in selecting textbooks. Meanwhile, *textbook compilers'* considerations are also explored to see if textbook compilers' concerns are in accordance with those of teachers. Specifically, the present study intends to address the following research questions:

1. What factors are senior high school English teachers generally concerned about in selecting EFL textbooks? And what are the priorities of these influencing factors?
2. Are there any differences between teachers of the *public senior high* and those of the *private senior high* in selecting EFL textbooks? What are the differences?

3. Are there any differences between teachers of the *urban senior high* and those of the *rural senior high* in selecting EFL textbooks? What are the differences?
4. Will *senior teachers* show different consideration patterns from those of *young ones* in selecting EFL textbooks? What are the differences?
5. Is it popular for teachers to use *checklists*<sup>6</sup> to evaluate internal factors in selecting textbooks? Are they satisfied with the checklists they have used?
6. What factors are the *compilers* generally concerned about, when compiling textbooks? Do those factors correspond to those of teachers'? What are the compilers' opinions about the evaluative checklists?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Ever since the nongovernmental publishing companies undertook the task of the English textbook compilation, there has been a large amount of literature dealing with the relevant issues. Despite the fact that plenty of studies have been done, the crucial aspect of what factors teachers may consider in selecting EFL textbooks is still neglected, because most of the studies focus either on the evaluation of the current English textbooks (Wu, 2002; Ma, 2002, etc.), or on how the textbooks are

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<sup>6</sup> More discussion on the checklists, which teachers adopt to evaluate textbook, will be presented in Chapter Two.

used (Li, 2003; Wang, 2004, etc.). Even if there are few studies (Chen, 2003; Chung, 2003) on the factors influencing teachers' textbooks selection, they only address the internal factors of the textbook without considering the external factors mentioned above. Furthermore, the factors compilers take into account when compiling textbooks are still an aspect that remains unexplored for most of the studies.

Unlike previous studies, the present study is aimed at investigating the influence of both internal and external factors on English teachers' textbook selection and textbook compilers' primary concerns for textbook compilation, which hopefully can make the following contributions.

First, English teachers themselves can be more conscious of their thinking process in selecting textbooks. With the help of the reflective thinking, they can make wiser decisions to select an optimal English textbook.

Second, the authorities concerned may be able to create a more favorable setting for English teachers to select textbooks after realizing what external factors may hinder their decision-making.

Third, textbook compilers can be more aware of what factors English teachers are most concerned about so that they can write or revise the textbooks to meet teachers' needs. Hopefully, this will greatly contribute to the refinement of the



future English textbooks.

### **1.5 Organization of the Study**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One describes the background, motivation, purpose and research questions, and the significance of the study. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature. Chapter Three introduces research method including subject selection, instrument design, pilot study and data analysis. Chapter Four presents the results of the study. Chapter Five discusses the important findings, and provides recommendations of the research and limitations and suggestions for future studies.