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Jl. Z.A. Pagar Alam No. 26, Labuhan Ratu Bandar Lampung, 35142

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# INVESTIGATING THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF AN ESP COURSEBOOK *ENGLISH FOR ACCOUNTING*

Luluk Iswati<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

Corresponding E-mail: [luluk007@umy.ac.id](mailto:luluk007@umy.ac.id)

## Abstract

*Textbooks play an essential role in the teaching of ESP (English for Specific Purposes), especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. Finding out the philosophical foundation of a commercial textbook can be a basis of whether or not that textbook is suitable for a particular learning context. Hence, this study aims to describe and analyze the philosophical foundation of an English for Specific Purpose (ESP) coursebook entitled 'English for Accounting' published by Oxford University Press, and to reveal the inferred intent of the book. This study employs a qualitative design with a content-analysis approach, in which data are described verbally. The data making was done by describing and analyzing the textbook using Littlejohn's adapted model (2011) consisting of describing the book, analyzing the contents, and making inference. The findings show that the philosophical foundations of the textbook are eclectic, as the book employs the principles of progressivism, critical pedagogy, and reconstructivism. Regarding the intent, the book is written in order to facilitate learners to use spoken and written English for communication in various accounting business settings.*

**Keywords:** *philosophical foundation, ESP, coursebook*

## INTRODUCTION

As there has been a growing demand in the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) among English as a Foreign Language learners, the role of textbooks becomes increasingly essential. Sheldon as cited in Radic-Bojanic & Topalov (2016) urges that textbooks offer tremendous benefits for both teachers and learners. The need of commercial ESP textbooks that are widely available in the market becomes almost absolute since ESP teachers, who are basically English teachers, are usually not familiar with the content knowledge of ESP. Consequently, there is often mismatch among the used textbook, learners' needs and language capability, and the curriculum. It is to say that not all commercial textbooks are suitable with a certain learning context,

since basically, their philosophical foundation does not always match with the local culture, situation of the learning context, and the learners. There have been many studies under taken regarding ESP textbooks development or evaluation (Iswati, 2019; Munir, n.d.; Parizoska & Rajh, 2017; Saragih, 2014; Trisyanti, 2009), but is hardly any study that describes and analyzes the philosophical foundation of an ESP coursebook. Moreover, there have been many studies that investigate the philosophical foundations of curriculum and teaching (Hasan, 2001; Mardiana & Suyata, 2017; Meredith, 2003; Suprihatin, 2007), but there is no study yet which focuses on exploring the philosophical foundation of a textbook used in teaching, especially in EFL contexts. Investigating the philosophical foundation of a textbook is essential

because it can serve as an evaluation or decision making whether in principle the textbook is suitable for the intended learners or not. This study attempts to describe the philosophical foundation of the textbook “English for Accounting” published by Oxford University Press as well as to find out the intent of the textbook and its impact to learners.

Teaching materials are important aspects in a curriculum. In education, the philosophical foundation that becomes the basis of curriculum development is usually reflected in its teaching materials. Many studies have been carried out to examine the values of English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks (Ilyas, 2015; Parlindungan, Rifai, & Safriani, 2018; Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Widodo, 2018). By explicit and implicit analysis, studies on ELT textbook evaluation aim to scrutinize the hidden values, curriculum, and ideology spread in either government-endorsed textbooks or commercial ones. A study by Xiong & Qian (2012) was conducted to discover the hidden ideologies in English textbooks used in China. The study reveals that the use of “we” instead of “you” implies values of kinship, solidarity, and power-free relation. Similarly, Baleghizadeh & Motahed's study (2010) shows that equal relation in social contexts are upheld in many British and American ELT textbooks used in Iranian schools. Meanwhile, a study undertaken by Cho & Park (2016) confirms an unresolved issue related to the underrepresentation of some minority groups in Korea that implies the need of re-conceptualization of national identity among Koreans. Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw (2019) found in their study on EFL textbooks that social problems are not depicted and that lives are described monotonously that do not represent the real condition. Those

studies show that although philosophical foundation is not explicitly stated, the issues found in them imply that understanding the philosophical foundation of teaching materials can be a basis to for a decision whether to use or not to use the book.

According to Yi (2013), philosophy deals with “the knowledge of nature, society, and our thinking” (p. 275). Hence, philosophy's value lies in the search of fundamental value through realistic and critical inquiry. Similarly, philosophy offers premises to reveal truth by understanding “the nature of existence, humankind, and its role in the world”(Ranjan Dash, 2017, p.3). Philosophy in education has frequently emerged since the mid 20th century, and what makes it distinctive is its aim which is to investigate what is not known, not certain, and not decided (Simpson & Duemer, 2011). As stated by Alwasilah (2014) there are a number of philosophical theories that are referred in education: essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, existentialism, reconstructivism, and critical pedagogy. Essentialism holds a principle that in order to succeed in building students' character and impose the essence of science to students, education should go back to embrace and reinforce traditional values. Essentialism sees the importance of transmitting cultural heritage to the next generation and maintains that humans should belong to a society. In teaching and learning process, teachers' role is more dominant as they are authoritarian. Perennialism believes that human beings are naturally rational, so directing them to learn vocational skills is strongly opposed. This philosophy suggests that students should be taught general subjects, not specific nor technical ones.

According to Gezer (2018), both essentialism and perennialism see that

materials are the most important aspect in the process of teaching and learning. Progressivism urges that educational curriculum should contain subjects that are relevant to students' needs and interests, and knowledge can be obtained from experience (Alwasilah, 2014). Under this educational philosophy, interaction among students is encouraged as a way to gain social understanding and passive learning by memorizing facts should be discouraged. Learning by doing is one bold characteristic of this educational philosophy. Education is viewed as democracy, thus the process of education should be central to students' needs (Suprihatin, 2007).

Reconstructivism wants cultural transformation in education as a result of injustice and basic mistakes in educational practices. The role of teachers is important in transforming the culture through social reconstructivism, and education is aimed not merely to gain credit or knowledge. Self-actualization is the ultimate goal that can be achieved through tools called knowledge, trainings, and skills. Both progressivism and reconstructivism put learners as the most important aspect in education process (Gezer, 2018), therefore their role is substantial as they are expected to actively participate during teacher's tasks. Furthermore, Gezer, (2018) states that teachers who embrace progressivism and reconstructivism usually have the following indicators: (1) they tolerate heterogenous culture; (2) they promote democratic environment; (3) learners' needs and interests become the consideration in preparing the teaching learning process.; (4) they make students aware of the importance of analyzing social, political, and economic issues. Existentialism teaching puts respect towards individual uniqueness, and this

philosophy maintains that self-reflection is important in education. Thus, the role of teacher is as a facilitator that provides exposure to students, and students are encouraged to self-direct their learning based on their individual pace of learning. According to Mardiana & Suyata (2017) existentialism paradigm sees learners as the primary source of learning. Critical pedagogy considers social context of learners and at the same time upholds social change (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2019). Mclean as cited by Jeyaraj et al. (2019) urges that in teaching, critical pedagogy puts learners as source of knowledge in addition to teacher, so the teaching process is more student-centered. As both students and teacher can be the source of knowledge, there is a reciprocal relationship in which teacher and students learn from one another. Critical pedagogy also emphasizes the need of critical thinking (Freire in Jeyaraj et al., 2019).

The teaching of English as a foreign language in the current era has demanded the teaching of 21st century skills that consist of important six skills: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, citizenship/culture, and character education/connectivity (Anugerahwati, 2019). Critical thinking becomes a key factor in learning because it stimulates students to have increased concentration, better analytical ability, and enhanced thinking process (National Education Association, n.d.). Having critical thinking means being critical in examining information as well as arguments, being able to observe patterns and to make knowledge significant for the real life (Fullan & Scott, 2014). Collaboration allows learners to work in group and solve problems from various perspectives. Surowiecki in Bialik & Fadel (2015) states that to solve problems in this

complex era, there should be a collaboration among people with various backgrounds and skills in order to formulate the most suitable approach. Furthermore, Bialik & Fadel (2015) suggest that collaboration can be established through agreement in group and task assignment. Besides, teaching listening skill can promote idea sharing, receiving, and applying. Communication in this digital era has come in various forms and its role is increasing important. In the context of teaching and learning, Bialik & Fadel (2015) state that the teaching communication skill should involve collaborative activities and authentic communication in order to ensure that there is no misunderstanding. Good communication skill refers to the ability to convey ideas clearly and meaningfully (Anugerahwati, 2019). Furthermore, Bialik & Fadel (2015) urge that conventional way of teaching communication skill which is done through presentation is less effective as the addressed message does not guarantee understanding. Creativity is “the ability of students to make use of their knowledge and/or talents to create something new, or to produce something in a new way” (Anugerahwati, 2019). According to Lamb, Doecke, & Maire (2017) creativity refers to the ability to identify problems, generate ideas, and solve problems. Creative skills can be developed as long as it is pedagogically and didactically supported. Citizenship or culture refers to the ability to think as a global citizen and to consider global issues by understanding that there are different values in working together to solve global issues (Fullan & Scott, 2014). Training students’ citizenship deals with making them aware about their surroundings. They are also encouraged to recognize and appreciate where they are from as well as their

society values (Anugerahwati, 2019). Character education or connectivity deals with developing students’ skill to interact with their peers and people to make the world a better place. Thus, teacher should drive them to become the world citizen that is “responsible, caring, and contributing.”(Anugerahwati, 2019 p.167).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The current study employs qualitative design with content analysis method. As a qualitative study, the instrument used in the current study is the writer as the human instrument. The object of this study is a textbook published by Oxford University Press entitled “English for Accounting.” The book was used by the third semester students at the Department of Accounting, Faculty of Economics and Business Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. Following Zuchdi & Arifah (2019), the procedure of this study consists of data making (unit, samples, and recording), and data reduction (making inference and analysis). Due to time constraint, this study uses sampling by selecting three out of six units of the textbook. In order to get representative data from the whole units, the sampled units consist of unit 1 (the beginning), unit 3 (the middle), and unit 6 (the last). For data analysis, this study adapts Littlejohn's model (2011) consisting of describing the textbook, analyzing the contents, and drawing inference. Describing the textbook is done based on the explicit information about the textbook i.e. Statements about the textbook, the textbook’s physical appearance, and main stages of the textbook’s instructions. Then, the content is analyzed in details in order to find out the underlying philosophical foundations and the implied intent of the textbook.

## DISCUSSION

Adapting Littlejohn's model (2011), the description of the textbook aims at describing what is explicitly stated or what is apparent in the textbook that primarily reports the general information of the textbook, components of the course package as a whole, and the content. Then, each component of the sampled unit was analyzed in order to find the underlying philosophical foundations and intent of the book.

### *Explicit information of the book*

The textbook, entitled English for Accounting was written by Evan Frendo and Sean Mahoney, and published by Oxford University Press in 2011. It is part of Oxford Business English Series. Regarding the course package as whole, the book is designed for occupational purpose. It can serve as either a supplementary or main textbook. In addition, the book can be used for self-study. In term of level, the book is intended for intermediate level of English language learners. The book is designed for adult people working in accounting and finance. Therefore, it supports the philosophy of *progressivism*, because as stated by Alwasilah (2014) progressivism encourages the development of curriculum which is based on learners' needs and interests. Learners who use this book are those who study accounting. Their reason for choosing the book is due to practical reason, because they need to master the communicative language functions when they deal with their future work in accounting or in business communication settings.

Coming as a package, the book is equipped with CD Multi-ROM for listening practice. Both the cover and contents of the book is colored. Regarding the materials, the book

provides audio, audio script, answer keys, extra practice, and tests. Both teacher and learners can access those components of materials. With regard to syllabus overview and wordlists, both teacher and learners can also access them. The fact that what comes as a package is meant to be accessible by both teacher and students indicates that in the teaching learning process, teacher and students are supposed to have equal power and relation. Both have equal access to the learning and teaching sources (audio, audio script, answer keys, guidance on use of the material, syllabus, extra practice, wordlist, and tests). Therefore, it can be seen that in terms of access to knowledge source, this textbook applies critical pedagogy, because according to Cho (2012) cited in Jeyaraj et al., (2019), one of the characteristics of critical pedagogy is egalitarian power in relationship. Based on this finding, both teacher and students have the same power to access the learning materials, so this is in line with the principle of critical pedagogy.

The route that the materials go through is explicitly stated in the back cover of the textbook, and each unit comprises some sections: 'Starter', 'Partner files', 'Output', 'Did you know?', 'Test yourself'. Interactions are promoted through Starter section, whether teacher-student interaction or student-student interaction. It can be seen from the existence of dialogs. Partner files section also stimulates communication through role- plays. Additionally, Output section encourage learners to be engaged in a discussion on certain topic. Hence, the components of each unit tend to adopt progressivism, because the sections promote learners to be active participant. A 21st century skill is also instilled through communication.

**The content of the book**

Regarding contents of the textbook, it is generally divided into three main elements: unit title, topics, and useful language and skills. The topics are highly related to the practice of accounting and finance: introduction to accounting, financial statements and ratios, tax accounting, auditing, management accounting, and investment. They are very relevant and practical for learners who study in Accounting Department. The useful language and skills are also frequently used in business settings of accounting field. It supports Alismail & McGuire (2015) and Mattarima & Rahim Hamdan, (2011) who suggest that materials in language learning should be made contextual and relevant to learners' real world. The finding related to the teaching of practical content in this textbook is in line with Szepe (2010) who states that practical knowledge should be taught in order to respond to the demand of today's industrial era with unpredictable changes. Therefore, it contains the characteristic of progressivism philosophy. The useful language and skills stimulate learners to be active participants during the learning process through various activities. Therefore, the textbook promotes student-centered learning rather than teacher-centered learning. Student-centeredness is prominent in progressivism and critical pedagogy, because both progressivism and reconstructivism put learners as the most important aspect in education process (Gezer, 2018).

Regarding the tasks, they are described in term of what learner is expected to do, the type of response that learners should give, the focus of language, mental operation during activities, with whom the activities are conducted, and what input learners deal with and what output

are expected from them. After examining those aspects in three sampled units of the book, the finding is shown in the figure as follows.

| I. WHAT IS THE LEARNER EXPECTED TO DO? | UNIT 1 | UNIT 3    | UNIT 6 |
|--|--------|-----------|--------|
| <b>A. TURN-TAKE</b>                    |        | frequency |        |
| Initiate                               | 7      | 3         | 6      |
| Scripted response                      | 14     | 14        | 6      |
| <b>B. FOCUS ON</b>                     |        |           |        |
| Language/system (rules or form)        | 0      | 0         | 2      |
| Meaning                                | 13     | 6         | 8      |
| Meaning/system/form relationship       | 7      | 10        | 3      |
| <b>C. MENTAL OPERATION</b>             |        |           |        |
| Decode semantic meaning                | 5      | 2         | 1      |
| Select information                     | 5      | 7         | 4      |
| Deduce meaning                         | 5      | 9         | 4      |
| Repeat identically                     | 2      | 3         | 2      |
| Apply general knowledge                | 7      | 5         | 4      |
| Deduce language rules                  | 3      | 4         | 2      |
| Express own ideas/information          | 4      | 3         | 4      |
| <b>II. WHO WITH?</b>                   |        |           |        |
| Learners individually simultaneously   | 15     | 15        | 9      |
| Learner to whole class                 | 1      | 0         | 1      |
| Learner individually outside the class | 0      | 0         | 0      |
| Learners in pairs                      | 4      | 1         | 2      |

Figure 1. The task types and the frequency

The turn-take section shows that learners are mostly expected to respond based on the given scripted responses. Both Unit 1 and Unit 3 clearly show a high contrast on turn-taking activities which are dominated by scripted responses. Rather than taking initiative to answers, learners are supposed to give prescribed responses.

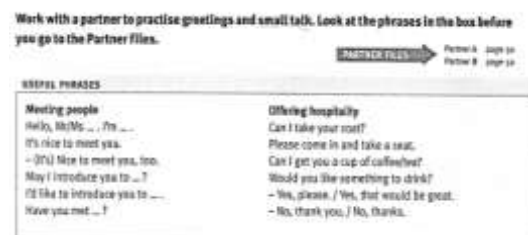


Figure 2. A task that requires prescribed responses

Figure 2 shows a task in which learners' responses in practicing the expressions of meeting people and offering hospitality are already provided. The useful phrases written in the box serve as a guidance during learners' practice and to ensure that they use the phrases appropriately. Giving scripted responses is one way that Richards (2015) mentions to provide support for learners to accomplish the given task. Through this task, learners are required to practice their communication skill using the



language expressions as prescribed above. Practicing communication skill is important in today's era, and this is in line with one of the 21st century skills which is communication. This, once again, promotes progressivism because the task promotes learners to be active participants in learning.

Concerning the focus of the activities, most activities are focused on meaning understanding rather than language system understanding. In fact, there is almost no activity which promotes the teaching or internalization of language system (rules or forms). Some activities combine the focus on meaning/system/form relationship, but they do not explicitly teach rules. For example, learners are asked to match some accounting terms and their definitions. In order to do the task successfully, learners need to focus on the meaning of each word, not the form. This is in line with Nunan as cited by Saragih (2014) who urges that in designing tasks that promote the use of authentic language, the emphasis should be on meaning, not on form. Norris and Ortega (2001) as cited in (Ollerhead & Oosthuizen, 2012) remark that focus-on-meaning approach concerns with giving exposure of meaningful input, so that the process of language acquisition is more incidental, rather than intentional. This is what Krashen pinpoints as a natural approach of language acquisition. Concerning mental operation, almost all cognitive skills are taught through the tasks, but the most frequent mental operation that is promoted is deducing meaning. An example of a task which requires deducing meaning can be seen in the figure below taken from Unit 1.



Figure 3. A deducing-meaning task

To complete the task as shown in Figure 3, learners have to guess the meaning of a word when it is put in a certain context. When the guessing of meaning makes sense, the answer is probably correct. The importance of teaching skill to deduce meaning is in line with the finding of a previous study on ESP conducted by Adnan (2011) who states that most ESP teachers consider deducing meaning as an important skill that should be taught to ESP learners. The second most frequent mental operations that are apparent from the tasks are applying general knowledge and selecting information. It means, the tasks can be accomplished using learners' knowledge general knowledge. Tasks that require deducing meaning promote critical thinking, because learners have to be critical in deducing meaning using the given context. The critical thinking skill which is attempted to be nurtured through this kind of task that frequently appears throughout the units implies the employment of critical pedagogy philosophy. With regard to input and output to learners, in detail it is described in the following figure.

| III. WITH WHAT CONTENT?                    |    |    |    |
|--|----|----|----|
| A. INPUT TO LEARNERS                       |    |    |    |
| a. Form                                    |    |    |    |
| Extended discourse: written                | 4  | 6  | 4  |
| Extended discourse: oral                   | 6  | 4  | 2  |
| Words/phrases/sentences: written           | 11 | 7  | 8  |
| Words/phrases/sentences: oral              | 0  | 0  | 0  |
| Graphic                                    | 0  | 0  | 0  |
| b. Source                                  |    |    |    |
| Materials                                  | 21 | 16 | 11 |
| Learners                                   | 1  | 0  | 1  |
| Outside the course/lesson                  | 0  | 0  | 0  |
| c. Nature                                  |    |    |    |
| Authentic                                  | 3  | 0  | 0  |
| Non-authentic                              | 17 | 16 | 12 |
| B. EXPECTED OUTPUT FROM LEARNERS           |    |    |    |
| a. Form                                    |    |    |    |
| Words/phrases/sentences/discourse: oral    | 10 | 5  | 6  |
| Words/phrases/sentences/discourse: written | 15 | 13 | 8  |
| b. Source                                  |    |    |    |
| Materials                                  | 12 | 12 | 6  |
| Learners                                   | 7  | 3  | 6  |
| c. Nature                                  |    |    |    |
| Authentic                                  | 0  | 3  | 3  |
| Non-authentic                              | 19 | 13 | 10 |

Figure 4. Input and output of the learners

As seen in Figure 4, the form of task is dominated by written form rather than oral form, and the tasks mostly require learners to deal with vocabulary, expressions, and sentences, rather than discourses. Concerning the source of input, the majority is in the form of materials as prescribed in the textbook. Rarely are learners asked to generate materials for their learning source. In terms of the nature of the materials, it can be seen that only few materials are authentic. In fact, most materials are non-authentic as they are already designed for language learning purpose. The lack of authentic materials for this ESP textbook negates what Dudley-Evans (1998) as cited in Kusni (2013) claims that authentic materials should be use in ESP course, as they represent what actually is encountered in the real life world. Furthermore, Kusni (2013) maintains that authentic materials promotes real context of learning.

In term of the output, it mostly requires learners to produce written phrases, sentences, and discourse, rather than oral ones. The source of output is also generated from the available materials in the textbook, not from learners. This is to say that what is expected to be

produced by learners is based on what is previously taught in the textbook. In term of the nature of the output, it is mostly non-authentic, although there are few authentic tasks.

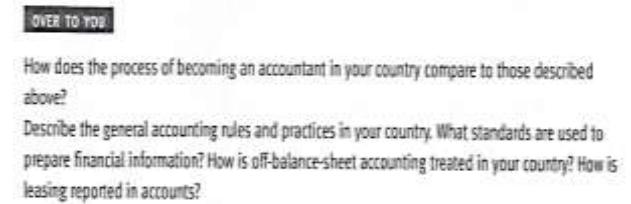


Figure 5. Example of an authentic task

Figure 5 shows that learners are supposed to share about how to become an accountant in their country. As it is based on the real-life context, this task is categorized as an authentic task. Learners need to use their background knowledge in order to accomplish that task successfully. The task above promotes one of the 21st century skill, i.e citizenship/culture, because it stimulates a discussion on different systems of accounting practice in different countries that represent a global issue. It elicits awareness among learners that an accounting system of a country might be different from that of other countries. The input and output of the learning through the textbook do not show a tendency for a certain philosophy that they principally adhere to.

***The intent of the coursebook***

Speaking of the intent of the coursebook, it can be drawn from the above findings that the book facilitates learners to be active participant during the learning process, thus teacher’s role is mostly as a facilitator rather than as the primary source of knowledge. The contents of the book are highly related to the field of learners’ educational focus, i.e., accounting, and it can be seen from the topics of each unit, the language expressions that are contextual in

accounting setting, and the tasks that are also related to accounting. Therefore, it can be inferred that the book is designed to facilitate learners to use English, both in oral or written forms, in various accounting and finance settings.

### CONCLUSION

It can be drawn up that 'English for Accounting' coursebook employs eclectic philosophical foundations throughout its content: progressivism, critical pedagogy, and reconstructivism. Among the three, the most frequently encountered philosophy is progressivism. It can be found from the book tendency that facilitates student-centered learning rather than teacher-centeredness. Examining the intent, the findings imply that the textbook is designed to facilitate learners to use English, both in oral or written forms, in various accounting and finance settings, through the teaching of practical and useful vocabulary, expressions, exercises, and tasks that promote active learning. Shortly, active learning is stimulated through those aspects. In addition to the philosophical foundations, some 21st century skills are also promoted through the book, they are communication, critical thinking, and citizenship/culture. The most dominant skill taught through the book is communication.

The eclectic philosophical foundations that the textbook 'English for Accounting' employ imply that in today's era, the principle in English language teaching is not merely based on a single philosophy. For the dominant philosophical foundation that this book adopts - progressivism - indicates that student-centredness is now a preferred learning approach in English language teaching, as learners are central during the teaching learning process.

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