Textbook Evaluation for the Students of Speech Therapy

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate an ESP textbook in terms of McDonough and Shaw (2003) based on external and internal evaluation. The ESP textbook was *Special English for Computer Sciences* (2010) by Hojjat Baghban. This study also discussed the external evaluation and a detailed evaluation of a chapter of the ESP textbook. This ESP textbook was designed for teaching to students of computer sciences in the department of computer sciences in *Islamic Azad University,* Larestan Iran. This evaluation revealed that the ESP textbook would be appropriate with some modifications and also with some additional materials to meet the needs of the students of computer sciences.

Keywords: ESP, Materials evaluation, Textbook evaluation, Teaching, Computer Sciences, Internal & external evaluation

1. The importance of evaluation

Evaluation is considered as a dynamic process that investigates the suitability and appropriateness of textbooks. (Rea-Dickens and Germaine 1992).The role of evaluation is very important in second or foreign language education. Both teachers and material developers use evaluation as a device which develops the innovations and modifications within the teaching and learning context. All materials taught by the teachers must be evaluated. A systematic evaluation can maximize learning a second or foreign language (Brown, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Richards, 2001). In spite of the important role of textbook evaluation in improving teaching and learning programs, it is not well-supported by teachers or curriculum designers. (Hargreaves 1989). The process of selecting and evaluating textbook is a time-consuming process (McDonough & Shaw, 2001; Karimi, 2006). However, evaluating a textbook should be in the direction of meeting the learners' needs.

Today, English language teaching is the most prominent issue in English for specific courses. It is the most important language of many scientific and scholarly conferences and workshops. For the past few decades the need for English language to learn the expression of information in various professional fields of study has been increased. To this end, one of the major concerns in some countries like Iran in which English is taught as a foreign language, is the teaching of ESP. ESP has been around 40 years. ESP has different definitions but all focus on the how ESP teaching develops appropriate procedures for learners who are supposed to learn English for specific purpose. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) believed that ESP is a process not a product. They also consider ESP "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p.19). ESP can also defined based on learner needs that have to successfully perform real-life tasks unrelated to merely passing an English course or exam (Smoak, 1996). According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) the main concerns of ESP are needs analysis, text analysis, and preparing learners to communicate in an effective way in any required situations. ESP doesn't include any type of teaching material, nor is it a type of language or methodology. In fact, it is assigned to particular group of people and in a particular context. However, an important issue in ESP is to see whether the textbooks and materials taught in the course is useful for the purpose of the course. To this end, textbook evaluation is done. The first component of ESP is assessing the needs of the learners followed by a need analysis. Therefore, students' needs and the ways to assessing and addressing them is the key point that should be elaborated effectively and efficiently.

To Hutchinson and Waters (1987) ESP includes principle which indicates that to what reason the learners need English and then teaching English for that reason. Therefore, teaching English is time-consuming. English in some countries like Iran is the language some academic textbooks especially in medicine. To this end, universities in Iran include some ESP courses in the curriculum. Although various ESP courses and the growing demand for communication through English, these courses are limited for teaching some specific lexicons, grammar points, and translation of the texts. They have failed to

take into account the learners' interests and needs and they are not successful in achieving high motivation for learning among the students, and in turn, it leads to poor performance especially when they want to use English in their professions.

The publication of ESP books as one of the most prestigious areas of EFL teaching has been common from the early 1960s. However, there are a few ESP textbooks that are based on some careful research and a defined theoretical position. Therefore, the evaluation of teaching materials is a major part of a teacher's duty. To Hutchinson and Waters (1987) evaluation is a matching process, which concerns matching learners' needs to available solutions. In order to assure optimal results the evaluation process in ESP should be carefully conducted.(Allwright, 1981;McGrath, 2002). Therefore, a promising approach to a theory of ESP comes from the analysis and evaluation of ESP textbooks. All ESP activities have to be connected to a view of text.

Textbooks in any teaching context play an important role in helping teachers fulfilling their responsibilities. Regarding this issue, Riazi (2003) points out that, "textbooks play a very crucial role in the realm of language teaching and learning and are considered the next important factor in the second/foreign language classroom after the teacher." (p.52). Likewise, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) refer to the role of textbook as a universal element of teaching. They also believe that "no teaching-learning situation is complete until it has its relevant textbook" (p.315).

To O'Neil (1982) four reasons of using textbooks are as follows: (a) the textbooks shoud be designed based on the needs of the learners (b) the students should have a plan for their future learning (c) textbooks should have reasonable price and (d) appropriate textbooks should allow teachers to adapt and modify them to meet the learners' needs. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) textbooks as materials can play an important role in learning situations and assist teachers with their responsibilities. They have some justifications for using textbooks a) as a source of language, b) as a learning support, c) for motivation and stimulation, and d) for reference.

The role of the textbook in the language classroom is a difficult one to be defined perfectly and exactly. Using only textbooks, from cover to cover, without any supplemental material is not the most satisfactory method for meeting students' needs. However, both teachers and students need a framework on which to build and textbooks definitely provide this. It is important that instructors strike a balance between being a slave to their texts and providing organized, objective-based instruction (Garinger 2002).

To Hutchinson and Waters (1987) materials have six objectives: they should (1) provide a stimulus for learning, (2) help to organize teaching and learning process, (3) embody a view of the nature of language and learning, (4) reflect the nature of the learning task, (5) have a very useful function in broadening the basis of teacher training, and (6) provide models of correct and appropriate language use.

The aim of Textbooks should be compatible with the learners' needs. Based on the importance of textbooks, they should meet appropriate criteria. Cunnigsworth (1995) suggests that "careful selection is made, and that the materials selected closely reflect the aims, methods, and values of the teaching program" (p.7). Nunan (1991) observes "the selection process can be greatly facilitated by the use of systematic materials evaluation procedures which help ensure that materials are consistent with the needs and interests of the learners they are intended to serve, as well as being in harmony with institutional ideologies on the nature of language and learning" (p.209). Sheldon (1988) considered different reasons for textbook evaluation. He believed that textbook selection showed an educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial, and even political investment. Evaluation helps teachers to become aware of the weaknesses and strengths of textbooks. To Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) evaluation is a means of conducting action research and it can be an important component for teacher training course. They refer to different types of materials evaluation. The first one is pre-use evaluation which is related to the performance of a textbook which is examined. The second type is in-use evaluation which examines the currently used textbook. The third type is post-test evaluation in which one can decide how to improve the textbook for the future use.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) have a definition for evaluation as asking questions and acting on the responses. They also believe that evaluation "begins with determining what information to gather and ends with bringing about change in current activities or influencing future ones" (p.128). Two main types of evaluation are formative and summative. Most ESP practitioners should be dealing with formative evaluation which happens during a course. This kind of evaluation involves "mini-evaluations" and helps necessary modifications of the course. Summative evaluation is another type of evaluation which takes place at the end of the course or when the course is finished. Summative evaluation does not influence on the course. In fact, the usefulness of the courses and the improvement of the subsequent versions of the course or materials are evaluated through this type of evaluation.

Evaluation is also defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as a process of matching needs to available solutions. They refer to four stages of evaluation process as a) defining criteria, b) subjective analysis, c) objective analysis, and d) matching. To have a best choice, they believe that different parties like teachers, students, and sponsors should be involved in the course.

Regarding different types of materials evaluation, Robinson (1991) points out that evaluation can be done by both outsiders and insiders. She has a further distinction of evaluation as process and product evaluation. Process evaluation refers to teaching and learning processes, strategies, administrative and decision-making processes, and product evaluation is related to the students' product such as examination results, and essays. By insiders she means teachers, students, and course designers. To carry out the evaluation, Robinson (1991) makes a list of tools such as questionnaires, checklists, rating

scales, interviews, observation, and records. Except formative and summative, Richards (2001) refers to another type of evaluation as illuminative evaluation. To Richard (2001) illuminative evaluation seeks to recognize how different aspects of the program work or are being implemented. Moreover, he suggests that illuminative evaluation seeks "to provide a deeper understanding of the processes of teaching and learning that occur in the program, without necessarily seeking to change the course in any way as a result" (p.289)

According to McDonough and Shaw (2003) textbook evaluation contains three stages. The first evaluation is external evaluation in which the materials are examines by the author or the publisher including claims based on the cover page and information in introduction and table of contents. External evaluation provides information about the intended audience, the proficiency level, the context of use, presentation and organization of materials, and authors' opinion about language and methodology, use of audio-visual materials, vocabulary list and index, cultural aspects, tests and exercises included in the book. On the other hand, in the internal evaluation some factors are examined: a) the presentation of the skills, b) the grading and sequence of the materials, c) authenticity or artificiality of the listening materials, d) authenticity or artificiality of the speaking materials, e) appropriateness of tests and materials, and f) appropriateness of the materials for different learning styles. Overall evaluation is the last stage in which usability, generalizability, adaptability, and flexibility factors are examined.

A good textbook can act as a plan or map for a teacher. Crowford (1994) point out that a textbook is very important for teachers because it can provide something to negotiate about and shows what is being done in the classroom. Riazi (2003) considers textbooks as important factors in second/foreign language classrooms.

An important issue in selecting good materials for the course is meeting the students' needs. To Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) in a foreign language context, ESP classroom may be the only source of English. Materials can also play role in exposing learners to the language. However, the materials should be challenging and they should offer new ideas and information while being grounded in the learners' experience and knowledge; to encourage fun and creativity.

In Iran, textbooks play major role in the language practice that takes place in the classrooms. In fact, textbooks are responsible for the content of lessons, the balance of the skills taught, and the language practice the students are dealing with during class activities. Therefore, textbooks form the content and nature of teaching and learning.

According to Nooreen & Arshad (2010) materials and textbooks are responsible for shaping knowledge, attitudes and principles of the students. Teachers are the authorities who can evaluate the textbooks and evaluation is part of their work (Ansari and Babayi 2002). Sheldon (1991) points out the importance of textbook evaluation as an administrative and educational decision. Sheldon (1988) has offered several reasons for textbook evaluation. He suggests that the selection of a language textbook often signals an important administrative and educational decision.

Textbook evaluation and teacher education are two aspects of professional development that has been the aim of carrying out of the current study. This study is supposed to examine a prescribed textbook used in ESP classrooms for the students of speech therapy and provides the necessary tools in preparing learners for the transition of language skills such as reading and writing across disciplines. Also, the current study concerns the language needs of the students of speech therapy in Shiraz University of medical Sciences, Iran, and attempts to shed light on their strengths and weaknesses in English.

2. The current study

To Robinson (1991) eight reasons for the underdevelopment of evaluation in ESP are the shortness of ESP courses, the time-consuming of evaluation, and feeling of no need for evaluation. In a context like Iran in which English is considered as a foreign language systematic evaluation of textbooks is not carried out and the students' needs are ignored. To this end, the researcher seeks to answer the following question: Is the ESP textbook appropriate for the students of speech therapy?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

In this study, there was a population of 40 (15 males and 25 females) students of speech therapy doing an ESP course in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. All the students were between 18 to 20 years old.

3.2 Materials

The textbook which was supposed to be evaluated was *English for the Students of Speech therapy*. Students were supposed to read the texts each session and translate them into Persian. In order to evaluate the textbook, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire with twenty items. The questionnaire was designed based on the Sheldon (1988) model of textbook evaluation. The questionnaire focused on six parts: practical concerns, materials in relation to course objective, subject matter, linguistic issues, skills and strategies, variety of tasks and activities, and the layout of materials. In order to make the questionnaire more understandable to the students, the researcher translated the items for the students. To check the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was used. To this end, the questionnaire was piloted with 30 students. In this study the obtained reliability for the questionnaire was 0.72 which was quite acceptable (De Vellis, 2003).

3.3 Procedure

The researcher of this study explained about the aim of the study and informed them of the processes they were supposed to go through. In order to anonymous, the students were also asked not to write their names on their papers. They also were

explained that their answers would not affect on their course grade.   To evaluate the effectiveness of the intended textbook, the participants were asked to give their opinion on a Likert type questionnaire with five options: excellent, good, average, weak, and very weak.

4. Results

The first areas to examine were practical concerns**:** question was "*To what extent is the textbook available?"* In answering the first question*,* 75% of the students selected "excellent" and 20% selected "good" and 5% selected "average". The second question was **"***To what extent can the accompanying materials be obtained in a timely manner?"* 17% of the students selected good, 30% selected average, 35% selected weak, and 18% selected very weak alternatives**.** The third question was **"***Is the text book cost effective?"* 9% of the students selected excellent, 48% selected good**,** 26% selected average, 8% selected weak, and 9% percent selected very weak alternatives.

The second area was supposed to examine the relation between course objectives and the textbook**:** the first question was **"***To what extent do the objectives of the textbook match the objectives of the course*?" 11% of the students selected excellent, 21% selected good, 28% selected average, 31% selected weak, and 9% selected very weak option. The second question was**: "***To what extent does the textbook seem to be in tune with broader educational concerns*?" 13% selected excellent, 23% of students selected good, 24% selected average, 21% selected weak, and 19% selected very weak option. The third question was *"To what extent is the textbook appropriate for the audience*?" 11% of the students selected excellent, 21% selected good, 20% selected average, 31% selected weak, and 17% selected very weak option.

Subject matter issue was the third area that was supposed to be evaluated. To this end, the first question was "*To what extent does the subject matter motivate and interest students*?" 7% of the students selected excellent, 18% selected good, 23% chose average, 44% selected weak, and 8% selected very weak options. The second question was "*To what extent has the ordering of by topics been arranged in a logical fashion*?" 28% selected excellent, 35% selected good, 11% selected average, 16selected weak, and 10% selected very weak options**.** The third question was "*To what extent has the content been graded according to the needs and background knowledge of the students*?" 14% of the students selected excellent, 31% selected good, 35% selected average, 14% selected weak, and 6% selected very weak alternatives.

Language issue was the next part to be evaluated. The first question was **"***To what extent does the textbook contain the basic grammatical patterns and vocabulary*?" 9% of the students selected excellent, 36% of the students selected good, 34% of the students selected average, 15% selected weak, and 6% selected very weak options**.** The second question was "*To what extent does the presentation of structure and vocabulary move from simple to difficult*?" 15% of the students selected excellent, 16% of the students selected good, 24% selected average, 30% selected weak, and 15% selected very weak options**.** The third q*u*estion was "*To what extent are the new vocabulary and structures recycled in the subsequent units for reinforcement*?" 12% of the participants selected excellent, 19% chose good, 23% chose average, 35% chose weak, and 11% selected very weak options.

Skills and strategies involved in the questionnaire were also evaluated. In this case, the first question was "*To what extent does the textbook teach the reading skill?"* 23% of students selected excellent, 19% selected good, 36% selected average, 13% chose weak, and 9% selected very weak alternatives**.** Strategies and skills: inference making, reading for the main idea, and guessing were next issues to be evaluated. As most of the students had some problems with these issues, the required information about them was obtained from interview with the students. The students believed that these skills and strategies were not considered in this textbook.

The exercises and activities were considered as the next step to be evaluated. The question was "*To what extent the exercises and activities varied enough to challenge the students*?" 45% of the students selected excellent, 30% selected good, 18% selected average, 7% selected weak, and nobody selected very weak option.

Layout of the book was the last part to be evaluated. To this end, the first question was "*To what extent does the book appear attractive*?" 8% of the students selected excellent, 14% of participants elected good, 22% of students selected average, 36% of them selected weak, and 20% selected very weak options. The second question was **"***To what extent do photographs and illustrations in the book motivate you to talk about the subject*?" The textbook did not have any photographs or illustrations related to the topics or reading passages. The following Table summarizes the results of the study.

Table1. The students' attitudes towards the textbook

Criteria	Very weak	Weak	Average	Good	Excellent
To what extent is the text book available?	___	___	5%	20%	75%
To what extent can the accompanying materials be obtained in a timely manner?	18%	35%	30%	17%	___
Is the text book cost effective?	9%	8%	26%	48%	9%
To what extent do the objectives of the textbook match the objectives of the course?	9%	31%	28%	21%	11%

To what extent does the textbook seem to be in tune with broader educational concerns?	19%	21%	24%	23%	13%
To what extent is the textbook appropriate for the audience?	17%	31%	20%	21%	11%
To what extent does the subject matter motivate and interest students?	8%	44%	23%	18%	7%
To what extent has the ordering of topics been arranged in a logical fashion?	10%	16%	11%	35%	28%
To what extent has the content been graded according to the needs and background knowledge of the students?	6%	14%	35%	31%	14%
To what extent are the new vocabulary and structures recycled in the subsequent units for reinforcement	15%	30%	24%	16%	15%
To what extent does the textbook teach the reading skill?	11%	35%	23%	19%	12%
To what extent the exercises and activities varied enough to challenge the students?	___	7%	18%	30%	45%
To what extent does the book appear attractive?	20	36%	22%	14%	8%

5. Discussion and conclusion

As aforementioned, some major areas were investigated in the questionnaire were practical concerns, materials in relation to course objectives, exercise and activities, skills and strategies, language issues, and subject matter. As a general matter, no textbook is perfect and every textbook or teaching material has its own merits. In this case, it can be said the textbook under the evaluation was relatively suitable from cost-effectiveness, availability, and grammatical patterns and vocabulary. The main purpose of this study was to evaluate an ESP textbook in order to make suggestions for improving its quality.

Regarding the first area responses to the questionnaire indicated that supplementary materials are the main problems. With these materials the students are able to improve their English and learn the contents of the textbook better.

Referring to the second area the results of the responses to the questionnaires revealed that the purpose of the textbook was not exactly clear for the students and they didn't understand the main aims of the course.

With respect to the third area that was the subject matter issues, it can be said that the ESP textbook was not so motivating for the students. It seemed that the students were not satisfied with the topics. The responses showed that the participants were pleased with grammatical structures and vocabulary provided in the textbook. However, the logical ordering was a major defect for this ESP textbook. In this case, it can be said no logical order from simple to difficult and no recycling of the structures and vocabulary were seen. Regarding the skills and strategies, the students didn't have positive attitudes towards the ESP textbook. In general, the main aim of an ESP textbook is to teach how to read efficiently and effectively through practicing useful skills and strategies like guessing the meaning of not familiar words from the context.

An important issue in the evaluation of a textbook is related to the layout of a textbook which plays an essential role in attracting the students' attention and they can also motivate the students. Unfortunately, the textbook was not illustrated. To this end, the students were become so tired easily.

Different issues should be considered in order to make a textbook suitable for the students such as the background knowledge and the current English level of the students. However, the results of the answers to the questionnaire revealed that the book didn't have any harmony with their English proficiency. Simple vocabulary and structures should be introduced in earlier lessons and the students should not be overwhelmed with some new and difficult structures.

Exercises and activities can play the consolidating role of what the learners have learned. In fact, the exercises and activities should be in a way to encourage learners to think about the texts and use their cognitive abilities. However, this textbook lacks pedagogical tasks and some examples of such activities.

One of the drawbacks of the most ESP textbooks is that they have not been designed based on the learners' needs. In most cases, need analysis has been ignored before the starting of the course. Therefore, there is no adequate information about the students who are supposed to take the course. While writing the course, the writers do not consider the students' needs and the intended audience, which makes them follow predetermined guidelines for all courses.

ESP textbooks should make the students interested and they should be motivating for the students. To this end, a useful technique that can be arousing is using pictures, illustrations, tasks and authentic materials. The materials should contain some prediction activities, skimming and scanning exercises, and also some tasks which stimulate critical analysis and evaluation of what they have read. The content of the textbook is an important factor to be considered. Therefore, it should be connected to the learners' experience previous knowledge. An appropriate ESP textbook should include some basic and necessary grammatical structures and should also contain an adequate quantity and range of vocabulary. Moreover, correct pronunciation and correct use of English should be practiced in an ESP course.

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