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Readable but not interesting: Taiwanese high school students' perception of content area textbooks

One of the enduring concerns involves the bi-directional relationship between interest and learning. Although numerous studies have supported the fact that interest-based learning is vital, it is seldom the main concern in school. In particular, Taiwanese high school teachers tend to cram a lot of supplementary texts and leave textbooks for students to self-study. It is thus worthwhile to explore the quality of textbooks and understand how students perceive their readability and their ability to engage the reader. Two versions of current high school textbooks on history and biology were analysed. The semi-structured interviews of 10 high school teachers and 20 high school students were followed. It was found that although the contents of textbooks might be simple, they are not easy to read. Important cues were usually neglected by students. Moreover, even if the texts were readable, students did not find them interesting. It is because in order to find a text interesting, students need to construct its meaning yet they were not taught to do so. Ironically, students consider the supplementary texts to be annoying and threatening. Based on aforementioned findings, the author offers suggestions for future textbook design.