

Evaluation of Materials for Grade 10 Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

The use of course book has become a debatable issue, especially in the field of English Language Teaching. Its use is deemed useful as it could provide a clear organization of the lesson, a syllabus, and a guideline for teachers to select materials for students. Nevertheless, it could also be argued that the use of course book also present some issues, for example, some teachers may rely on course book without making informed decisions about how to use it appropriately. This study aimed to evaluate a course book used in a secondary high school. The evaluation focused on how the course book accommodate students' speaking skills and learning styles. The course book was analyzed using both external and internal checklists adapted from current literature. In addition, the analysis of institution, teacher, and student needs were also conducted in order to see whether the course book fulfilled their needs. The results showed that the external evaluation did not demonstrate any issues. However, the internal evaluation revealed that the tasks did not cater most students' learning styles as well as communicative activities. This study recommends further material adaptation and supplementation for this course book to better suit the teaching context.

Keywords: course book, evaluation, English teaching *materials*

INTRODUCTION

Materials development covers not only a field of study but also a practical undertaking. While as a field, it focuses on the principles of the design and evaluation of language teaching materials (Tomlinson 2011), as a practical undertaking, it refers to any attempt to provide sources for language input, to exploit them to maximize the intake, and to stimulate output (ibid). When it comes to materials development and selection, Hutchinson (1987, p.37) says that "the selection of materials probably represents the single most important decision that the language teacher has to make." Nonetheless, selecting materials often depends on teacher intuition and convenience than on a systematic analysis regarding the needs of learning contexts (Spratt 1999). Therefore, this paper aims at presenting materials design based on principled analysis and evaluation, referring to a process that includes measuring the potential value of learning materials (Mishan & Timmis 2015). In addition, this paper also aims at analyzing a course book based on differentiation in terms of learning styles.

This paper will first highlight the theoretical background of the role of course book and the aspect of learning styles. Then, it will examine the teaching context including the teacher's and the students' needs. Also, this paper will present external and internal checklists to evaluate the course book with the focus on speaking skills and learning styles.

LITERATURE REVIEW The Role of Course book

Course books are considered an unavoidable part of the language classroom due to their roles in the learning process (Hamidi et al. 2016). Nevertheless, McGrath (2016) states that their use has been a debatable issue involving a degree of continuum. He further argues that while there are some teachers who always rely on course books as that is what they are required to do, others never use course books because they disdain to do so. Meanwhile, between the two extremes are teachers utilizing course books

for certain purposes (*ibid*). Despite these different perceptions, as Hutchinson and Torres (1994) maintain, course books not only survives, but it also thrives as their roles have been widely recognized.

The use of course books itself presents both advantages and disadvantages. Ur (1996) mentions that course books provide a clear organization of the lesson and serves as syllabus consisting of language content. In addition to ready-made activities course books offer (Allen 2015; Kirkgoz 2009), they are beneficial for teachers' professional development as they may inform methodology and allow teachers to improve their practice through the utilization of course books (Edge & Wharton 1998). Nevertheless, course books also present some issues in language teaching. Littlejohn (1992) warns that they can reduce teachers' role to supervise preplanned events because teachers may use them without making day-to-day decisions regarding what and how to teach. Moreover, no course books can efficiently meet individual differences of learners (Tomlinson 2003a), and only few of them apply language acquisition principles in designing materials (Tomlinson 2010). Therefore, adaptation, referring to adding, reducing, and modifying materials (McGrath 2016), and supplementation, referring to adding something new to materials (*ibid*), are necessary for teachers to ensure the appropriacy of materials for particular circumstances.

Differentiation in terms of Learning Styles

Several researchers have attempted to define the term 'learning styles'. Reid (1995) defines them as one's preferred ways of retaining and understanding new information. Moreover, Dunn and Griggs (1988, p. 3) asserts that they are characteristics that "make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others." Dornyei (2010) also maintains that they are not static since other factors, e.g. educational experiences, can shape one's learning styles. He further draws distinction between learning styles and cognitive styles which are often used interchangeably. As Rayner (2000) states, while cognitive styles refer to a stable and internalized dimension of one's thinking, learning styles are more external and less stable due to the influence of the environment. Additionally, learning styles are commonly associated with multiple intelligence (Ehrnman et al. 2003). However, Gardner (2013) cited in Strauss (2013) explains that the two concepts are different because while intelligence is one's ability for learning, learning styles refer to how a person deals with a range of materials. Synthesizing the definitions mentioned previously, in this paper, learning styles are defined as learners' preferences for acquiring knowledge and approaching learning.

Regarding types of learning styles, there are some researchers who have classified them (e.g. Cohen & Weaver 2005; Ehrman & Oxford 1990). Despite the different terms they use, they share similarities in categorizing style dimensions such as (1) visual students who rely on their sight, (2) auditory students who prefer listening and speaking activities, (3) extroverted students who enjoy interactive learning, (4) introverted students who are more independent in their work, (5) global students who like to guess possibilities, and (6) analytic students who concentrate on details (*ibid*). However, Oxford (2003) argues that learning styles are not dichotomous, but they represent a continuum or multiple, intersecting continua. A student, for instance, can be more introverted, or equally auditory and visual but with lesser kinesthetic involvement. Ultimately, as Felder and Henriques (1995) note, although the categories are by no means comprehensive because no finite number of dimensions could comprise individual differences, the usefulness of learning style models are recognized as they are helpful for teachers to know the distribution of learning styles in class.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative in nature, aiming to gain in-depth understanding of a phenomenon under scrutiny (Gray, 2014). Purposive sampling was used to collect data, focusing on taking samples which meet the research purposes (Gray, 2014; Robson & McCartan, 2014). The course book evaluated in this paper was entitled "Pathway to English" intended for grade 10 of Senior High School students in Semarang, Indonesia. This book was written by Indonesian teachers and produced by a local

Indonesian publisher. Additionally, it is not a compulsory book for all Indonesian schools, but the private school in this teaching context has used it as a required book for teaching English.

Document analysis was used to evaluate documents, in this case course book, to elicit meaning (Bowen, 2009). The course book was analyzed using both external and internal checklists.

The external evaluation, using Yes/No questions and commentary sections, is utilized to examine the blurb of the course book (McDonough & Shaw 2003). Based on the teaching context, the criteria for this evaluation are adapted from McDonough et al. (2013) and McGrath (2016). Both checklists share some similarities of criteria such as the target audience, presentation of the course book, and visual materials. Basic information e.g. the intended students is important to be known in advance to ensure the suitability of topics for their age and proficiency (McDonough & Shaw 1993). Furthermore, the layout course book needs to be evaluated because it involves the clarity of instructions and the structures of activities (Tomlinson 2003b). Also, it is essential in this context to know whether the course book presents images because most of the students are visual (Oxford 2003).

Additionally, both checklists offer different criteria which can be integrated into the checklist. This criterion regarding syllabus suggested by McGrath (2016) is included because this teaching context uses functional and topic-based syllabus, thus, ensuring the appropriacy of the syllabus in the course book with the required syllabus is important. Moreover, the criterion considering the use of course book in the local context (ibid) is incorporated because as Basturkmen (2010) states, global course books usually do not reflect students' needs in particular contexts. Also, Smith (2011) argues that course books should give teachers space to apply their beliefs. Therefore, the criterion regarding the methodology in the course book proposed by McDonough et al. (2013) is included to know whether the course book reflects the teacher's beliefs and the methodology suggested by the government, i.e. CLT. Finally, the criterion concerning language skills is an additional item to ensure that the course book covers four skills for examinations.

Regarding the internal evaluation involving in-depth analysis into the materials (McDonough & Shaw 2003), two speaking tasks in one unit covering the topic of advertisement will be evaluated (Appendix 5). The checklist uses a rating scale to assess how well criteria address particular aspects (McGrath 2016). Furthermore, this checklist is developed based on the teaching context and the literature regarding speaking and learning styles. As Tomlinson (2003b) suggests, evaluators should develop criteria considering the context than applying ready-made criteria for all contexts. Therefore, regarding speaking, the principles of speaking tasks by Hedge (2000) are adapted to suit the context. Hedge (2000) states that speaking tasks should allow students to practice speaking more freely so they can use the language for purposeful communication. This principle is included (no.1) because the students need to practice speaking for the oral examination where they should use the language for communicative purposes, e.g. presentations and conversations. Additionally, speaking tasks should encourage negotiation of meaning (ibid). This principle is also incorporated (no.2) because as Ellis (2003) argues, speaking skills involve the ability to repair a breakdown in communication. Moreover, the principle requiring tasks to enable students to express ideas (no.3) is included (Hedge 2000). Such tasks can encourage discussion of students' interests, which results in engaging activities (ibid). Thus, these speaking criteria can evaluate whether the tasks are suitable for the oral examination and able to cater the students' needs in which most of them are extroverted.

Regarding learning styles, the checklist is developed using the framework proposed by Ehrman and Oxford (1990) and Cohen and Weaver (2005). These frameworks are adapted because they offer three dimensions of learning styles that are strongly associated with second language (L2) learning (Oxford 2003). The first dimension is sensory preferences (no.4-6) referring to the physical learning channel which students favor (Cohen & Weaver 2005). This dimension is chosen in the checklist because one of its aspects covers the learning style most of the students prefer, i.e. visual. Similarly, personality types (no.7-8) comprising extroverted and introverted are included because the former is the characteristic of most of the students. Additionally, according to Ehrman and Oxford (1989, 1990),

this aspect has significant relationships with L2 proficiency so it is also important to address this area. Ultimately, desired degree of generality (no.9-10), involving global learners who focuses on the main idea and analytical learners who likes analyzing details, is also incorporated. As Felder and Silverman (1988) argue, this aspect is essential because it is associated with cognition affecting the way they progress towards understanding in learning. Therefore, it is expected that this checklist not only cover most of the students' learning styles, i.e. visual and extroverted, but it opens to, as Dornyei (2010) states, the possibility of multiple learning styles the students might have.

The course book was analyzed with reference to its contextual use. The analysis also focused on (1) teaching context analysis; (2) teacher and student needs analysis; and (3) whether or not the course book has accommodated different learning styles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing Institutional Factors

In evaluating course books, analyzing institutional factors is important because the aspects of teaching contexts affects how course books can be used (McGrath 2016). This analysis adapts McDonough et al.'s (2013) considerations because they discuss both the constraint in a teaching program and the wider context of language policy. The information about the teaching context obtained through an interview to an English teacher in the school. The summary of the information can be seen in Table 1.

The context is a private secondary school in Semarang, Indonesia, and the intended students are grade 10. Each class has 20 students, and English is taught 4 hours a week. Furthermore, the syllabus used is the multi-syllabus which Harmer (2001) describes as the combination of several syllabus, i.e. the functional syllabus covering language functions and topic-based syllabus providing different topics. While the students in grade 12 should take the examination provided by the government (Furaidah et al. 2015), the 10-grade students need to take the school examination administered in written tests, involving listening, reading, and writing; and oral tests e.g. presentations and conversations.

Table 1. Institutional Factors adapted from McDonough et al. (2013)

No	Factors	Teaching context
1	Level of educational system	Grade 10 in secondary school in Semarang, Indonesia
2	Private/public sector	Private
3	The number of students	20 students
4	Time	4 hours a week
5	Syllabus	Functional and topic-based syllabus
6	The types of tests used	Written tests covering listening, reading, writing; Oral tests covering speaking, e.g. presentations and conversations. (The new materials proposed that can be applied in one meeting focuses on preparing the students for the oral test).
7	The role of English in the school	English as the medium of instruction for English
8	The curriculum used	Curriculum 2013 promoting Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as stipulated by the Indonesian government
9	Freedom given to teachers	Teachers are given opportunities to adapt and supplement materials although there is a compulsory course book they should use.

Moreover, this private school follows the government's language policy promoting English as a medium of instruction for English lessons (in s. 55 of Government Regulation 1998). Also, the curriculum 2013 stipulated by the government, aiming at developing communicative skills through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Nur & Madkur, 2014), is also implemented. Ultimately, although the school has a compulsory course book, the teacher is allowed to modify materials given to the students.

Teacher and Student Needs Analysis

Teachers are not passive beings who only transmit knowledge, but their needs and beliefs should be considered in materials development (Tomlinson & Masuhara 2004). Regarding teacher needs, Masuhara (2011) proposes three categories namely (1) personal needs, e.g. age, educational background, beliefs; (2) professional traits, e.g. teaching experience; and (3) preferred teaching styles and methodology. Based on the information obtained through an interview to the teacher, the teacher is a female aged 25 who holds a masters' degree in TESOL. She has advanced English language proficiency (IELTS 7.0) and has two-year teaching experience. As she holds the belief that one should use English in communications to master it, she tends to use the communicative approach in her practice. Also, she attempts to cater individual learning styles in her teaching by modifying learning materials.

Table 2. Teacher needs analysis, Adapted from Masuhara (2011)

No	Factors	Teacher Needs
Personal needs		
1	Age	25 years old
2	Gender	Female
3	Educational background	Bachelor's degree in English language education
4	Belief about language learning	English should be used for communications. Individual learning styles are catered through some modifications in learning materials.
Professional traits		
5	Language proficiency	Advance; IELTS score 7.0
6	Teaching experience	Two-year teaching experience
Preference for teaching styles and methodology		
7	Teaching styles and methodology	Communicative approach is preferred.

Concerning student needs, factors e.g. age, proficiency level, language learning experiences, expectation of the course, and preferred learning styles should be considered (Cunningsworth, 1995; Masuhara 2011; McDonough et al. 2013). Five students were interviewed to ask their preferences regarding the factors mentioned previously. In this context, the 10 grade-students are intermediate level aged 16-17. They have been learning English formally for approximately 9 years because, as Supriyanti (2012) states, English has become a compulsory subject in Indonesian primary schools. Due to the written and oral examinations, they expect that this class can equip them with the skills needed for the tests. Ultimately, their preferred learning styles seems to be visual and extroverted. However, there might be some possibilities of other learning styles existing in the classroom as the styles deal with individual students (Xu 2011).

Table 3. Student Needs Analysis, Adapted from Cunningsworth (1995), Masuhara (2011), and McDonough et al. (2013)

No	Factors	Students Need
1	Age	16-17 years-old
2	Proficiency level	Intermediate
3	Previous language learning experience	9 year-learning experience in formal education
4	General expectation of the course	The class can equip them with the skills needed for the written and oral tests.
5	Preferred learning styles	Visual; extroverted

Course book External and Internal Analysis

As Mishan and Timmis (2015) suggest, the results of the materials evaluation, involving the course book and two speaking tasks in one unit, should become the basis of the rationale for the materials adaptation and supplementation. The results of the external checklist reveal that the course book is suitable not only for the age and the proficiency of the students, but also for the syllabus of the course as it consists of functional and topic-based syllabus. In addition to the clear presentation and the visual materials the course book offers, it covers the four skills and is produced in Indonesia, implying the possibility that it may be appropriate for Indonesian contexts. Furthermore, as stated in the course book's cover, the communicative approach, which is suitable for the teacher's preferred method and the students' need for the oral examination, seems to underpin the course book.

Table 4. Results of External Checklist, Adapted from McDonough et al. (2013) and McGrath (2016)

No	Criterion	Yes	No	Additional Comment
1	Is the course book suitable for the age of the learners?	✓		
2	Is the course book suitable for the learners' level of proficiency?	✓		
3	Is the course book suitable for the syllabus of the course?	✓		Based on the table of content, the course book consists of functional syllabus (e.g. invitations, requesting/offering something) and topic-based syllabus (e.g. advertisement, memorable event, songs)
4	Is the layout and presentation clear?	✓		
5	Does this course book contain visual materials (e.g. photographs, charts, diagram)?	✓		
6	Has this course book used in a local context?	✓		It is published in Indonesia so it is possible that it has been used in this context as well.

7	What language skills does the textbook contain?	From the cover, the author states that the course book covers 4 skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking).
8	What is the author's view on methodology?	From the cover, the author states that this course book stimulates discussion and promotes communication in the classroom. Thus, it could be argued that the course book is in line with the communicative approach.

Nevertheless, the results of the internal evaluation demonstrate some issues. Although the external evaluation shows that the course book promotes communicative activities, in the first task, the results reveal that 60 % of the criteria is rated 1 (totally lack) and 40% of the criteria is rated 2 (weak). These findings mean that this task is lack of communicative activities based on Hedge's (2000) principles and does not cater for most of the students' learning styles, i.e. visual and extroverted, although it might be suitable for introverted students and analytical students who, as Xu (2011) argues, are in favour of activities requiring details.

The rating scales (1-5) represent: 1: totally lacking; 2: weak; 3: adequate; 4: good; 5: excellent

Table 5. Results of Internal Checklist

No	Criterion (Speaking) adapted from Hedge (2000)	Task 1 (Scale 1-5)	Task 2 (Scale 1-5)
1	The task allows learners to practice their speaking skills more freely rather than in a controlled way.	1	2
2	The task encourages negotiation of meaning	1	2
3	The task enables learners to express their own ideas, preferences, and opinions	1	2
No	Criterion (Learning Style) adapted from Ehrman and Oxford (1990); and Cohen and Weaver (2005)	Task 1	Task 2
Sensory Preferences			
4	The task supports visual learners (e.g. pictures)	2	2
5	The task caters for auditory learners (e.g. listening to conversations, oral directions).	2	2
6	The task address the need of kinaesthetic learners (e.g. drawing, hands-on experiences).	1	1

Personality Types			
7	The task caters for extroverted learners (e.g. interactive learning tasks such as conversations, discussions, and presentations).	1	3
8	The task supports introverted learners (e.g. independent work or pair work).	2	3
Desiree degree of generality			
9	The task meets the need of global learners (e.g. interactive and communicative activities).	1	2
10	The task address the need of analytic learners (e.g. providing activities which require details or specific information).	2	2

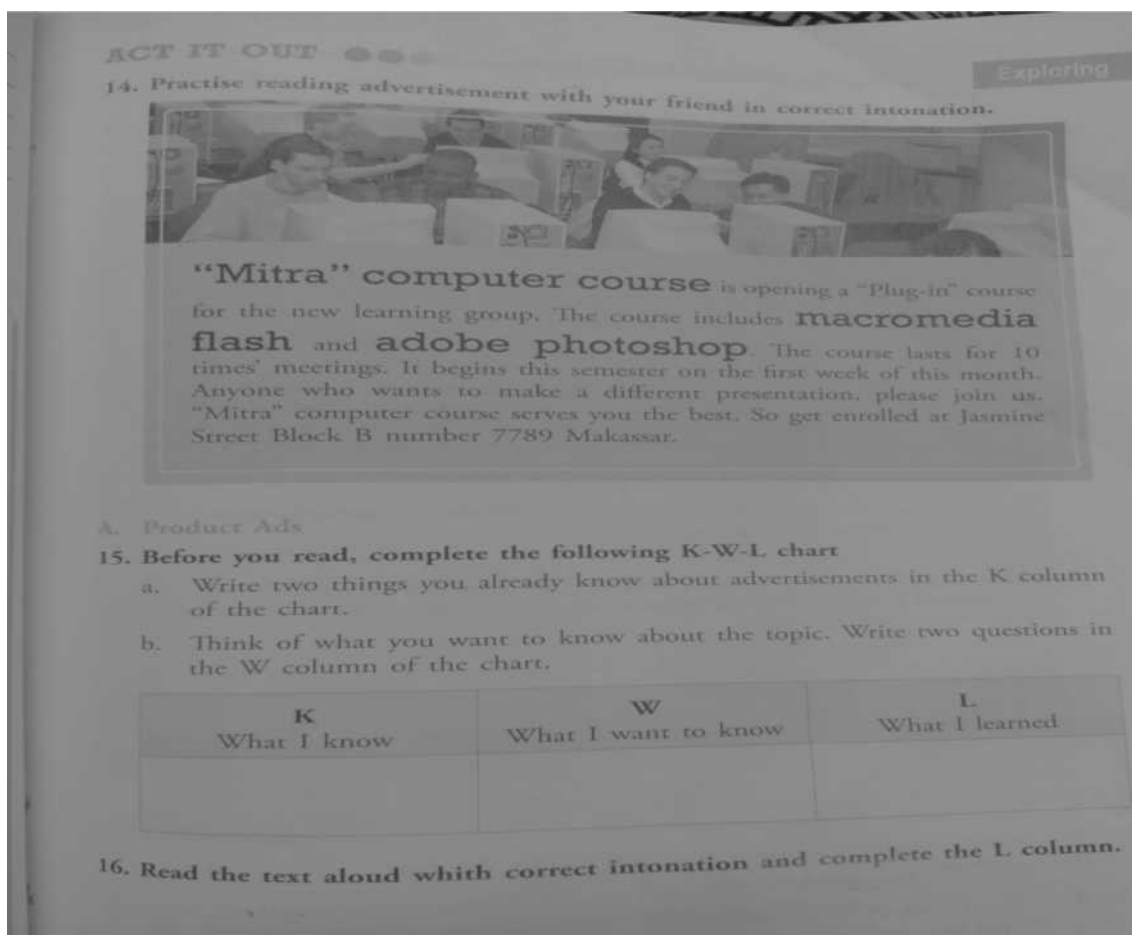


Figure 1. Sample 1: Task 1

In the second task, 70 % of the criteria is rated 2, 20% of them is rated 3, and 10% of the is rated 1. The rating still implies that the task is weak in fulfilling Hedge's (2000) principles of speaking tasks. Although the task is adequate for extroverted and introverted students due to the employment of conversations and pair work (Oxford 2003), it does not address properly the other kinds of learning styles. Therefore, based on the results of these evaluations, there is a need for adaption and

supplementation of the materials because as Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) argue, there is a mismatch between the materials and the students' needs regarding learning styles and speaking.

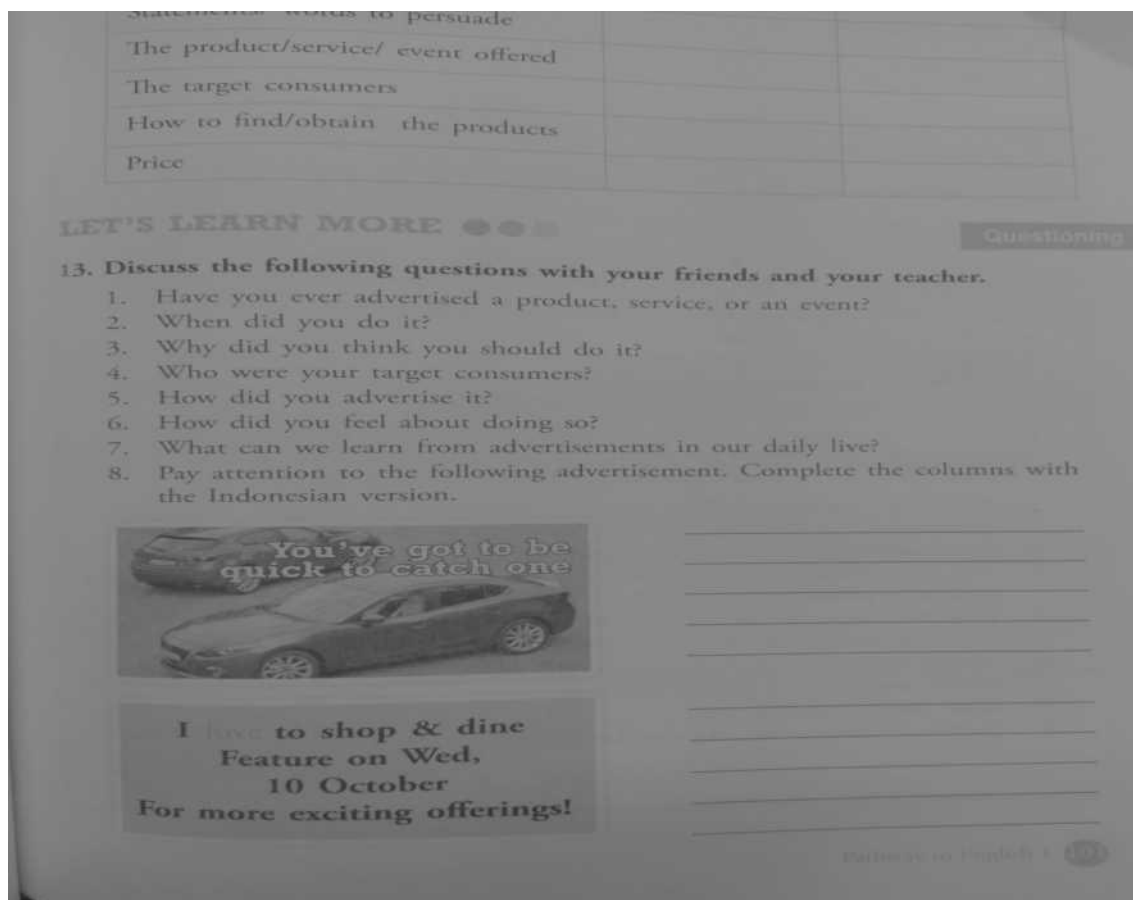


Figure 2. Sample 2: Task 2

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to evaluate the course book entitled “Pathway to English” in relation to how the content of the book addressed the institutional, teacher, and student needs as well as differences in learning styles. The results of the evaluation of the speaking tasks in the course book entitled “Pathway to English” show that the adaptation and supplementation of materials are required as the tasks do not support the students' learning style in this context and are not communicative enough. This study, however, is limited to one course book, thus the results might not be generalisable to other research settings. Further research may evaluate course books by incorporating both teachers and students' perceptions towards the course book.

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