

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES FROM HISTORY TEXTBOOKS RESEARCH

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Abstract

The textbook is one of the important resources in the process of teaching and learning. The textbooks, specifically for the history subject, not only transport factual knowledge but also historical images, notions of space and time, and social values in which society needs to convey to the next generation. In Brunei Darussalam, the most common teaching materials are textbooks and worksheets. The primary focus of this study is to analyse the upper primary history textbooks that was previously used in the country. The impetus for research in this area arose from the recent educational reform changes in Brunei Darussalam where the teaching of history in the upper primary level has been replaced by social studies. This study undertook the design of descriptive and content analysis research. It is descriptive because investigations were conducted on the content of the three upper primary history textbooks. The content analysis on the other hand was used to examine explicit and implicit objectives and aims of the previous primary history curriculum portrayed in the textbooks. There were two main issues identified from the textbook research study. Firstly, the aims and objectives were not evenly distributed in the content of the textbooks and secondly, the lack of relevant facts and evidence showed in the content of the textbooks. One of the interesting observations in all the textbooks studied was on the profound emphases of the Monarchical system. This may perhaps be a unique way of approach in setting the aims and objectives of history curriculum by reflecting the national ideologies of Brunei Darussalam. Based on the above findings, it is recommended that further research study in history textbooks should be made in order to align it with the current teaching of social studies in the upper primary school level. Future study should center on gaining a better understanding on how to develop appropriate textbooks and how to improve the use of textbooks in the social studies lessons.

Keywords: Textbook research, history, Brunei Darussalam

1 INTRODUCTION

There are different perspectives towards textbook research by researchers worldwide. According to Marsden (2001), the three types of reaction to textbooks identified were, the first 'bemoans their presence and campaigns for prohibition', secondly, 'accepts their necessity, but demands measures for effecting reform', and finally, is 'to ignore the textbook as a subject worthy of serious study'.

It is assumed that the existence of anti-textbooks was due to the aims towards an innovative school environment. The commitment to change in which the teacher would function not as employee but as a true or extended professional, and the believe that such innovation would not happen when a teacher is dependent on textbooks (Marsden, 2001). However, there are researchers who viewed the relevance in textbooks research (such as Gopinathan, 1983; Whitley, 1988; Wakefield, 1998). Similarly, UNESCO, since 1992, in co-operation with Georg-Eckert Institut fur international Schulbuchforschung in Germany has been developing the UNESCO International Research Network with 322 experts from 51 countries from all regions around the world. The network provided information on new approaches, institutions and projects carried out in various countries with regard to researches into textbook development and revision of history, geography and social science textbooks (UNESCO, 2003). In addition, Watts (2000) pointed that one of the instances of the abiding concerns of the Council of Europe from the 1950s has been over history textbooks. There has been anxiety over a range of issues, such as the emphases on political and national, even nationalistic,

history; the neglect of the history minorities, women, culture and much of Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, bias both religious and implicit.

Textbook research warrants a serious study. Despite much attention having been paid to make teachers aware of the value of audio-visual aids and giving them some training in the production of aids and supplementary materials, the textbook remains a vital part of student learning and will continue to be so into the next millennium. Furthermore, Marsden (2001) cautioned that there must be a balance between using and applying the contents of the textbooks, and in the development of the pedagogy acquired by the teacher.

If most teachers were over-reliant on textbooks and used them mechanically, while educational specialists were at the same time advocating high levels of teacher initiative and a more critical and flexible use of textbooks, then there was some neglect of duty in not developing the latter skills. Equally, if teacher initiative was shown to have educational advantages, and publishers were producing only teacher-proof materials, then they too were failing in their duty. (Marsden, 2001, p. 2).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Role of School Textbook as a Transport Factual Knowledge

According to Hummel (1988), the school textbook assumes numerous functions. Firstly it normally provides the child with one of his/her first contacts with the printed word and the book. This is particularly important and significant in developing countries where the school textbook is very often the first book in the home and may serve the parents as well as the students. It is one of the first, if not the first, sources of reading matter. Bierman et al. (2006) supported this view and emphasized that for decades, the printed textbook has been the means by which factual knowledge is both organized and distributed to students. They further argued that textbooks served to gather and bound an established body of knowledge, and to function both as mechanism for initial learning and as a reference of knowledge. Hence, the Textbook serves as one of the first source of reading materials which can be act as a catalyst for first learning and reference knowledge and it also can act as a medium of communication between teachers and students or between students themselves.

Dramatic changes is happening in technology as we approach to the next millennium where electronic media are a commonplace and comfortable part in academic life and raise the question of how textbook fit into students' cultural and learning environment. Bierman and colleagues (2006) argued that textbooks are not dead but their roles and appearance are changing fast. They predicted that the textbook's function will be as a guide, interweaving and coordinating a variety different learning exercise and organizing hub of an integrated learning environment where the students experience is the key. They further added that "the goal here is to retain the core stability and authority that make the textbook so valuable while at the same time to provide the flexibility, timeliness, and inquiry-focused approach that the web and other electronic resources offer" (Bierman et al., 2006, p. 306).

2.2 The Role of Textbook as a Medium of Transmission of Values

The content of textbooks and the dominant ideology coincide to a considerable extent, and this leads to the assumption that textbooks and teaching materials do have an impact beyond the classroom. They do not only transport factual knowledge but also those historical images, notions of space and time and social values which a society wants to convey to the next generation. Crawford (2004) stated that "school textbooks are crucial organs in the process of constructing legitimated ideologies and beliefs and are a reflection of the history, knowledge and values considered important by powerful groups in society" (p. 2). While Apple (1993), one of the pioneers in textbook research stated that textbooks are "...conceived, designed and authored by real people with real interests ...published within the political and economic constraints of markets, resources and power" (p. 46). According to Ying and Young (2007), textbooks and learning materials have the power to transmit knowledge, build skills, and shape the way learners interact with the world.

2.3 History Textbook Research in the Context of Brunei Darussalam

According to Terao (2001), textbooks should be most directly affected by the characteristics and the change of the national curriculum. Textbooks are defined as a major teaching and learning material in school education, and therefore the primary history textbooks in Brunei Darussalam (hereafter, referred to as Brunei) were created in accordance with what the aims and objectives laid by the Curriculum Development

Department of the Ministry of Education in Brunei. It is obvious that the content of the textbooks with regard to the objectives and the aims of the curriculum can be considered as a non-negotiable condition.

Brunei itself has a textbook dominated culture in its schools, and thus, the impact of textbooks on achievement is self-evident (Mahadi & Shahrill, 2014). The history textbook is one of the important supporting materials in classroom teaching and learning that has been provided by the Curriculum Development Department for the teachers and the students in Brunei. The department is responsible in disseminating the resources available for the teaching of all the subject areas, in addition to the teaching curriculum of all subjects, in all Government Brunei schools. Because of its centralized curriculum, every school uses the same syllabuses and textbooks. Textbooks and worksheets usage in other subjects, such as mathematics and science are also evident as the most used resources in classrooms (Shahrill, 2009; Yong, 2010).

According to the history syllabus for upper primary provided by the Curriculum Development Department (1990), the general aims of history education at primary levels in Brunei are to create a common perception of the past; to appreciate the contribution of the past towards the development of mankind; to inculcate students' sense of national identity through the study of history as a basic foundation to love their country and to promote the interest in learning history. The objectives are to develop an understanding of chronological sequence; to develop consciousness and awareness of continuity and change towards their country through the study of history; to provide a change for the students to compare and contrast and appreciate the significance of similarities and differences and make simple informed judgment about the past such as cause and effects; to acquire basic skills in collecting, organizing, recording and presenting information; to develop basic skills in recognizing, understanding and using chronological convention such as BC, AD, decade and so on; begin to assess the value of stories and simple written sources as piece of evidence.

In this study, the primary focus will on be on the three history textbooks that were previously used in Brunei upper primary classes. These sampled sources were self-selective as there were no other relevant textbooks available to analyze (at the time of study). The three textbooks are the Primary 4, 5 and 6 history textbooks for Brunei Darussalam (or known in Malay Language as *Sejarah bagi Sekolah Rendah Negara Brunei Darussalam*). Given in Table 1 below are summaries of the units covered in the Brunei primary history textbooks. In general, they cover a very large period of time from the primitive eras to the middle of the 19th Century. The contents are divided into chapters and sections by each historical period and are arranged in chronological order. The content focus of the history textbooks seemed to be on Brunei history only. However, world history is also covered within the context of its relationship with Brunei history, which includes the neighboring countries, and Brunei's relation with the European countries. The textbooks generally consist of texts, illustrations, pictures, maps, figures, tables, glossaries, suggested extra activities for the students to do at the end of each chapter, and also a summary. As stated in the textbook by the Curriculum Development Department (2002), the main aim of publishing and producing the history textbooks for Primary 4, Primary 5 and Primary 6 is to produce textbooks that reflect the culture and identity of Brunei so that the students can practice them. The content also encourages various activities in teaching and learning history. The uniqueness of the history textbooks observed for the upper primary levels in Brunei lies in the introduction page of each chapter where verses from the Quran were given as quotes. These indirectly connects with the moral or values of the stories presented in each chapter.

Table 1. Summaries of the Units covered in the Brunei Primary History Textbooks.

Levels	Primary 4 Textbook	Primary 5 Textbook	Primary 6 Textbook
Units	Introduction: What is History and why do we study it	The coming of Islam to Brunei	Brunei in the 16 th Century
	The Early History of Brunei	Brunei Sultanate	Brunei Sultanate
	The Early Life of Brunei People	The Expansion of Islamic Influence	Brunei Diplomatic relations with European Countries
	Trade in Brunei Long Ago	The Expansion of Brunei Kingdom	Treaty Agreement Brunei-British

The impetus for research in this area arose from the recent educational reform changes in Brunei where the teaching of history in the upper primary level has been replaced by social studies. The education system in Brunei has recently undergone a major educational reform known as *Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad Ke-21* or translated to English Language as the National Education System for the 21st Century (and better known as SPN21) (Mahadi & Shahrill, 2014; Mundia, 2010, 2012; Omar et al., 2014; Salam & Shahrill, 2014; Shahrill & Clarke, 2014). It is anticipated that within these early stages of reformed curriculum, findings from this study may provide some suggestions to the curriculum developers in their on-going quests in improving the primary school syllabus for all subject areas. Moreover, this particular textbook research study as well the findings achieved, can also be anticipated as a recommendation for which further research or researches can be replicated and extended.

This study was guided by the research question “To what extent does the contents of the textbooks portray or match with the aims and objectives provided by curriculum developers of Brunei?”

3 METHODOLOGY

The approach of this study follows the design of descriptive and content analysis research. It is descriptive because investigations were conducted on the content of the three upper primary history textbooks. The content analysis on the other hand was used to examine explicit and implicit objectives and aims of the previous primary history curriculum portrayed in the textbooks.

A quantitative method was used to represent the frequency of explicit and implicit types of each objective and the aims of the Brunei primary history curriculum featured in the textbooks. The most common way to interpret content analysis data was through the use of frequencies, that is, the number of specific incidents found in the data, and the percentage and/or proportion of particular occurrences to total occurrences. The gathered statistical data will reveal any broad patterns in the content of the textbooks.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analyses of the textbooks covers data information on the sampled sources by defining the unit analysis, deciding the codes that were used, constructing the categories for the analysis of the sampled sources, conducting the data analysis and finally, in summarizing the analyses. The themes were constructed according to the general aims and objectives of history education at the primary levels in Brunei. The results presented will cover four conceptual themes in which each will address the research question to be investigated. The themes are a common perception of the past, the national identity, the contribution, and promoting interest in the learning of history.

4.1 A Common Perception of the Past

There are 12 chapters in the sampled sources. Each sentence and paragraph from the 12 chapters was identified explicitly or implicitly in order for it to be categorized into the theme of ‘a common perception of the past’. There were 74 sentences in the summarized data collected. The data were then coded into eight categories. The categories are Settlement, Evidence, Early Kingdom, Transportation, Relationship, Religion, Administration, and Trade.

Table 2. Frequency of Categories in each Sampled Sources for the Common Perception of the Past.

Categories	Primary 4 Textbook (N=22)		Primary 5 Textbook (N=31)		Primary 6 Textbook (N=21)		Total (N=74)	%
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Settlement	4	18.2	0	0	0	0	4	5.4
Evidence	3	13.6	7	22.6	4	19.0	14	19.0
Early kingdom	5	22.7	5	16.1	1	4.8	11	15.0
Transportation	2	9.0	0	0	0	0	2	3.0
Relationship	1	4.5	2	6.6	5	23.8	8	11.0
Religion	1	4.5	5	16.1	0	0	6	8.1
Administration	2	9.0	10	32.6	9	42.3	21	28.4
Trade	4	18.2	1	3.2	2	9.5	7	10.0

From Table 2, the category 'administration' was significantly higher with 28.4% than the other categories, and 'transportation' was significantly lower with only 3%. For each of the sampled sources in Table 2, categories for 'settlement' and 'transportation' were only mentioned in the Primary 4 textbook, and none in the Primary 5 and Primary 6 textbooks. The findings also showed that there is an increased percentage in the categories of 'relationship' and 'administration' as the levels progressed. In contrast, decreasing patterns in percentages were observed in the 'settlement', 'transportation' and 'early kingdom' categories.

4.2 National Identity

For the conceptual theme on national identity, there were 30 sentences in the summarized data collected. The coding for this theme was given in three categories namely, Religion, Administration, and Tradition. The findings in Table 3 indicated that the highest percentage for each category is on 'religion' (46.6%), followed by 'administration' (36.7%), and 'tradition' with a slightly lower percentage of 16.7%.

Table 3. Frequency of Categories in each Sampled Sources for National Identity.

Categories	Primary 4 Textbook (N=7)		Primary 5 Textbook (N=15)		Primary 6 Textbook (N=8)		Total (N=30)	%
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Religion	2	28.6	11	73.3	1	12.5	14	46.6
Administration	1	14.3	3	20.0	7	87.5	11	36.7
Tradition	4	57.1	1	6.7	0	0	5	16.7

The above results also indicated a pattern that shows the 'tradition' category is mostly emphasized in the Primary 4 Textbook, 'religion' heavily emphasized in the Primary 5 Textbook, and 'administration' significantly emphasized in the Primary 6 Textbook. Interestingly, there is no aspect of 'tradition' mentioned in the Primary 6 Textbook.

4.3 Contribution

For the conceptual theme on contribution, there were 40 sentences in total in the summarized data collected. The six categories of coding for this theme were, Labeling, Evidence, Administration, Relationship, Religion, and Expansion.

Table 4. Frequency of Categories in each Sampled Sources for Contribution.

Categories	Primary 4 Textbook (N=3)		Primary 5 Textbook (N=21)		Primary 6 Textbook (N=16)		Total N=40	%
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Labeling	1	33.3	2	9.5	4	25	7	17.5
Evidence	1	33.3	5	23.8	0	0	6	15
Administration	1	33.3	4	19.0	9	56.3	14	35
Religion	0	0	5	23.8	0	0	5	12.5
Expansion	0	0	4	19.0	0	0	4	10
Relationship	0	0	1	4.8	3	18.6	4	10

The results in Table 4 above shows that the 'administration' category had the highest percentage with 35%, followed by 'labeling' (17.5%), the 'evidence' mentioned in the sampled sources with 15%, 'religion' (12.5%), and 'expansion' and 'relationship' with 10% each.

4.4 Promoting Interest in Learning History

There were 24 sentences in total in the summarized data collected for the conceptual theme on promoting interest in learning history. The nine categories here are Story-telling, Quiz, Experiment, ICT, Drawing, Discussion, Scrapbook, Visit and Role Play. In Table 5, the percentage distribution ranged from the highest percentage of 25% for 'quiz' to the lowest percentage of 4.2% for the categories 'Story, ICT and Visit'.

Table 5. Frequency of Categories in each Sampled Sources in Promoting Interest in Learning History.

Categories	Primary 4 Textbook (N=9)		Primary 5 Textbook (N=7)		Primary 6 Textbook (N=8)		Total N=24	%
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Story	1	11.1	0	0	0	0	1	4.2
Quiz	2	22.2	1	14.3	3	37.5	6	25
Experiment	1	11.1	0	0	1	12.5	2	8.3
ICT	1	11.1	0	0	0	0	1	4.2
Drawing	1	11.1	1	14.3	2	25	4	16.7
Discussion	1	11.1	1	14.3	1	12.5	3	12.5
Scrapbook	1	11.1	2	28.6	0	0	3	12.5
Visit	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	1	4.2
Role play	1	11.1	1	14.3	1	12.5	3	12.5

4.5 Distribution of the Themes in the Sampled Sources

Given in Table 6 below is the summarized distribution of each of the conceptual themes from the sampled sources. The finding shows that the category 'the common perception of the past' had significantly higher percentage (44%) than the other themes.

Table 6. Distribution of the Conceptual Themes in the Sampled Sources.

Conceptual Themes	Total no.	Percentage (%)
A Common Perception of the Past	74	44.0
National identity	30	17.9
Contribution	40	23.8
Promoting Interest in Learning History	24	14.3

4.6 Issues Identified from the Research Findings

There were two main issues identified from this textbook research study. Firstly, the aims and objectives were not evenly distributed in the content of the textbooks and secondly, the lack of relevant facts and evidence showed in the content of the textbooks. Analyses of evidences from the sampled sources also revealed that the contents of the textbooks were mainly portrayed on how the country is governed. One of the interesting observations in all the textbooks studied was on the profound emphases of the Monarchical system. The textbooks revealed that the Monarchical System plays the major role towards developing, establishing and maintaining prosperity of the country. Apart from the Monarchical System mentioned in the sampled sources, Religion was also significantly emphasized in the Brunei upper primary history curriculum. However, the Brunei Sultanates were equally as important because they played major roles in spreading and establishing the religion. These findings may perhaps be a unique way of approach in setting the aims and objectives of history curriculum by reflecting the national ideologies of Brunei.

In addition, the evidence from the findings here shows that the most contributions from the early kingdom of Brunei to the current system of government were mainly from the Brunei Sultanates. In contrast, national identity, were less emphasized. From the results given earlier, only 17.9% categorized as national identity was mentioned in the textbooks, and these were mainly on topics such as tradition and cultural practices exercised by the major ethnic group in Brunei.

It is evident that the content of Brunei primary history textbooks does match, or in other words, are in line with the aims and objectives given by the Brunei curriculum developers. Besides, the contents of the Brunei primary history textbooks fulfills and presents the intended outcomes of the Brunei primary history curriculum, even though the aims and objectives may not be evenly distributed in the content of the upper primary history textbook.

5 CONCLUSIONS

From the analyses conducted in this study, it can be concluded that the contents should be evenly distributed within the aims and objectives of the curriculum. The findings concurred with Ying and Young

(2007) in which textbooks and lesson materials are significant resources in transmitting knowledge to the learners. By evenly distributing the aims and objectives of the history curriculum in the content of the textbooks, these will benefit the students and the country itself.

This present study focused on the upper primary history textbooks used prior to SPN21. In the context of Brunei, this is an issue, which is both significant and relevant especially in the development of new social studies textbooks currently being used in the country. This study provides useful insights specifically for the first author who is a teacher educator in the field of social studies and history. These insights are equally meaningful for those who are concerned with the development of the history and social studies curriculum, namely, university planners, policy makers, curriculum developers, coordinators and teachers of history and social studies in schools. It is very important to these groups to understand and make serious attempts to try to develop and improve the status and the quality of the textbooks, and the teaching and learning of social studies and history in the primary and secondary schools. The findings obtained in this study portrayed how the sampled sources were defined, analyzed and categorized. And this could hopefully stimulate awareness among teachers, academics and curriculum developers.

Based on the above findings, it is recommended that further research study in history textbooks should be made in order to align it with the current teaching of social studies in the upper primary school level. Future study should center on gaining a better understanding on how to develop appropriate textbooks and how to improve the use of textbooks in the social studies lessons. Additionally, from the research findings, there are several areas that may also be interesting to follow up for further study or studies. For instance, comparative analyses of the current primary and secondary social studies textbooks used within the present educational reform in Brunei, and whether there are any improvements in the ways to promote students' interest in the learning of history and social studies.

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