DEVELOPING A CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING READING COMPREHENSION TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract

Thepurpose of thepresent study is to explore the features of several available textbooks evaluation checklists proposed by researchers, reading specialists and professionals in the field of reading comprehension. It then presents a suggested checklist to enable material developers as well as educators to evaluate the quality of reading textbooks. The use of this checklist is expected to make the evaluation process more efficient, accurate, and reliable.

A. Introduction

It is widely accepted that textbooks play a central role in teaching English in the classroom.Hutchinson and Torres (1994) have pointed out that ELT textbooks may play a pivotal role in innovation. They suggest that textbooks can support teachers through potentially disturbing and threatening change processes, demonstrate new and/or untried methodologies, introduce change gradually, and create scaffolding upon which teachers can build a more creative methodology of their own. Similarly, Karamouzian (2010: 25) states that textbooks are seen as central to teaching and learning, as their quality is a determining factor in enhancing or diminishing the quality of a language program.Furthermore, Cunningsworth (1995:7) explains that course books have multiple role in ELT and can serve as (1) a resource for presentation materials, (2) a resource for activities of learners practice and communicative interaction, (3) a reference source for learners on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, (4) a resource of stimulation and ideas for classroom language activities, (5) a syllabus (where they reflect learning objectives which have already been determined, (6) a source for self-directed learning or self-access work, and (7) a support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence. Additionally, Richard (2001) points out that textbooks are the key component of language teaching serving as the basis for much of the language input learners receive when learning a language. Textbook is a device to help students to get not only familiar with the linguistic aspects of the language but also with social and cultural aspects embedded in language.

While the process of selecting an appropriate textbook is not an easy task for materials developers and educators, they have carefully selected textbooks to teach in the classroom. They further should take time to preview the information thoroughly. Moreover, they have to systematically evaluate based on established criteria.

Cunningsworth (1995), Richard (1998), and Miekley (2005) suggest to use a set of checklist to evaluate the textbook. This is not only to make the educators easy to determine the quality of certain textbook, but also to make the evaluation process more efficient and reliable.

B. A Review of Some Checklists and Their Score Scales

In evaluating textbooks, several researchers, educators, reviewers, and reading specialists provide checklists as a tool to judge (Cunningsworth, 1995; Griffiths, 1995; Harmer, 1998; Peacock, 1997; Sheldon, 1998; Garinger, 2001; Litz, 2005; Miekley, 2005;

and Jahangard, 2007).Cunningsworth(1995: 2-4) suggestsa checklist for evaluation and selection of textbook as follows:

a. **Aims and approaches**
   - ☐ Do the aims of the course book correspond closely withthe aims of the teaching program and with the need ofthe learners?
   - ☐ Is the course book suited to the learning/ teachingsituation?
   - ☐ How comprehensive is the course book? Does it covermost or all of what is needed? Is it a good resource forstudents and teachers?
   - ☐ Is the course book flexible? Does it allow differentteaching and learning styles?

b. **Design and organization**
   - ☐ What components make up the total course package (e.g., Students' books, teachers' books, workbooks,cassettes)?
   - ☐ How is the content organized (e.g., according tostructures, functions, topics, skills, etc.)?
   - ☐ How is the content sequenced (e.g., on the basis ofcomplexity, "learn-ability", usefulness, etc.)?
   - ☐ Is the grading and progression suitable for the learners? Does it allow them to complete the work needed tomeet any external syllabus requirements?
   - ☐ Are there reference sections for grammar, etc.? Is someof the material suitable for individual study?
   - ☐ Is it easy to find your way around the course book? Isthe layout clear?

c. **Language content**
   - ☐ Does the course book cover the main grammar itemsappropriate to each level, taking learner's needs intoaccount?
   - ☐ Is materials for vocabulary teaching adequate in term ofquantity and range of vocabulary, emphasis placed onvocabulary development, strategies for individuallearning?
   - ☐ Does the course book include material for pronunciation work? If so, what is covered: individual sounds, word stress, sentence stress, intonation?
   - ☐ Does the course book deal with the structuring and conventions of language use above the sentence level, forexample, how to take part in conversations, how toidentify the main points in a reading passage?

d. **Skills**
   - ☐ Are all four skills adequately covered, bearing in mindyour course aims and syllabus requirements?
   - ☐ Is there materials for integrated skills work?
   - ☐ Are reading passages and associated activities suitablefor your students' levels, interests, etc.? Is theresufficient reading material?
   - ☐ Is listening material well recorded, as authentic aspossible, accompanied by background information,questions and activities which help comprehension?

☐ Is material for spoken English well design to equiplearners for real-life interactions?

☐ Are writing activities suitable in term of amount ofguidance/ control, degree of accuracy, organization oflonger pieces of writing (e.g. paragraphing) and use ofappropriate styles?

e. **Topic**
☐ Is there sufficient material of genuine interest tolearners?
☐ Is there enough variety and range of topic?
☐ Will the topic help expand students' awareness andenrich their experience
☐ Are the topic sophisticated enough in content, yetwithin the learners' language level?
☐ Will your students be able to relate to the social andcultural contexts presented in the course book?

f. **Methodology**
☐ What approaches to language learning are taken bythe course book?
☐ What level of active learner involvement can beexpected? Does this match your students' learningstyles and expectations?
☐ What techniques are used for presenting/ practicingnew language items? Are they suitable for yourlearners?
☐ How are the different skills taught?
☐ How are communicative abilities developed?

g. **Teacher's books**
☐ Is there adequate guidance for the teachers who will be using the course book and its supporting materials?
☐ Are the teachers' books comprehensive andsupportive?
☐ Do they adequately cover teaching techniques, language items such as grammar rules and culture-specificinformation?

h. **Practical considerations**
☐ What does the whole package cost? Does thisrepresent good value for money?
☐ Are the books strong and long lasting? Are theyattractive in appearance?
☐ Are they easy to obtain?

Alamri (2008: 105-107) provides a set of criteria for evaluating textbooks. The criteria are covered within twelve areas, which are as follows:

1. **General Appearance**
   a. The cover is informative and attractive.
   b. The font size and type used in the book are appropriate for sixth graders.
   c. There is an informative orientation page.
   d. The book has a complete and detailed table of contents.
   e. Every lesson is given an appropriate title.
   f. The book has an appropriate glossary.
   g. The book has a complete bibliography

2. **Design and Illustration**
   a. There is a variety of design to achieve impact.
   b. There is enough white space to achieve clarity.
   c. There is consistency in the use of headings, icons, labels, italics, etc.
   d. The illustrations are varied and attractive.
   e. The illustrations stimulate students to be creative.
   f. The illustrations are functional.
   g. The illustrations facilitate students' visualizations without imposing completevisual images.

3. **Accompanying Materials**
   a. Cassettes that accompany the book are suitable.
   b. The CD-ROM that accompanies the book is suitable.
   c. The posters and flash cards that accompany the book are suitable.
   b. The teacher's book that accompanies the book is informative.

4. **Objectives**
   a. Generally, the book fulfills the general objectives of teaching English language in Saudi Arabia.
   b. Generally, the book fulfills the general objectives of teaching English language for elementary stage.
   c. The terminal objectives specified explicitly in the pupil's book are based on some theoretical background.
   d. The terminal objectives define the desired degree of mastery.
   e. The terminal objectives meet the needs and wants of sixth graders.
   f. The terminal objectives define the desired degree of mastery.
   g. The terminal objectives meet the needs and wants of sixth graders.
   h. The developmental objectives are specified at the beginning of each lesson in the teacher's book.
   i. They are clear and precise.
   j. They are measurable.
   k. They suit the level of sixth graders.
   l. They contribute to the attainment of terminal objectives.

5. **Topic Contents**
   a. The topics of the book are varied and engaging to appeal to sixth graders with different interests and personalities.
   b. The topics encourage students to express their own views.
   c. The book avoids potentially embarrassing or disturbing topics.
   d. The topics allow students to think critically.

6. **Language Contents**
   a. The book covers the main grammar items appropriate to sixth graders.
   b. The book includes adequate materials for teaching vocabulary.
   c. The book includes adequate material for pronunciation work.
   d. The materials for teaching grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are graded in an appropriate manner.

7. **Social and Cultural Contexts**
   a. The social and cultural contexts in the book are comprehensible.

b. The content of the book is free from stereotypical images and information.
c. Students can learn about the inner lives of the characters used in the book.
d. The book expresses positive views of ethnic origins, occupations, age groups, social groups and disability.

8. Language Skills
a. The four skills are adequately covered.
b. There is material for integrated skills work
c. Listening material is well recorded, as authentic as possible, and accompanied by background information, questions and activities.
d. There is sufficient reading material. (There is a range of varied and interesting reading text that can engage students cognitively and effectively.)
e. There is sufficient material for spoken English (e.g. dialogues, role-plays, etc.)
f. Writing activities are suitable in terms of length, degree of accuracy, andamount of guidance.

9. Teachability
a. The book helps teachers to minimize their preparation time.
b. The book helps teachers exploit the activities to meet the students' expectations.
c. The book helps teachers cater for mixed ability students and classes of different sizes.

10. Flexibility
a. The book is appealing and useful to the students.
b. The book caters for different levels of formality.
c. The book provides opportunity for teachers and students to localize activities.
d. The book caters for different preferred learning styles.

11. Teaching Methods
a. The teaching methods used in the book are the latest in the field.
b. The methods used are student-centered.
c. The methods used allow students to talk more than teachers.
d. The methods used allow various class activities.

12. Practice and Testing
a. The book provides a variety of meaningful and mechanical exercises andactivities to practice language items and skills.
b. It provides communicative exercises and activities that help students carry outtheir communicative tasks in real life.
c. Every exercise has a clear direction.
d. There is a reasonable and appropriate number of exercises.
e. The tests are valid and contain correct language.
f. The book provides periodical revisions for diagnostic purposes.
g. The book provides models for final achievement tests.

With regard to the system of rating, he develops based on a 4-point scale, namely strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4).

Harmer (1998) proposes nine main areas which teachers should consider in evaluating the books; (1) price, (2) availability, (3) layout and design, (4) methodology,

(5) skills, (6) syllabus, (7) topic, (8) stereotyping, and (9) the teacher's guide.The score system in this checklist is developed based on the descriptive answers provided by the users.

Peacock (1997) designschecklistsincluding eight sections: general impression, technicalquality, cultural differences, appropriacy, motivation, and the learner, pedagogic, analysis, finding the way through the student's bookand supplementary materials. The weighting system is developed based on a 3-point scale, namely good (2), satisfactory (1) and poor (0).

Litz (2005) in his study creates a series of textbook evaluation questionnaires. The questions provide seven areas: (1) practical considerations, (2) layout and design, (3) activities, (4) skills, (5)language type, (6) subject and content and (7) conclusion/overall consensus. Each ofthese main categories also contains some evaluative items that are presented respectivelyfor the student and teacher evaluation forms: (1) 2 and 5, (2) 2 and 8, (3) 5 and 7, (4) 3and 5, (5) 6 and 6, (6) 5 and 5 and (7) 2 and 4. The system of rating is based on a 10-pointscale which moves from highly disagree (1) to highly agree (10).

Miekley (2005: 4-5) specifically presents a set of criteria for reading comprehension textbooks based on twenty two previously developed textbook evaluation checklist. He divides the checklist into three major areas: *textbook, teacher's manual, and context*. He further considers four major components for *the textbook*: content (5 items), vocabulary and grammar (5 items), exercises and activities (7 items), and attractiveness of the text and physical make-up (4 items). For the second part, *teachers' manual*, he considers four features: general features (2 items), background information (2 items), methodological guidance (3 items), and supplementary exercises and materials (3 items). For the last part, *context*, he considers three main components: the appropriateness for the curriculum (1 item), the appropriateness for the students (4 items), and appropriateness for the teacher (1 item).With regard to scoring system, Miekley suggests a 5-point scale: excellent (4), good (3), adequate (2), poor (1) and totally lacking (0). He also provides some additional options: mandatory, optional, and not applicable.

Finally, Jahagard (2007: 133) develops other checklists from 10 different authors. He, finally, offers the following criteria:

1. Explicitobjectives in the layout in an introduction, and implemented in the material
2. Good vocabulary explanation and practice
3. Approaches educationally and socially acceptable to target community
4. Periodic review and test sections
5. Appropriate visual materials available
6. Interesting topics and tasks
7. Clear instructions
8. Clear attractive layout, print easy to read
9. Content clearly organized and graded
10. Plenty of authentic language
11. Good grammar presentation and practice
12. Fluency practice in all four skills
13. Encourage learners to develop own learning strategies and to become independent in their learning.

C. DISCUSSION

Having presented several features of textbooks evaluation checklists, we are now in a position to determine the most practical checklist. As previously discussed, Cunningsworth's(1995) and Miekley's(2005) checklist seems to be organized,more

specifically in the field of reading comprehension, easy to follow, and more objective evaluation. This consideration is pertinent to the idea of Karamoozian and Riazi (2008: 18) who suggest that with regard to format, checklists should be easy to follow and user friendly while they should really avoid presentingcluttered and confusing materials. They add that the items, features, and factors should be signpostedto help the users findtheir way through the material.Therefore, the writer recommends educators, researchers and professionals to use Cunnigsworth's (1995) and Miekey's (2005) checklists. The writer then modified and used them as a parameter to evaluate the quality of textbooks used in teaching reading comprehension.

The checklist contains 10 criteria as follows: (1) Aims and Approaches; (2) Design and Organization; (3) Content; (4) Skills; (5) Vocabulary and Grammar; (6) Exercises and Activities; (7) Methodology; (8) Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-Up; (9) Teacher's Manual; and (10) Practical Consideration. To interpret the checklist, the four rating scale was used, namely excellent (4), good (3), fair (2), and poor (1). In order to easily interpret the rating scale, the following descriptor is shown:

Table 1. Interpretation of the Rating

Score	Rating	Descriptor
4	Excellent	A textbook is deemed excellent textbook if it has extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
3	Good	A textbook is deemed good textbook if it has strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
2	Fair	A textbook is deemed fair textbook if it has a few strengths and a few major weaknesses
1	Poor	A textbook is deemed poor textbook if it has very few strengths and numerous major mistakes

To be more detail, the checklist and rating system are presented as follows:

Table 2.Suggested Checklist for Evaluating Reading Comprehension Textbook

Textbook Title : Author(s) : Publisher :	Rating			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
A. Aims and Approaches				
1. Do the aims of the textbook correspond closely with the aims of the teaching program and with the need of the learners?	4	3	2	1
2. Is the textbook suited to the learning/ teaching situation?	4	3	2	1
3. How comprehensive is the textbook? Does it cover most or all of what is needed? Is it a good resource for students and teachers?	4	3	2	1
4. Is the textbook flexible? Does it allow different teaching and learning styles?	4	3	2	1

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
B. Design and Organization				
1. What components make up the total course package (e.g., students' books, teachers' books, workbooks, cassettes)?	4	3	2	1
2. How is the content organized (e.g., according to structures, functions, topics, skills, etc.)?	4	3	2	1
3. How is the content sequenced (e.g., on the basis of complexity, "learn-ability", usefulness, etc.)?	4	3	2	1
4. Is the grading and progression suitable for the learners?	4	3	2	1
5. Is the layout clear?	4	3	2	1
C. Content				
1. Are the reading selections authentic pieces of language?	4	3	2	1
2. Are the text selections representative of the variety of literary genres, and do they contain multiple sentence structures?	4	3	2	1
3. Is the content appropriate? (interesting, challenging, topical, varied, culturally acceptable, unlike to date)	4	3	2	1
4. Is there enough variety and range of topic?	4	3	2	1
5. Will the topic help expand students' awareness and enrich their experience?	4	3	2	1
6. Will your students be able to relate to the social and cultural contexts presented in the textbook?	4	3	2	1
D. Skills				
1. Is the reading text used for introducing new language items (grammar and vocabulary), consolidating language work, etc?	4	3	2	1
2. Is there a focus on the development of reading skills and strategy?	4	3	2	1
3. Is the reading material linked to other skills work?	4	3	2	1
4. Is there emphasize of reading for pleasure and for intellectual satisfaction?	4	3	2	1
5. How long are the texts? Do they encourage intensive and extensive reading?	4	3	2	1
E. Vocabulary				
1. Are new vocabulary words presented in a variety of ways (e.g. glosses, multi-glosses, appositives)?	4	3	2	1
2. Are the new vocabulary words presented at an appropriate rate so that the text is understandable and so that students are able to retain new vocabulary?	4	3	2	1
3. Are the new vocabulary words repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning and use?	4	3	2	1
4. Are students taught top-down techniques for learning new vocabulary words?	4	3	2	1
F. Exercises and Activities				
1. Are there interactive and task-based activities that require students to use new vocabulary to communicate?	4	3	2	1
2. Do instructions in the textbook tell students to read for	4	3	2	1

comprehension?				
3. Are top-down and bottom-up reading strategies used?	4	3	2	1
4. Are students given sufficient examples to learn top-down techniques for reading comprehension?	4	3	2	1
5. Do the activities facilitate students' use of grammar rules by creating situations in which these rules are needed?	4	3	2	1
6. Does the text make comprehension easier by addressing one new concept at a time instead of multiple new concepts?	4	3	2	1
7. Do the exercises promote critical thinking of the text?	4	3	2	1
8. Are students assigned extensive reading activities?	4	3	2	1
G. Methodology				
1. What approaches to language learning are taken by textbook?	4	3	2	1
2. What level of active learner involvement can be expected? Does this match your students' leaning styles and expectations?	4	3	2	1
3. What techniques are used for presenting/ practicing new language items? Are they suitable for your leaners?	4	3	2	1
4. How are the different skills taught?	4	3	2	1
5. How are communicative abilities developed?	4	3	2	1
6. Do teachers activate students' background knowledge before reading the text?	4	3	2	1
H. Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-Up				
1. Is the cover of the book appealing?	4	3	2	1
2. Is the visual imagery of high aesthetic quality?	4	3	2	1
3. Are the illustrations simple enough and close enough to the text that they add to its meaning rather than detracting from it?	4	3	2	1
4. Is the text interesting enough that students will enjoy reading it?	4	3	2	1
I. Teacher's Manual				
1. Is there adequate guidance for the teachers who will be using the textbook and its supporting materials?	4	3	2	1
2. Are correct suggested answers given for the exercises in the textbook?	4	3	2	1
3. Do they adequately cover teaching techniques, language items such as grammar rules and vocabulary, and culture specific information?	4	3	2	1
J. Practical Considerations				
1. What does the whole package cost? Does this represent good value for money?	4	3	2	1
2. Are the textbook strong and long lasting? Are they attractive in appearance?	4	3	2	1
3. Are they easy to obtain?	4	3	2	1
Total Each Colum				
Grand total				

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

To sum, evaluating a textbook is not an easy task for educators and materials developers. They need to determine an appropriate checklist. The use of standardized checklist will be helpful to make the evaluation process more efficient, accurate, and reliable.

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LEMBAR TANYA JAWAB
SEMINAR NASIONAL EVALUASI PENDIDIKAN (SNEP) 1
PPs UNNES, 13 JULI 2013

Ruang : 3 621

Moderator : Dr. Ir. Dyah Rini I. MP

Nama Penyaji : Sirajul Munir
Instansi : STAIN Batu sangkar
Judul : Developing A Checklist For

Nama Peserta : Em Nur Agustin
Instansi :
Pertanyanaan

1) fokus Aplikasi yang bapak teliti Untuk jenjang apa?

Jawab Untuk Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam (PTAI)
& Sumatera Barat.

Pemakalah