

Evaluation of English Textbook

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Research Article

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Abstract

Textbooks play significant role in teaching and learning process. This paper intends to evaluate grade six English language learning textbooks. This study uses a combined and contextualized evaluation checklist from available textbook evaluation checklists. It directly concern with grade six students textbook evaluation of odd units of the text. The main objective of this textbook

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evaluation is to find out the best material as source of language teaching and learning that will fit to the learners and to identify the weak side which mentioned in the textbook. Furthermore, after discussing textbook evaluation through checklists some suggestions for curriculum designers and teachers have been proposed. The findings suggest that the investigated textbooks work for the designed course. The findings of this study can be useful for researchers and students. Moreover, it is recommended that textbooks must be revised from time to time to obtain definite language learning objectives. The book being evaluated lacks innovation, students' interest, and relevant content and appropriate skills.

Key words: textbook, evaluation,

1. Introduction

Textbooks relate considerable importance in the academic growth and success of students at all levels of education (Azizifar, Koosha, & Lotfi, 2010). Textbooks provide structure and curriculum for an educational program (Zohrabi, Sabouri, & Behroozian, 2012). The use of English textbook does not only become a guide to the teachers when delivering the materials, but also presents necessary input through various explanations and activities. On the side of the learners, it also influences their attitudes and performance to the materials. English has been considered as a foreign language in Ethiopia. It has a special place in the school curriculum. In relation to that, Ethiopia has been carrying out teaching English as a foreign language at schools which is taught in primary school, high school until University. To aid teachers in conducting instructions and achieving the objectives of materials, they can use some instructional materials as the source of teaching and learning activities in the classroom. The use of English textbook has a common for both teachers and learners. It could serve as the only book learners' use during a course. So, a syllabus is an expression of opinion on the nature of language and learning. It acts as a guide for both teacher and learner by providing some goals to be attained. Textbook Evaluation is essential to find out the best material as resource of English foreign language teaching that will fit to the learners.

2. Criteria for textbook evaluation

Sheldon (1988) suggests that no general list of criteria can ever really be applied to all teaching and learning contexts without considerable modification, most of these standardized evaluation checklists contain similar components that can be used as helpful starting points for English language teaching practitioners in a wide variety of situations. However, all agree that evaluation checklists should consist of some criteria related to the physical attribute of textbooks such as illustration, layout, design, size, and visuals. Other important criteria that should be included are those that evaluate textbooks' methodology, the availability of materials based on curriculum, language skills, topics, language appropriateness and cultural aspect.

3. Types of Textbooks

There are several types of textbooks in learning process, it's important to know about the categories of textbooks before evaluating textbooks or series Hussain & Mahmood (2002)

3.1 Core Series Textbooks

This sequence of books, usually beginning through high intermediate or advanced levels sometimes includes a literacy level as well. The four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are integrated, although "many series put a stronger emphasis on listening and speaking

skills development and have a life skills focus” Hrehovcik, (2002) Many series include different components such as audio-visual elements, teacher materials, web based assistance and assessment options. Most core series try to relate in some way to standardized assessment, national, state and other standards.

3.2 Integrated Skills Texts

These books also provide practice in the four skills, but they are single text instead of being the part of a leveled core series.

3.3 Grammar Texts

Some books are core grammar series and include both presentation and practice for learners. Other reference books not typically used as students, but useful for teacher and learner also.

3.4 Skill Specific Texts

These books focus on particular skills, such as listening, reading, speaking, vocabulary or pronunciation. Most commonly, such textbooks are introduced and published as part of the series of curricula.

3.5 Literacy Texts

Some books and other materials are designed specifically for learners who have limited formal education. Students go through such textbooks as part of their academics. These books are written on some specific curriculum guidelines.

3.6 Content Based Texts

These books are focused on specific subject areas such as civics or citizenship, job related topics or academics preparation. Most likely professional matters and information are discussed in such text volumes.

3.7 Dictionaries

Picture dictionaries for beginning levels and a range of English only dictionaries (from limited, with simple definitions to high advanced) for other levels can be useful for learners both in and outside of class. There are different types of dictionaries i.e. monolingual, bilingual and multilingual dictionaries etc.

4. Discussion

Depending on the evaluation criteria or check list evaluator try to evaluate grade six students English textbook. The textbook contain 13 chapters from these evaluator take 7 chapters [*i.e. unit 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13*] for evaluation. When evaluator starts evaluation from the acceptability of the textbook for students the textbook is organized based on the students understanding and it considers the age of most students. The textbook reflect the needs of students with the right levels of difficulty. On contrary the text does not achieve the acceptable balance between the relevant language skills. Example: speaking skill in unit one is one lesson, listening skill is two lessons, reading, writing and vocabulary is one lesson for each and there is three grammar lessons in this chapter; on chapter three, there is one lesson for speaking skill, listening skill, reading skill, writing skill and vocabulary and there are eight grammar lessons in this chapter. On chapter five, seven, nine, eleven and thirteen there are one speaking skill, listening skill, reading skill, writing

skill and vocabulary lesson and there is 2, 3, 7, 6, 2 grammar lessons respectively. This indicates that there is imbalance between the distribution of both macro and micro skills in the textbook.

VOCABULARIES: The vocabularies are not presented in appropriate rate and there are some new vocabularies which are beyond the students' capacity of vocabulary; however these vocabularies are not repeated in subsequent lesson. The words definitions are not presented in the glossary part of the text; it placed only on the form of activity.

GRAMMARS: The grammar is presented in logical sequence or from simple to complex, but their explanations are not display on the text on the other hand the essential items are not clearly identified for students. When we see the distribution of grammar in all chapter there is imbalance distribution. In some chapters there are from 2 to 3 grammar lessons on the other chapters there are from 7 to 8 grammar lessons.

VISUAL AIDS AND PHYSICAL MAKE UP: One point which can be actually referred to as one of the strengths of this textbook is its use of a variety of beautiful, colorful, and real pictures which serve two main functions. First, these illustrations make the book and its content very appealing and motivating for the students. Second, it refers to the linguistic advantage of the pictures as they provide a meaningful context for each activity and help students to understand the materials and make sense of the tasks better. The paper used for the textbook is good quality; each sheet is quite thick and ensures durability of the texts. Binding is not so strong, but the physical appearance is interesting and attractive. The good printing, size and type of the fonts used in this book undoubtedly guarantee the smooth readability of the texts. The layout is clear and well-organized. Name of the Authors written next to cover page. To make the book durable 10 rules written to help the students to take care the book. The topic of each unit is written in bold type and attractive to grade six students. Because, the idea of the topics familiar with the students, (i.e. Unit 1: what are you learning, Unit 3: Who am I? Unit 5: Animal fables, Unit 7: Having a large family or... Unit 9: I think I will, Unit 11: Healthy living, Unit 13: Say no to children labor.) . These motivate them to construct their idea in English.

Reading passages have normal font size. There are no weak points in the font size for topic and exercises, the top, bottom, left and right margins, the space between words, sentences, lines and paragraphs, the quality and color of ink used, etc. Evaluator observed the textbook but found no cases of errors. It ensures through editing and proof reading of the textbook.

EXERCIES/ ACTIVITIES: In this English textbook, also, there are lots of groups and pair work activities that define the characteristics of students-center approach. Consequently, the tasks become more meaningful in the classroom. In addition, the tasks of this English textbook are not performed monotonously. The students are not only asked to do tasks independently but also collaboratively. As an example, it can be seen in writing tasks which are not always presented in the form of independent writing. Collaborative and work in pair writings are also used to make writing activities more interesting. They will have a chance to create such as description with their friends so it will be more meaningful and they will not get bored. To put it briefly, the tasks are done with various methodologies in English language teaching. To warm up students' interest and prior knowledge, this textbook provides various kinds of tasks. For example, group discussion activity on page 120, the students are required to discuss the advantage and disadvantage of small

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and large families and what kind of families would they like to have in the future? Why? And then they have to act it out in front of the class. Another example is on page 157 the teacher can be facilitator to demonstrate the task of describing something using more than one adjective. It means the tasks presented in this textbook encourage students to be involved in learning process. It can be concluded that the tasks in this textbook can work well with methodologies in English language teaching since it has various kinds of tasks to aid the students in learning English. In fact, the tasks developed in this textbook are in line with their context to initiate meaningful communication. Additionally, it also accommodates interesting topics for each task which motivate students to read, talk and related to school context which can initiate them to share their idea about it.

To a large extent the activities and tasks built in each unit evolve around the four major language skills. Most of the speaking activities are mainly based only on pair work, role play. Reading activities are mainly limited to question-answer types that range from simple scanning questions to questions that ask for opinions and arguments. Although the reading texts have wide coverage of topics and content, they considerably lack variety in materials and activities. Writing exercises are also limited, but they are good tasks of writing intended to improve writing ability of the students as well as to practice the grammatical structures presented in each lesson. The textbook incorporates actual activities and tasks. There are also challenging writing tasks, for example, “write a paragraph about what you think life was like 50 years ago (page105).” This task is not considering the capacity and level of the students. Most of activities are intended to apply at home, school, nearby environment, as well as in society.

I can say that the textbook is a full of exercise and activities. Each chapter has a number of exercises and activities. For example on chapter 1, 3, 5, and 13 are 39, 44, 37, and 21 exercises and activities respectively. The minimum number of exercise is 20 on chapter 7. These exercises must be done by the students individually, in pair, and group. The individual exercises are help to check their understanding related to teaching materials previously, in pair activities are usually conducted to implement their understanding and group activities usually done in the forms of game and role play. But it is difficult to apply it in classroom in our country because these activities need more time and the number of students in one class is above fifty so the teacher cannot manage the classroom easily and needs more time to check the students' class and home work. Therefore; the activities should be minimizing. The textbook includes both macro skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing skills) and micro skills (vocabulary, grammar, tenses, etc.).

The textbook has sufficient number of pictures to make the situation more life-like. The distribution of vocabulary in this textbook from simple to complex occurs equally. It provides texts with simple and familiar words and then it becomes more complex in next chapters. However, it is contrast with listening tasks and grammar sections. This textbook provides limited tasks of listening skill for example on page 3, 36, 74, and150. In the tasks, the students always asked to listen to the teacher and then answer the questions. It can be concluded the textbook does not provide tasks with well-defined goals as they can be listening. In addition to this the textbook has a grammar section in this section there in no sufficient explanation and examples so it makes confusion for the students and other burdens for the teachers. Consequently, since the tasks are arranged systematically after teaching materials, they start from the easiest to the most difficult one. Automatically, they really help students who are under and over achievers. In other word, there is a good distribution (simple to complex) of tasks across chapters and the whole book.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above evaluation, grade six English textbook has interesting contents and tasks which try to meet the objectives. Additionally, there is a good distribution (simple to complex) of tasks across chapters and the whole book. In sum, it can be concluded that the textbook is suitable for grade six students in English foreign language learning as an English textbook.

6. Recommendation

Based on this textbook evaluation made above the following recommendations are given.

- Facilitators, teachers should facilitate their students by providing good materials.
- The teacher should refer supplementary grammar book and give a note to the students before proceed to the activity during teaching grammar parts throughout the book.
- This textbook also has weakness especially in listening tasks, and grammar sections, teacher should fill the gap by providing available materials that should be taught. Therefore, the author should be take awareness to fill the gap and teachers need to be more critical and creative in overcoming the limitation of textbook used by making teacher-made hand-out contained additional materials and exercises.
- Teachers' role nowadays is as facilitator, not instructor anymore. As the teachers should be do some activities in classroom and aware students to do further activities in their home.
- Explanation and examples should be placed on the textbook for a better understanding.
- On the listening section the teachers must use other supporting materials rather simply read the passage.

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