

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

In order to meet the current demands of the society and enhance national competitiveness, the Nine-year Integrated Curriculum was planned and developed by the Ministry of Education from 1997 to 2002. Then it was put into effect in elementary schools and junior high schools. According to the Ministry of Education (2004), “the curriculum is the major component of schooling so it must be reviewed and revised continuously in order to render school culture and educational results, thus promoting our national development.”

Curriculum reform plays an important role in the implementation stages of the Nine-year Integrated Curriculum. One of the influential decisions is that English courses for grade 5 and grade 6 in elementary school were implemented in the school year 2001, other than implemented in junior high school as before. In order to enhance students' English competence, most elementary schools in different counties and cities in Taiwan begin offering English courses well before grade 5, at grade 3 in Taipei County. Taipei City Government even decided that all students in all elementary schools in Taipei City begin learning English from grade 1 in the school year 2004. As a matter of fact, many children begin to learn English in kindergartens in Taiwan.

Another influential decision is that textbooks for elementary and junior high school education will be compiled according to the curriculum guidelines and submitted to the authority/agency in charge for review and approval. Thus, schools may select their own textbooks from all of the approved versions.

1.2 Motivation

Tandlchova, E. (1995) stated that textbook is considered not only as a source of skills and knowledge, but also a source of motivation and a learner-centered tool in an EFL classroom. Well-compiled textbooks will greatly improve both teaching and learning once they are utilized in an EFL classroom.

Besides, Cunningsworth (1995:5) claimed that coursebooks have multiple roles in language teaching and can serve as:

1. a resource for presentation materials (spoken and written),
2. a source of activities for learner practice and communicative interaction,
3. a reference source for learners on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.,
4. a source of stimulation and ideas for classroom language activities.,
5. a syllabus (where the coursebooks reflect the established learning objectives),
6. a resource for self-directed learning or self-access work, and
7. a support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain confidence.

Textbooks provide teachers with resources and supports for teaching because well-compiled ones can save much preparation time and energy to choose and produce teaching materials by themselves before classes. With the help of the ready-made teaching materials, teachers can engage much more time in improving their teaching methods, collecting concerned information about the lectures and correcting students' homework or tests.

Moreover, textbooks can serve as an access to authentic English and give a quick preview or review of classroom instruction for students. Students can learn easily and quickly in class with the help of textbooks and get some confidence and reliance in preparing the Basic Competence. Textbooks indeed affect teaching and learning strongly.

Undoubtedly, textbooks are the most convenient means for providing the basic structure that the teaching-learning system requires (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). Therefore, textbooks are widely used in all schools in Taiwan.

In the past, English teachers in all junior high schools in Taiwan adopted the English textbooks produced by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation of Ministry of Education (MOE). As a result of the implementation of the Nine-year Integrated Curriculum in 2002, the junior high school (JHS) English textbooks are no longer prescriptive. All junior high schools in Taiwan now have to select their own textbooks. With the open-door policy to the publishers of textbooks, JHS English teachers have to face a tough task to select the most appropriate ones for their students.

While there are no evaluation criteria for textbook selection for JHS English teachers, there are only checklists produced by Shih (2000) for the selection of English textbook in elementary schools and the evaluation criteria in senior high schools in Chen's (2000) study. In order to select the most appropriate textbook, it is urgent to develop the evaluation criteria for textbook selection for JHS English teachers. Furthermore, the understanding of every different version as to its advantages and disadvantages will be helpful to the teachers in the textbook selection.

In addition, each student's English proficiency level is quite different because students have begun to learn English from different grades in different elementary schools. The problem of the gap between grade 6 in elementary schools and grade 7 in junior high schools becomes serious, but there are no related information and resolution provided for the teachers. This indicates the importance of textbook selection. Ideal textbooks have to bridge the gaps between grade 6 and grade 7. Thus, JHS English teachers have to spend lots of time comparing different sets and investigating both strong and weak points of each set in order to make a wise

decision.

JHS English teachers seem to play a vital role in selecting the appropriate textbooks for their students and teaching. It is necessary and crucial to make an evaluation among the current sets as a reference for JHS English teachers.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

All the current sets are required to be compiled according to the guidelines of the Nine-year Integrated Curriculum and have to pass the examination and inspection of the Textbook Compilation and Evaluation Committee appointed by the Ministry of Education. Since each different set on the market has its own merits and demerits, all JHS English teachers have to be well-informed. An evaluation of the current used textbooks becomes urgent and helpful for teachers.

Furthermore, the opinions of the JHS English teachers using their selected textbooks are also included in this study for the reference of the compilers and publishers of the textbooks. The editors and publishers can compile the better ones to meet both teachers' and students' needs. Besides, the JHS English teachers will expect to know the usage of the other sets and the opinions of their users as a reference of selecting the appropriate ones.

It is expected that the JHS English teachers will gain a comprehensive understanding of the new textbooks and acquire some guidance in evaluating them through the findings of the research. It is also expected that the compilers and publishers of the textbooks will follow the JHS English teachers' opinions to compile the satisfactory ones.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The Nine-year Integrated Curriculum has been put into practice since 2002,

but the innovative revolution really puts a great pressure on JHS teachers. Above all, they have to choose one set of textbooks for their teaching among many other sets. It is a tough task for JHS English teachers because many factors must be taken into consideration, especially the contents and students' English proficiency level. This study aims to evaluate the current widely used English textbooks to gain a deeper insight into the features of these new sets and then provide a reference for JHS English teachers to save their time and relieve their anxiety. Furthermore, the opinions of JHS English teachers using their chosen set will be helpful for textbooks writers and editors to compile high quality textbooks.

1.5 Research Questions

This study will focus on the textbook selection of junior high schools by surveying JHS English teachers in Taipei City and Taipei County. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the criteria highlighted by teachers when evaluating the new textbooks?
2. Who are the committees of English textbook selection in each individual junior high school?
3. What is the procedure of English textbook selection in each individual junior high school?
4. What are the junior high school English teachers' opinions of the contents and layout of the new teaching materials?
5. What are the teachers' opinions of the workbooks?
6. What are the teachers' opinions of the teachers' manuals?
7. In what way are JHS English teachers satisfied or dissatisfied with the textbooks chosen?

8. Why do JHS English teachers change the textbook in the second semester?

Does the changed textbook solve the problems? Are students more interested in the newly changed textbook?

1.6 Limitation of the study

Although the Nine-year Integrated Curriculum has been put into practice since 2002, the adopted versions are all tentative ones. The revised versions were used in 2003, but only two volumes of these new versions are used in the academic year 2003-2004 when the study is conducted. Therefore, the findings may not extend to the whole set of new English textbooks. Furthermore, due to time constraint, investigation areas are only confined to some junior high schools in Taipei City and Taipei County. Consequently, the results may not be applied to all the junior high schools in Taiwan.