

**WHAT CRITERIA DO ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS  
USE TO EVALUATE AN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK?****Ş.A.NƏZƏROVA*****Bakı Dövlət Universiteti***

Education is of crucial importance in keeping people up to date with the technological developments and recent improvements in our world through various instructional materials. Instructional materials are one of the main components of language teaching. The sources for instructional materials can be anything, which serves to increase or improve learners' knowledge or experience or, "anything which is used to help to teach language learners" (Tomlinson, 1998, p. XI) such as a textbook, teachers' book, workbook, journals, magazines, pictures, newspapers, maps, a photocopied handout, a paragraph written on a whiteboard, dictionaries, realia (models, vocabulary items), charts, graphs, diagrams.

Textbooks occupy one of the most important places among the instructional materials. They raise learners' awareness about the language and target culture; they extend learners' general, subject knowledge and develop learners' understanding of what is involved in language learning. (Graves, 2000)

Using textbooks has both advantages and disadvantages for language instruction. In general, most teachers claim that as textbooks support systematic teaching; and that it is very difficult to teach without them (Grant, 1987). In most cases, textbooks serve as a syllabus, providing sufficient coverage of the content and instruments for teachers' use of them. A set of visuals, activities, tasks, supporting materials, such as, teacher's guide, and student's workbook are security for the learners because of consistency among units, levels. Somehow a carefully chosen textbook can answer the learners' needs. Textbooks can especially be helpful for inexperienced teachers (Graves, 2000; Nunan, 1996; Ur, 1996).

O'Neill (1990) emphasizes the usefulness of textbooks saying that most of them are suitable for learners' needs because they provide materials, which are well presented and they allow teachers to adapt and improvise while they are teaching.

Textbooks can have disadvantages. For instance, the content can be irrelevant and inappropriate to the learners, or "there may be too much focus on one or more aspects of language and not enough focus on others" (Graves, 2000, p. 174). Textbooks also have their own "rationale and chosen teaching\learning approach" and do not consider the variety

of levels of language knowledge and ability, learning styles, strategies (Ur, 1996, p. 185). In such cases they may not provide many opportunities for teachers' to use them creatively and flexibly.

Another issue is that the textbooks can present the characteristics of the target culture too strongly. On the other hand, they should provide learners with sufficient information about the target culture characteristics, but on the hand, depending on course requirements, learner needs and interests, and purposes, there should be a balance between the characteristics of the target and learners' culture (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986).

The institutional timetable can be unrealistic situation with the textbook, as the textbook may not be written for that particular case (Graves, 2000). Many institutions have a fixed number of hours for the English lessons and they do not increase or decrease the lesson hours in accordance with the textbook.

Another limitation of the textbooks can be considered when the textbooks happen in to the hands of poorly prepared and poorly motivated teachers. The successful result can be relied only on the textbook writer in this case.

Statement of problem. As the teachers are the immediate users of the textbooks, they need to find out how much the textbooks answer their students' needs and interests. The experienced teachers may not need the workbook or teacher's book but less experienced teachers may need these supporting resources, sometimes may even stay dependent on them and they may evaluate the textbooks differently. Male and female participants may apply to different criteria while evaluating textbook, because of their social status, their role in the society, the women's status of subordinate group and their interests and attitudes (Holmes, 1992). In the Eastern culture the status of male and female is not the same. Males are always considered the most important people in the family, in the society, at schools and so on. They are supposed to treat the learners in a very serious way, to set them a good example of behaviour, pride, and treatment. This serious and responsible status could effect the language teaching instruction of the male teachers. They may not like culturally biased topics, or the Western or American style of verbal play. On the contrary the female teachers can be very friendly and jolly with the learners and like the new styles of life, and different culture. So it is very important to investigate the teachers' textbook evaluation criteria in terms of these variables. Long years' experiences might have made teachers more skilful and flexible about making changes, adapting, adopting and modifying the materials they use.

The Criteria Suggested by Research Studies. The research suggests the main criteria used by the scholars to evaluate textbooks. According to the research studies the textbook should be evaluated on the following specific factors: practical considerations, design, tasks and activities, language skills, culture, and guidance. Each of the criterion is considered individually.

#### Practical considerations as a criterion in textbook evaluation

The textbook should be investigated according to its practical considerations by the scholars. Under the term of practical considerations the researchers mean the cover, price, durability, quality of editing and

publishing, availability, introduction, table of contents, organisation of the attractiveness, units and lessons (Daoud and Celce-Murcia, 1979; Dougill, 1987; Grant, 1987; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; McDonough and shaw, 1993; Robinson, 1991; Sheldon, 1987; Tucker, 1978).

McDonough and Shaw (1993) suggest external evaluation criteria for textbooks, which investigate the textbooks from the outside in (cover, introduction, table of contents). It is very logical, as well because we first estimate things visually and then we go in depth in terms of content. The external evaluation of the materials gives us some information about the tables of content, the intended audience, the proficiency level, the structure in which the materials are to be used, the ways the language has been introduced and constructed into teachable units/lessons, the authors' views on language and methodology. With external evaluation the following factors also should be kept in mind:

- 1) Are the materials to be used as the main 'core' course or to be supplementary to it?
- 2) Is a teacher's book in print and locally available?
- 3) Is a vocabulary list/index included?
- 4) What visual materials does the book contain (photographs, charts, diagrams) and is it there for cosmetic value only or is it actually integrated into the text?
- 5) Is the layout and presentation clear or cluttered?
- 6) Do the materials represent minority groups or women in a negative way?
- 7) Do they represent a 'balanced' picture of a particular country /society?
- 8) The inclusion of audio/video material and resultant cost. Is it essential to possess this extra material in order to use the textbook successfully?
- 9) The inclusion of tests in the teaching materials (diagnostic, progress, achievement), would they be useful for the particular learners?" (McDonough & Shaw, 1993, pp. 67-74).

Sheldon (1987) suggests investigating the textbook in terms of:

*Availability:* whether the book is easy to be obtained or whether teachers can contact with the publisher's representatives to get more information about content, approach or pedagogical detail of the book.

*Accessibility:* whether the book is clearly organized, whether there are indexes, vocabulary lists, section headings and so forth.

*Layout/graphics:* whether there is an optimum density and mix of text and graphical material on each page, whether the artwork and typefaces are functional, colourful or appealing.

*User definition:* user definition: whether there is a clear specification of the target age range, learning preferences, educational expectations, whether the entry/exit language levels precisely defined.

*Overall value for money:* whether the book is cost-effective, and easy to use (Sheldon, 1988, pp. 243-245).

Grant (1987) suggests an initial evaluation in his three-stage evaluation criteria for textbooks. The initial evaluation is meant to assess the textbook quickly, as the teachers often have to make quick judgments about textbooks. These criteria consider the physical appearance,

durability, level of difficulty, length of the texts, tasks in the textbooks.

The durability, price and value, weight, attractiveness, and quality of editing and publishing factors were taken as important factors for textbook evaluation in the articles written by daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) and Madsen and Bowen (1978).

Under the term of practical considerations the research examines the appropriateness of the level to the students' background knowledge, the price, availability of the textbook and so on. So, practical considerations are to be one of the criteria for textbook evaluation because as the research says the textbooks should be attractive, durable, and appropriate for the level and average age of the learners, should be obtained easily and the price also should be affordable for the learners.

#### Design as a criterion in textbook evaluation

Ellis and Ellis (1987) claim that today a great many people are educated to be critical about the transmission of information through a display of text, artwork and photographs and this can be applied to classroom textbooks. According to the authors, design sets the scene and good design signals clearly what is going on and there is no need to ask, "what is it all about?" Good design draws attention and it has an effective motivation on the reader to go on reading. The design should clarify what is being asked of the reader by indicating the amount of importance of different issues within the text and the relationship between them. Ellis and Ellis (1987) point to the implications of design criteria to EFL textbooks like this:

- At a glance recognition of what is happening on the page so that the learner and teacher are both fully aware of theme, purpose and intended result.
- Clear information paths which help the learner and teacher to understand the relationships between the texts, exercises, artwork and photographs so that they know where to go/what to look at next
- Accessibility to target groups ensuring that both the learner and teacher feel that they can relate happily to the material on the page.
- Encouraging both the learner and teacher to feel motivated to use the information, which the design is helping to transmit. (p. 91)

Ellis and Ellis (1987) suggest three main design criteria: relevance, accessibility and cohesion. In order to examine the relevance factor the authors pay attention to the following: signposts, audience, colour and mimesis. The writers claim that a headline, chapter, or unit heading carry out a number of purposes such as to attract interest in the reader and to summarise what is to be expected. Placement and design of the headline is of great importance in attracting attention to it, through size and colour. Sub-headlines are also important as a device for skimming. The relevance of artwork and photographs to the theme plays a similar important role in textbook design.

When the issue is about the relevance to audience the following questions should be asked:

- Does the book contain sufficient variety of design to interest the learner?
- Is the use of cartoons and photographs at the right level for the learner?

- Is the density and variety of text at the right level for the learner? (p. 93)

According to the authors, specific questions can point out some of the problems encountered when seeing colour in the textbook such as whether it is necessary, how it frames the text, whether the colour is accidental or complements and brings out a particular theme or topic.

Ellis and Ellis (1987) state that some textbooks make it very difficult to choose them because they are inaccessible for one or another reason either to the learner or teacher or both. An accessible textbook should have a clear reading path, possess obvious quality of production both in text presentation and layout and use of visual support and will be both learner and teacher friendly. To determine the accessibility of the textbook the following set of questions should be asked:

- 1) Is the teacher interested in this topic?
- 2) Does the layout help the teacher find your way round the page?
- 3) Is there a logical movement from one page to another?
- 4) Does the page tell the teacher what language work he or she is doing?
- 5) Is the teacher motivated to pick up this book and look through it? (p. 97)

Finally, the cohesion criteria argues that various components of the book should hold together, visually, in terms of accessibility, and there should be a uniformity of page allocation to units. Different length in units can make the learners feel confused. Typographical and design conventions adopted within the book should be used consistently.

#### The tasks and activities as criteria in textbook evaluation

The task and activities in the materials are very important in textbooks. Ur (1996) states that the topics and tasks should be both interesting and various so as to provide for different levels, learning styles, and interests. The importance of good explanations and practice exercises for pronunciation and vocabulary, fluency and accuracy practices in all four skills-listening, reading, writing, and speaking were emphasized by Breen and Candlin (1987), Dougill (1987), Grant (1987), and Ur (1996).

Breen and Candlin (1987) designed a long list of questions for textbook evaluation criteria, which consists of two phases. In the first phase of the criteria they ask a set of questions which investigate the tasks and activities very closely by asking questions about the nature and appropriateness of them to the context they are explored. They claim that the tasks and activities should be analyzed in terms of learners' needs and interests. So what they suggest is to discover the learners' criteria on the procedures for working tasks and activities in the classroom for good textbooks. For this purpose they ask students questions which cover the learners' preferences on tasks and activities and their reasons for choosing them. In phase two the authors suggest some questions for the choice and use of materials in ways which are sensitive to classroom language learning and teaching. This phase examines the textbooks in terms of their appropriateness to learners' needs and interests and the learners' approaches towards language learning.

In evaluating materials retrospectively Ellis (1997) suggests con-

ducting a micro-evaluation of tasks through collecting information, analyzing the information, reaching conclusions and making recommendations and writing a report. According to the article “materials have traditionally been evaluated predictively using checklists and questionnaires to determine their suitability for use in particular teaching contexts” (p.41), but what it strongly emphasizes is ‘micro-evaluation of a task’ which, according to the author has certain advantages for the learning/teaching process, because this kind of evaluation can display to what extent a task works for a particular group of learners and reveal weaknesses in the implementations. Tasks are described according to their objectives, the input they provide terms, procedures and the designated outcomes of the tasks.

Wajnryb (1992) proposes some useful recommendations on task design and evaluation which looks at the background, task objective, and procedure. The procedure makes decisions on tasks, before the lesson, during the lesson through observing both the teacher and the learners, and after the lesson. This evaluation criterion gives an opportunity to the teachers to test the tasks in use and then to come up with conclusions.

So, the tasks and activities in the textbook should be appropriate, interesting, and motivating to the learners’ level and needs and interests.

#### Content as a criterion in textbook evaluation

Harmer (1983) states that it is necessary to analyze what topics are included in the course and whether they match up the students’ personalities, backgrounds and needs, if the content is relevant to the students’ needs, whether it is realistic, whether it is interesting for the students and whether there is sufficient variety to sustain motivation.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987) investigate the content in terms of subjective and objective analysis. According to their criteria the content of the textbook should be analyzed in terms of type(s) of linguistic description, language points that the materials cover, the proportion of work on each skill, whether there is skills-integrated work, micro-skills, texts, the subject-matter area(s), assumed level of knowledge and types of topics, treatment of the topics, the way the content is organized and sequenced both throughout the book and within the units. The content factor should be treated as one of the main factors in textbook evaluation as it analyses the textbook both objectively and subjectively.

The content was also taken as a main factor in textbook evaluation in the criteria suggested by Madsen and Bowen (1978). They examine the content in the view of functional load, rate and manner of entry and re-entry, and appropriateness of contexts and situations. By functional load the authors mean the problems which can be created by the extent to which certain difficult and complex words and structures are essential to the manipulation of the language or to its minimal use in communication. They claim that the complex structures, or patterns, which are hard to explain, should be presented as formulas to be learned without explanation and similarly, the introduction of vocabulary must conform to the requirements of functional load. According to the authors “suitable entry involves economy and timing” and “the concept of economy also applies to re-entry, once a word or structure has been introduced, it

should continue to play an active role" (p. 227).

Grant (1987) also points out the importance of content in view of teacher's overall impressions of the contents. He thinks that the teacher's impression on content should be favourable.

Breen and Candlin (1987) also suggest discovering the learners' criteria for good textbooks on the aims and content of language learning through asking them questions.

#### Language skills as a criterion in textbook

Rivas (1999) has investigated two recent elt coursebooks for the intermediate level and above, *blueprint intermediate and upper-intermediate* and *headway intermediate, workbook intermediate and upper-intermediate* to find out that ways the coursebooks reflect theories on foreign language reading in their treatment of the reading skill. The author speaks about the interactive reading model and the three-phase approach in practice, pre-reading phase, while-reading phase and post-reading phase and the integration of reading with the other skills during these processes. As to the results the first book offers the greatest number of activities that contribute to the development of reading integrated with the other language skills, while the books *headway intermediate and upper-intermediate* offer few activities to integrate reading and writing, *workbook intermediate and upper-intermediate* offer few opportunities for the integration of reading with writing and listening.

Lally (1998) did the similar research on two other recent coursebooks in order to investigate the treatment of writing skills, the number of communicative activities versus mechanical drills, and the existence of force-choice exercises in the textbooks. But the author doesn't mention the names of the textbooks she examined she gives a general overview. If two textbooks took an in-depth process-oriented approach to L2 writing, two other texts ignored this important skill entirely, two other texts devoted nearly half of all exercises to communication and whereas one textbook contained as many as 42% forced-choice exercises another had as few as 10%.

So, as the research indicate the balance of language skills in the textbook accordingly to learners' needs, interests, and their purpose of learning language should be carefully considered.

Harmer (1983) and Dubin and Olshtain (1986) emphasize the language skills in the textbook evaluation and claim that it is very important to find out whether the right skills and appropriate practice of the skills are included and whether the balance between the different skills is appropriate for the group and whether the skills are introduced in a way that is integrated.

McDonough and Shaw (1993) investigate language skills in the internal evaluation criteria for textbooks, as follows:

- 1) The presentation of the skills: whether all language skills are covered, in what proportion, and whether this proportion is appropriate to the context, whether the skills are treated discretely or in an integrated way and for tasks and activities which investigate the presentation of the skills, grading and sequencing.
- 2) Where reading/'discourse' skills are involved, is there much

- in the way of appropriate text beyond the sentence.
- 3) Where listening skills are involved, are recordings 'authentic' or artificial?
  - 4) Do speaking materials incorporate what the teachers know about the nature of real interaction or are artificial dialogues offered instead? (p. 75-76)

The sufficient coverage of language skills through tasks and activities is very important in the textbooks. Skills exercises should improve appropriate language skills. The balance between different language skill exercises and activities should be appropriate to learners' level. Besides integrated skill exercises could be more useful for the learners as students can find some individual skill exercises not very interesting, even boring. So the textbooks should provide a lot of emphasis on presentation of language skills in the units.

#### Culture as a Criterion in Textbook Evaluation

In some of the evaluation criteria, textbooks are evaluated in terms of cultural appropriateness. Language learners are supposed to gain some cultural knowledge about the target language as "cultural awareness must ... be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 8). But the degree of cultural knowledge of the learners connects with their purpose of learning language. "If the text is designed for an area where English is taught as a second language for use as a medium of instruction, the learner is likely to need and want considerably less of the target culture. Rather, the content will be more appropriate for him if it is developed from a contrastive analysis of the two cultures and gives considerable weight to his native culture" (Madsen and Bowen, 1978, p. 228-229). The content of the textbooks should be evaluated in terms of both pedagogical and cultural appropriateness, where the content should be suitable for learners' age, level, background and interests.

Some researchers think that the textbook should not be judged on the basis of its containing 'unwarranted cultural bias', rather it should be judged on the degree of 'cultural biasness' it presents (Demirkan-Jones, 1999). Brosh (1997) investigated both the explicit and implicit socio-cultural messages conveyed by language textbooks. The subjects were twelve arabic textbooks currently used in junior high schools in hebrew educational system in Israel. The results indicate that "these messages provide a partial, ethnocentric, subjective, simplistic and unbalanced presentation of Arab society, which doesn't reflect the new reality in the Middle East in the era of peace nor the contemporary Arab culture". As the textbook is the main source of outsider's culture it should reflect the main characteristics of the society.

Sheldon (1995) states that the learner difference factor plays a great role in learning cultural knowledge by saying that "cultural content can be motivating and informative to those learners who believe that language and culture are intertwined, while to others it may be irrelevant or even 'imperialistic'" (p. 350).

McDonough and Shaw (1993) consider one of the main concerns for the program designers is finding out whether the teachers make any cultural adaptations with the textbooks, by "altering culture-bound to-

pics, instead of using those in the textbook” (p. 33).

Alptekin (1993) finds the issue of culture very problematic by claiming that “the ‘fit’, or consistency, between the culture-specific aspects of cognition and the native language undergoes a substantial degree of conflict when one begins to learn a foreign language” (p. 137). According to him there are two types of knowledge, systematic and schematic used in expressing and interpreting meanings, where systematic knowledge deals with the formal properties of language, embracing its syntactic and semantic aspects, and schematic knowledge is socially acquired. As the EFL learners mainly trust their already established schematic knowledge when developing new systematic knowledge, “foreign language teaching materials which make use of target-culture elements to present the systemic data are likely to interfere with this natural tendency” and he further continues his argument by saying that “such teaching materials are detrimental to foreign language learning” (p. 136).

Alderson (1985) suggests examining the teacher’s guide in terms of cultural content, too which should contain factors relating to the content of the materials; assumptions about shared culture in lesson content, and the teacher’s ability to deal with this ambiguity, and assumptions about the shared culture in teaching methodology and the teacher’s ability and willingness to deal with incompleteness.

So the selection and evaluation of a textbook in terms of cultural aspect needs a careful consideration of the textbooks by the teachers. The textbook should contain target culture characteristics but in this respect it shouldn’t ignore the learners’ native culture characteristics, either.

#### Guidance as a Criterion in Textbook Evaluation

The supporting resources can be the next criterion for textbook evaluation.

Supporting resources should be provided not only for teachers but also for students. They should provide clear explanations of how the material can be used to its maximum advantage through a teacher’s guide, student’s book and workbook.

The role of teacher’s guide is of crucial importance for teachers, especially for less experienced teachers to achieve a good standard of teaching, through provision of information about language, guidance on teaching procedures and a rationale for the course (Cunningsworth and Kusel, 1991). According to these authors the teacher’s guide carries out the following functions:

- 1) It provides a statement of the general purpose of the teaching material and gives descriptions of the linguistic and /or methodological rationale.
- 2) It encourages the development of teaching skills generally, going beyond the specific skills needed to utilize the class material.
- 3) It assists the teacher in understanding the structure of the course material and the contribution of each lesson or unit to the overall course.
- 4) It provides guidance in the practical use of the material.
- 5) It provides linguistic and cultural information necessary for

the effective use of the material in class (p. 129).

In the evaluation process, Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991) make a distinction between global appraisal and detailed evaluation. The global appraisal approach focuses on the underlying approach of teacher's guide and the broad assumptions they make such as interpreting the general principles on which the material based. In this attempt the teacher's guide doesn't consider the practical purpose of advising the teacher on how to deal with a particular unit or to administer an activity within a unit. Global appraisal examines the teacher's book in terms of information about language and language learning they provide and developing teacher's awareness of theory. The detailed evaluation investigates the teacher's guide in terms of objectives and content, cultural loading, procedural guidance, advice about the unpredictable, correction and testing, motivation, presentation and use and lesson evaluation.

Gearing (1999) also gives reasons for evaluating the teacher's guide such as helping teachers on their selection of textbooks with teacher's guide, making them aware of the content of the textbook, helping them to make more effective use of it and so on. The author asks questions whether the teacher's guide provides a guide to lesson planning, implementation and evaluation, whether it provides information about ways of teacher development and whether it supplies technical points about the teacher's guide.

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## **İNGİLİS DİLİ DƏRSLİKLƏRİNİ DƏYƏRLƏNDİRƏRKƏN İNGİLİS DİLİ MÜƏLLİMLƏRİ HANSI MEYARLARDAN İSTİFADƏ EDİRLƏR?**

**Ş.A.NƏZƏROVA**

### **XÜLASƏ**

Məqalə ingilis dili dərsliklərinin dəyərləndirilməsinin vacibliyini önə çəkir, bu sahədə alimlərin apardığı tədqiqat işlərini araşdıraraq onların dəyərləndirmə prosesində müraciət etdikləri meyarları müəyyən edir və ingilis dili müəllimlərinə ingilis dili dərsliklərini dəyərləndirərkən bu meyarlardan istifadə etməyi tövsiyə edir.

### **КАКИМ КРИТЕРИЯМ ОБРАЩАЮТСЯ ПРЕПОДОВАТЕЛИ, ОЦЕНИВАЯ УЧЕБНИКИ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА?**

**Ш.А.НАЗАРОВА**

### **РЕЗЮМЕ**

Статья рассматривает исследовательские работы, проведенные в области оценивания учебников английского языка. Также в статье определяется критерии, которым советуют обращаться преподавателям английского языка в процессе оценки учебников.