

Evaluation of High School English Textbooks: “*English for Afghanistan*” based on McDonough and Shaw’s (2003) Model

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ABSTRACT

The textbook is an integral component of the ELT classroom. They need to be evaluated periodically, as the needs of learners change according to time, context, and approaches to identify their strengths and weakness. The aim of this research is to evaluate High School English textbooks at schools in Afghanistan. The textbooks include ELT books: ‘*English for Afghanistan*: for grades 10-12’ designed by the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan. For this purpose, the researcher used McDonough & Shaw’s (2003) model. Both the external and the internal evaluation criteria are applied to the textbooks. The findings indicate that the textbooks are designed for local purposes, which reflect Afghan religious and cultural values. The study also indicated that the textbooks are based on communicative language teaching which includes different situations for teaching the topics. However, the textbooks also had some drawbacks. The listening skill, which is the main component of the CLT approach, is completely neglected; the grammar activities are brought in the deductive approach, and the textbooks are gender-biased. Overall, the textbooks are up to date and meet the learners’ needs and wants, and can achieve the objectives made for each unit. However, the findings of the research can be more useful for teachers, syllabus designers, materials developers, methodology experts, and test designers in revising the textbooks.

Key words: Textbook Evaluation, Materials Evaluation, English for Afghanistan, ELT Textbooks, EFL Coursebooks

INTRODUCTION

In today’s world, English functions as the international lingua franca, which is used for the purpose of communication in international trade, commerce, and teaching and learning. Smith suggested the previous models of EFL/ESL be changed by English as an International Language (EIL) which is used by people of several nations for the purpose of communication.

English in Afghanistan is used as a foreign language. Afghanistan becomes a part of expanding circle in Kachru’s (1986) model in which English is accepted as a foreign language in the country. In another distinction which Kachru (1992) separates English as ESL from English as EFL; English in Afghanistan is primarily performance variety rather than essentially institutionalized variety. The government of Afghanistan has introduced English as a compulsory subject at schools. The medium of instruction in primary and secondary classes of English subject is native language but it is English in high school classes.

Alimyar (2015) states that John White and Philip O’Hare claim that every country needs to have a national curriculum,

Ministry of Education in Afghanistan has developed a national curriculum with clear aims and ethical values of teaching English for schools: *English for Afghanistan* (2010). These textbooks are intended for students of Afghan schools only whether they are located inside or outside the country. In Afghanistan, English language teaching starts at grade 4 and continues to the last grade which is grade 12.

The textbook is an important material used in the process of teaching and learning. Sheldon (1988) considers the textbook as the visible heart of any ELT program which offers considerable advantages for both the student and the teacher (P.237). Similarly, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest that the textbook is almost a universal element of English language teaching and no teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook.

In order to choose a suitable textbook for an education program, the administration and teachers need to evaluate the textbooks (Azizifar, Koosha, and Lotfi, 2010). Evaluating textbooks is an activity of applied linguistics by which administrators, supervisors teachers, and materials developers can judge the effectiveness of the materials on the people

who use them (Tomlinson, et al 2001, p. 15). McGrath (2002) claims that textbook evaluation is an important task for the administration and development of language learning programs.

Problem Statement

The relationship between the textbooks' contents and the learning process makes textbook evaluation an essential task for the future success of an educational program (Kohandani, and Nejadansari, 2014). In order to ensure that program expectations and learners' needs are properly being met and maintain their effectiveness, a regular textbook evaluation should be carried out (Cirocki, 2010). In order to choose appropriate materials for the learners at school, we need to evaluate the present textbooks taught at school. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the series "English for Afghanistan Grad 10-12" provided by the Ministry of Education. However, there are much of studies available for ELT material evaluation, to the researcher's knowledge, there are not enough studies done regarding the series.

Significance

As language materials are essential elements in the field of language teaching and learning, all textbooks should be selected and evaluated carefully. According to Khodabakhshi (2014), all textbooks should maintain the particular purposes, needs, interests, age as well as cultural characteristics of the particular groups of learners. Since textbooks developed for the purpose, needs, interests age, and culture of a particular group of students, they are not suitable to be used for other groups. Therefore, evaluating textbooks will help teachers identify present drawbacks in textbooks and try to associate them with proper supplementary materials and it also lets authors and material developers revise and improve the weaknesses in their next editions.

Furthermore, different researchers (Allwright, 1981; Thornbury & Meddings, 2001; Harwood, 2005) have questioned the actual use of textbooks in ELT classes. They claim that there is an obvious gap between learners' needs, learners' styles and advances in teaching and learning, and the textbooks prepared commercially for ELT courses (Richards, 2005).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

ELT materials play an essential role in language teaching and learning. Tomlinson (2001, 66) defines materials as anything that can be used to facilitate the learning of a language. Richards (2001) considers the materials fruitful for new teachers as he asserts, "In the case of inexperienced teachers, materials may also serve as a form of teacher training. They provide ideas on how to plan and teach lessons as well as formats that teachers can use."

A basic distinction between authentic materials and created materials is made by Richards (2001) as he states: Authentic materials refer to texts, photos, graphs, video

selections, and other teaching resources that are not specifically created for pedagogical purposes. On the other hand, Created materials refer to textbooks and other resources which are made especially for instructional purposes.

Tomlinson (2001: 66) asserts that materials can be (a) instructional: which can inform learners about the language; (b) experiential: which can offer the experience of the use of language; (c) elicitive: which can provoke language learners into using language; and (d) exploratory: which provide opportunities for learners that lead to discoveries about the language.

Demir and Ertas (2014) quote from Cunningsworth (1995): "ELT coursebooks have multiple roles such as helping to present the written and spoken materials, promoting interaction, serving as a reference of vocabulary and grammar, acting as a source for classroom activities and offering self-access work or self-directed learning." Another important aspect that books have is that they maintain balance among the students. As Wahab (2013) states, the use of a coursebook in a program can guarantee that students in different classes will receive similar content and therefore, can be evaluated in the same way. Richards (2001) also highlights the importance of course books and states that any learning program may have no impact if it does not have course books as they provide structure and a syllabus.

In order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of textbooks, Richards & Renandya (2002) and Tomlinson (2003) consider material evaluations as a helping tool. Tomlinson (2003:15) defines materials evaluation as "a procedure that involves measuring the value of a set of learning materials. It involves making judgments about the effect of the materials on the people using them." Richards and Renandya (2002) talk about the purpose of evaluation. They claim that the primary purpose of the evaluation is to find out whether the curriculum goals have been met or not. They further explain that the other purpose is to find out the effectiveness of the curriculum and to evaluate the language program itself.

Different scholars give different opinions regarding different approaches to material evaluation. Ellis (1997) proposes that there are two types of materials evaluations; a predictive evaluation is designed to make a decision regarding what materials to use and a retrospective evaluation is designed to examine what has actually been used.

Vasiljevic (2011) agrees with Ellis (1997) in mentioning 'predictive' and 'retrospective' evaluations. Whereas Tomlinson (2003) maintains that there are three types of evaluations; pre-use, whilst-use, and post-use evaluations. It is worth mentioning that Ellis and Vasiljevic's predictive is similar to Tomlinson's pre-use evaluation and retrospective is like post-use evaluations.

In a different distinction, ELT materials can be evaluated at the 'macro' and the 'micro' levels (McGrath, 2002, p.14). Macro evaluation has also been termed 'external evaluation' (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p.61). McGrath (2002) claims that 'macro-level evaluation is concerned about obtaining a general impression of the material' (p.25). Micro-level evaluation has also been termed 'internal evaluation' (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p.66). According to

McDonough & Shaw (2003), ‘the essential issue at this stage is for us to analyze the extent to which the factors in the external evaluation stage match up with the internal consistency and organization of the materials as stated by the author’ (pp. 66-67).

Among the others, Retrospective or post-use evaluation is the most important and valuable evaluation as it presents the real impact of the materials on the users (Tomlinson, 2003). In other words, it can measure the actual outcomes of the use of the materials and thus provide the data on which reliable decisions about the use, adaptation, or replacement of the materials can be made.

Mukundan and Ahour (2010) proposed that a framework for generating clear, concise, and flexible criteria would be more useful than detailed and inflexible checklists. Therefore, the researcher has selected the McDonough and Shaw (2003) model for the evaluation of the textbook this is a retrospective evaluation that contains external evaluation, internal evaluation, and whole evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is a qualitative study of *English for Afghanistan* series, which evaluates the textbooks by analyzing them based on the framework proposed by McDonough and Shaw (2003). In this study, the researcher used a non-survey research design. Brown (2001, p.2) suggests that it is essential to study the available non-survey data before developing any new data collection instrument. Non-survey data can be gained through the available information tools which include recorded analysis, literature review, etc.

Tools and Techniques

English for Afghanistan (2010) series includes 8 books that are taught in grades 4-12. The researcher has selected High School textbooks which include grades 10-12 for the evaluation.

The textbooks are examined through retrospective evaluation based on McDonough and Shaw’s (2003) material evaluation model. The model includes external evaluation which includes criteria that gives an overview of the organizational foundation of the course books, ‘as stated explicitly by the author and publisher through the cover, introduction, and table of contents statements. Internal evaluation to see how far the materials match up to what the author claims as well as to the aims and objectives of a given teaching program. The overall evaluation examines the extent of suitability of a textbook for a group of learners. For providing data on each of the elements in either model stated above, the researcher will refer to the materials. Therefore, textbooks will be analyzed.

Procedure of Data Collection and Data Analysis

The main data for evaluating the textbooks is the books themselves. The researcher will look for any component

based on models to be analyzed in the book. The researcher examined the data in the textbooks by looking at and evaluating all the topics, tasks, and exercises in the books for grades ten, eleven, and twelve.

The researcher examined the textbooks using McDonough and Shaw’s model having external evaluation, internal evaluation, and overall evaluation. In external evaluation, the preface to the textbook, table of contents, and the introductory part of the *English for Afghanistan*: for grades 10-12 are examined to observe the claims made for the textbook. In internal evaluation, the internal organization of the textbook is examined. The overall evaluation examines the extent of suitability of a textbook for a group of learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

McDonough and Shaw (2003) Three-Stage Model

- For the purpose of evaluating *English for Afghanistan*, the researcher used McDonough and Shaw’s (2003) evaluation model. This model consists of external evaluation and internal evaluation, and overall evaluation which contains the following items to be identified.

External Evaluation

- *The Intended Audience.* The textbooks: *English for Afghanistan* Grade 10, 11, and 12 are published by selected committees of compiling, research, and editing of the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan. These textbooks are intended for teaching at schools in Afghanistan. The whole series contains eight books that are introduced in grade four and continue till grade twelve, one book each year. As per a message of his excellency Minister of Higher Education, the series is intended for school children in Afghanistan, “Our new curriculum has been shaped by the desires of our people for an ideal future using the latest advances in education development”, so it is not taught in other private institutions for the purpose of short term or long term courses. This series is only intended for local use only because it is based on the needs and culture of Afghan students rather than global use.
- *The Proficiency Level.* The textbooks which the researcher intended to evaluate are for high school grades. This means the textbooks are meant for the Advanced level based on the proficiency levels provided by ACTFL which comprises Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior. The advanced level includes (Advanced Low, grade 10; Advanced Mid, grade 11; and Advanced High, grade 12).
- *The Context in Which the Materials are to be Used.* Obviously, as noted by the authors, these textbooks are designed as General English textbooks. Additionally, this series is prepared considering the needs, wants, and interests as well as the culture of Afghan students. So they are particularly written for the Afghan community keeping in mind the values of the community. As a

result, it is made for local purposes rather than global purposes.

- *How the language has been presented and organized into teachable units/lessons?* The textbooks in question contain twelve units each, which each comprises seven lessons on average. Each unit starts with its objectives; The first lesson starts with a topic related to daily life including one exercise; the second lesson is related to grammar items that contain exercises to it; Lesson three has a reading section that contains a passage following the related questions for discussion; lesson four is word study which teaches new words and an exercise with it; Lesson five is another conversational activity in which a stimulus (like a picture) is provided for discussion; lesson six is related to writing in which a written passage is provided to reflect on it; Lesson seven is a revision usually related to the grammar item which is discussed in the same unit.
- *The author's views on language and methodology and the relationship between the language, the learning process, and the learner.* The author's view of language here is to develop practical and functional skills in which grammar is carefully controlled. The authors also focus on lexicon and structures to be acquired and mastered. Further, the authors link the language, religion, and culture.
- *Are the materials to be used as the main 'core' course or to be supplementary to it?* The textbooks which the researcher is evaluating are related to the main series which functions as a core course and is to be used for teaching in schools in Afghanistan.
- *Is the teacher's book in print and locally available?* *English for Afghanistan* grades ten, eleven, and twelve don't have a teacher's guide book but they are available only for grades six, seven, and eight.
- *Is a vocabulary list included?* All the books in this series contain twelve units which comprise conversation, reading, writing, word study and at the end of each unit, there is a list of all new words given.
- *What visual material does the book contain and is it there for cosmetic value only or is it integrated into the text?* The textbooks contain pictures, icons, Signs, (for example Traffic Signs), Symbols, and graphic organizers (for example Charts, boxes, shapes ...) for help in the classification of some data. They also include some drawings like showing the water cycle. Maps are also given for discussing a topic. All these visual stimuli are given in order to contextualize the topic as well as facilitate learning, start a discussion, explain topics, and simplify things.
- *Is the layout and presentation clear or cluttered?* There are different types of visuals in the textbooks. Such as most of the titles are written with word arts; most of the grammar items are explained with shapes, boxes, and vectors; there are many pictures on almost every page as well as more background colors for page making the textbooks somehow cluttered.
- *Is the material too culturally biased or specific?* As this series of textbooks is made for Afghan schools, it is meant to be biased. Afghanistan is being an Islamic country, It is completely focusing on Islamic culture. Moreover, most of the topics are related to the Afghan community. Even most of the people pictured in the book are Afghans.
- *Do the materials represent minority groups and/or women in a negative way?* An important part of this component is about gender biases. In these textbooks, almost all the topics and discussions are being biased-they are related to males. The people shown in the pictures are also male. One another point that has to be discussed is the religious aspect. In these textbooks, almost half of the topics and passages are related to the Islam religion. These topics also include pictures which are more than enough.
- *What is the cost of the inclusion of digital materials?* No digital material—CD, DVD, interactive games, quizzes, and downloadable materials- are included in student books, thus they do not pay anything for them. Only the textbooks are available in PDF format on the online site of the Ministry of Education for free.
- *The inclusion of tests in the teaching materials; would they be useful for your particular learners.* No test or test book is included in the materials. However, there are some parts of the books, 'reviews' that can be used as a test, especially a diagnostic test.

Internal Evaluation

- *The presentation of the skills in the materials.* High school material of *English for Afghanistan* comprises language skills as well as vocabulary and grammar. The language skill which is focused the most is Reading which is 47%. The second skill which is focused more is Speaking which is 31%. The third skill is Writing which is 22% but the Skill which is almost completely ignored is Listening for which there is no exercise provided for practicing and its degree is 0% as you can see in Figure 1.
- *The grading and sequencing of the materials.* The gradation of the material is based on what Krashen (1982) says that the next teaching item should be just above the current competence of the learner. The sequence of the materials in *English for Afghanistan* is in cyclic format. Some grammar items are explained gradually in different units. For example, the grammar item (Reported speech) is started for the first time in lesson two, unit eight, grade ten. Then it is more elaborated in lesson two, unit nine, same textbook. Later on, the same topic is discussed more in detail in lesson four, unit nine, and grade eleven. Finally, it is further elaborated in lesson four, unit ten, grade eleven.
- *Where reading/'discourse skills are involved, is there much in the way of appropriate text beyond the sentence?* The reading skill is focused more on *English for Afghanistan*. There are different types of passages provided for reading. These include paragraphs, essays,

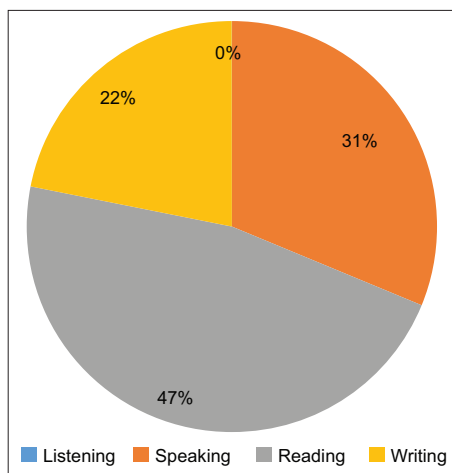


Figure 1. Language Skills

articles from magazines, newspapers, etc. they usually focus on both local comprehension and global comprehension. The question usually that comes after the reading passages are related to skimming and more related to scanning.

- *Where listening skills are involved, are recordings 'authentic' or artificial?* The listening skill in *English for Afghanistan* is neglected as discussed earlier. In some circumstances, the teacher is asked to read aloud for the students in place of playing a native speaker's audio.
- *Do speaking materials incorporate what we know about the nature of real interaction or are artificial dialogues offered instead?* The conversations do not seem to be artificial mostly since they are based on the conventions of speaking in different situational circumstances. As an example, consider the conversation of unit five, lesson one of grade ten, 'Money', which is based on a real conversation that takes place when you are in the money exchange market.
- *The relationship of tests and exercises to (1) learners' needs and (2) what is taught by course materials.* According to Cunningsworth, (1995, p.97) Students' needs are:
 - The need to communicate effectively
 - The need to be familiar with the language systems
 - The need for challenge
 - The need to take on more responsibility for their own learning
 - The need for cross-cultural awareness

Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann.

English for Afghanistan is written based on some of the students' needs, but the question is which one of them. As mentioned before, the books have a communicative approach toward language learning and teaching, and because the exercises of the books are based on the contents to be taught, it is rational to consider that the exercises of the books serve the communicative goals of the books. However, all needs are not covered for example all language systems are not covered, no responsibility is given for the students learning on their own ... As authors of

English for Afghanistan noted in their introduction and analysis of the course books shows, contents are based on the Islamic-Afghan culture; thus, the learners do not acquire cross-cultural awareness.

- *Do you feel that the material is suitable for different learning styles?* They are suitable for all learning styles but the topics and exercises, in this series, are presented only in visual (images, graphs...) and verbal (reading and writing) exercises and activities. However, exercises and activities for the remaining learning styles are neglected. For example, there is no claim for self-study, all that is guided is that teachers should teach.
- *Are the materials engaging to motivate both students and teachers alike, or would you foresee a student-teacher mismatch?* In *English for Afghanistan*, interactive activities (like games) and kinesthetic learning activities are missing. No technology, software, and the internet are used in teaching and learning to make learning more interactive. Yet, the situations and activities motivate learners because they are context-related and engaging.

The Overall Evaluation

- *The usability factor.* The objective of the curriculum is to learn English as a communicative means. The current books serve this purpose as 'core' properly. However, some adaptation is necessary for some parts of the textbooks.
- *The generalizability factor.* As this series is published for Afghan Schools only, then they can be used for Afghans learning the English language at Afghan Schools both inside Afghanistan and outside Afghanistan. Because the topics and situations are related to Afghan culture. And all Afghans share a common culture.
- *The adaptability factor.* The textbooks are introduced by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of teaching English at Afghan schools, where teachers are not allowed to adopt any parts of the book. Thus, adaptation is not feasible.
- *The flexibility factor.* *English for Afghanistan* is a fixed series for teaching English to school students. The contents along with the sequence and grading of the topics and activities are identified by the curriculum committee. Teachers are not given permission to alter any part of their textbooks.

CONCLUSION

In this research, High School grade 10-12 English textbooks were evaluated using McDonough & Shaw's (2003) model. The evaluation indicated both strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks. The strength includes that the textbooks which are published by the curriculum committee of the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan are made for local purposes. This series is prepared considering all the values of the people of the community including their religion and culture. No cultural or Islamic offensive issues are included in the books. Additionally, the textbooks are

situational approach based, in which different real-life situations are given for the purpose of communication. The textbooks have their particular objectives for all the units that are achievable through the lessons. Moreover, the activities are encouraging students to use the language and require them to express themselves rather than be a listener. Furthermore, the tasks enhance comprehension that draws students' attention more to the meaning of the language than its form. Finally, the visuals, definitions, examples, and other forms of input help to remove doubt about the meaning of introduced information. However, the evaluation also indicated some drawbacks in the textbooks. The textbooks are very much cultural and gender-biased. As they include Afghan culture only. The visuals and situations in the books are almost all related to the masculine gender. Additionally, listening skill is neglected as no audio material is associated with the series. Furthermore, the tasks in the textbooks do not apply an inductive approach toward teaching grammatical structures so discovery-learning is not practiced. Likewise, the amount of pair/group work activities that help learners to practice the language more naturally is not satisfactory. Moreover, the visual picture, graphs, shapes, and tables are more than enough for giving Language input.

Limitations

During the evaluation process, reviewing the literature regarding English for Afghanistan the researcher faced a lack of studies.

Suggestions

The researcher offers the following suggestions for the curriculum committee of the Ministry of Education.

- Ministry of Education should present design and develop teachers' guide to help teachers to use a common way of material presentation with some creative options.
- The present textbooks lack workbooks, CD, and teaching-based tests that are suggested to be added to the series.
- Grammar and vocabulary need to be contextualized. In isolation, the grammar and vocabulary can not be properly learned.

Further Research

- As Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the core skills in language learning, they need to be studied too.
- The textbooks need to be evaluated from the teachers' point of view based on a checklist proposed by any researcher to provide primary data.

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