

The Value of Evaluating English Textbooks: Challenges and Opportunities in Libyan Primary Schools

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Abstract:

The evaluation of English textbooks is crucial for ensuring effective language instruction. This research paper evaluates the suitability of a textbook called English textbooks used at primary schools in the Libyan context. A questionnaire targeted primary school English teachers and consisted of 15 items. The findings of this research can be helpful for the textbooks' developers and designers in the Ministry of Education and other pedagogical experts to revise and modify the current English textbook. This research paper also concludes with a better picture of the suitability and effectiveness of English textbooks in Libyan primary education.

Keywords: the relationship between English textbooks and evaluation, background on English text books use in Libya.

الملخص:

يعد تقييم الكتب المدرسية للغة الإنجليزية أمراً بالغ الأهمية لضمان تعليم اللغة الفعال. تقوم هذه الورقة البحثية بتقييم مدى ملاءمة كتاب مدرسي يسمى كتب اللغة الإنجليزية المستخدمة في المدارس الابتدائية في السياق الليبي. استهدفت استبانة معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الابتدائية وتكونت من 15 فقرة. يمكن أن تكون نتائج هذا البحث مفيدة لمطوري ومصممي الكتب المدرسية في وزارة التربية والتعليم وغيرهم من الخبراء التربويين لمراجعة وتعديل كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية الحالي. وتختتم هذه الورقة البحثية أيضاً بصورة أفضل عن مدى ملاءمة وفعالية كتب اللغة الإنجليزية في التعليم الابتدائي الليبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلاقة بين الكتب المدرسية الإنجليزية والتقييم، خلفية عن استخدام الكتب المدرسية الإنجليزية في ليبيا.

1-Introduction

Textbooks play a fundamental role in education, serving as vital tools that structure learning experiences and distribute knowledge across various subjects and levels of study. Evaluating English textbooks is significant because it ensures that they meet educational standards, are pedagogically effective, and align with curriculum objectives. Research indicates that "the evaluation and analysis of the textbook obviously will provide better insights into the book's suitability; whether it is relevant to the student's needs, matches the context in which it is going to be used, follows the objectives of learning, as well as fits the teachers' methodology (Hanifa, 2018:167). Another study by Torki and Chalak (2016) highlights that textbooks need to be designed, developed, and chosen carefully based on the needs of the students.

Evaluating these resources ensures that they provide a balanced and inclusive approach, catering to diverse learners and addressing varied learning styles. This evaluation process is vital for adapting materials to evolving educational standards and addressing specific local needs and contexts. Textbook evaluation is a practical process through which teachers; supervisors, managers, and materials developers can make judgments regarding the effect of the materials on the students (Torki and Chalak 2016).

2-Statement of the Problem

In Libya, the quality of English language education at primary schools is significantly influenced by the textbooks used in the classroom. From my own teaching experience and discussion with colleagues, I have noticed generally that there are issues that exist with the current primary English textbooks. For example, the prescribed classroom time often does not align with lesson content, limiting teachers' ability to engage students in various activities that foster language learning. This indicates a lack of systematic evaluation of these textbooks to determine their effectiveness in promoting language learning. This led the researcher to concern regarding the adequacy of teaching English textbooks, which may not align with modern

pedagogical approaches or the specific needs of Libyan students. As a result, students may struggle to achieve desired proficiency levels, hindering their overall academic performance and future opportunities in an increasingly globalized world.

3-Significance of the Study

There is a need for the current evaluation of English textbooks used in Libyan primary schools. Conducting this study is essential to address the gaps currently present in the literature regarding the effectiveness of these English textbooks. By systematically evaluating the textbooks, this research aims to provide valuable insights into their alignment with modern pedagogical approaches and the specific needs of Libyan students. Moreover, the findings of this research would be used as crucial evidence to guide educators and policymakers to make decisions about the development of textbooks. This can lead to improve teaching practices and better learning outcomes for students. In this regard, researchers can then conduct further research in this area based on the findings from this study.

4-Research question

1-To what extent is the English textbooks appropriate for Libya primary school students?

5-The relationship between English textbooks and evaluation

A school textbook is a book of a particular subject that is used in an educational setting. According to Nazeer et al (2015), a textbook is a source of knowledge for students. Textbooks are the central learning resources that provide English learning materials for students (Ayu, 2020; Tok, 2010). Textbooks serve as the primary instructional resource for teaching English language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Textbooks provide teachers with a framework for instruction and students with structured learning materials. Ayu (2020) also, confirms that textbooks are designed for learning processes that aim to increase students' knowledge and experience. The relationship between English textbooks and evaluation is essential in ensuring successful language education. There is a need for evaluation of English language textbooks in order to fulfill the needs of students (Nazeer et al, 2015). Evaluating textbooks involves evaluating various aspects, such as content and structure with ensure they meet educational standards and support learning

objectives. Chen (2005) defines curriculum evaluation as the application of evaluation to systematically measure and improve the planning, implantation, and effectiveness of programs. Textbooks serve as a reference point for teachers to plan lessons, select materials, and measure students' progress. Textbook evaluation is a formative process that involves analysing and interpreting the contents of a textbook to determine its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. To use and select appropriate effective textbooks during the learning and teaching process, on-going evaluation is required to ensure that materials effectively meet educational objectives and standards. Textbook should be evaluated to check and ensure their appropriateness (Nazeer et al, 2015). McDonough and Shaw (2003) also confirm that the evaluation of textbooks deserves serious consideration because an inappropriate choice may waste time and, funds and this may have a demotivating effect on both students and other teachers. Moreover, it may not meet the educational standards, curriculum objectives, and pedagogical principles. From this, a successful education system depends on an evaluation of English textbooks that ensures the suitability of a textbook.

6-Background on English textbooks use in Libya

In Libya, the use and evaluation of English textbooks at primary schools are crucial components of the educational framework. Libya's primary education system mandates a nine-year basic education, with English being a fundamental subject. The English textbooks used, such as "English for Libya," are designed under the supervision of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction to ensure consistency and structure in teaching and learning (Abdelaty, 2023).

The primary goals of these textbooks are to facilitate students' learning of essential English language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Typically, each textbook set comprises a subject book, a workbook, and a teacher's guidebook. The subject book includes eight units and eight lessons focused on vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension, often accompanied by audio CDs to enhance listening skills through exposure to native English speakers. The workbook provides exercises for students to practice the lessons learned in the subject

book. The English subject is in two classes each week of forty-five minutes.

The evaluation of English textbooks in Libya serves multiple purposes. It ensures content remains relevant, culturally sensitive, and aligned with educational standards. The evaluation process also fosters improvements and innovations in the educational system, driven by feedback from educators, students, and educational stakeholders. The Ministry of Education in Libya has tried to change and update its textbook many times to meet modern educational objectives. Ahmed (2012) also indicates that Libya has consistently tried to pay more attention to education with possible ways of improving it. The English textbook is designed to meet the learning objectives outlined by the Ministry of Education (Abdelaty, 2023).

In Libya, primary school teachers and inspectors have no role in designing English textbooks. Teachers are required to follow guidebooks as approved by the Ministry of Education within a specific period of time. However, Tok (2010) suggests that EFL teachers have the right to participate in evaluation since they are the real users of school textbooks. To develop an English textbook, it is essential to explore the opinions of the users as teachers.

Furthermore, selecting appropriate textbooks for primary school students meets various difficulties, as Ebbar (2011) states that from 2000 to 2010 the school system and structure went through unplanned changes and modifications of curricula. Ahmed (2012) confirms that teaching English in Libya has not been stable due to certain political issues. This caused an education gap, which affected the subsequent generations of students. A study by Pathan et al,(2016) state that English textbooks are out of students' needs, levels, and socio-cultural. These concerns highlight the importance of on-going evaluation and adaptation to ensure that English language education meets the evolving needs of Libyan students' effectively.

By continually evaluating and refining educational English textbooks, Libya aims to provide its students with a robust foundation in English language skills necessary for their academic and professional futures. The literature review highlights several aspects related to English textbooks.

These insights provide a basis for the present study, which seeks to evaluate a textbook called English for Libya used at primary schools in the Libyan context.

7-Methodology

Using a questionnaire to collect data on the evaluation of English textbooks among primary schools teachers in Libya is a practical and insightful approach. The nature of the investigation required such a data collection instrument. This questionnaire is well-suited for gathering insights from a large number of respondents. It allows for structured data collection on specific items related to the evaluation of English textbooks.

Only 59 responded to the online questionnaire and was analysed.

8-Data analysis and discussion

The descriptive statistics of the data from the questionnaires would be presented using a chart, with a brief description and discussion provided for each one. The process of analysis and discussion is conducted by presenting aspects of the data that have a relationship to the research question and aims of the study. The findings of this research revealed important points relating to the characteristics of a good textbook and identified strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to modify the book.

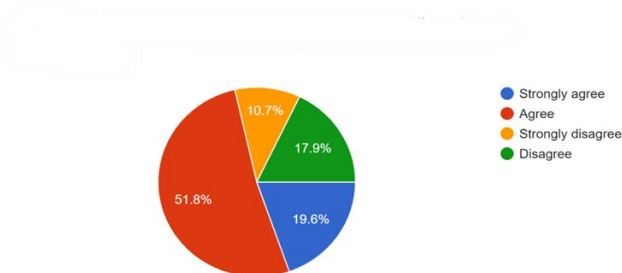
8-1 English textbooks are useful for learning.

From the below chart, the majority of respondents (71.4%) either strongly agreed or agreed, that textbooks are useful for their students' learning. Effective textbooks have the role of vital tools that can guide both teachers and students toward achieving educational goals. In addition, textbooks can be used as a map by teachers and students to achieve educational objectives. This result is agreed with Tok (2010) that textbooks play a useful role in the teaching /learning process and they are the primary agents of conveying the knowledge to the students. However, (28.6%) of teachers expressed disagreed with the statement regarding the usefulness of the current English textbooks. This indicates that a considerable number of educators find the textbooks lacking in their current form. The reasons for this dissatisfaction may include content that is not engaging, or not adequately aligned with students' needs and curriculum objectives.

To address these concerns, it is suggested that further development of English textbooks is necessary. Policymakers and the department of

curriculum and instruction should consider these insights to make targeted improvements. This could involve revising the content to make it more relevant and engaging, updating pedagogical approaches, and ensuring that the textbooks better meet the diverse needs of students.

Chart 1: English textbooks are useful for learning.



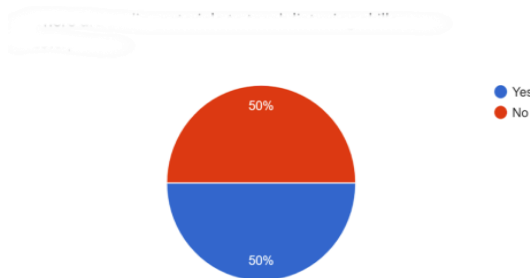
8-2 Audio materials.

The following chart illustrates the responses that (50%) of 59 teachers reported that their textbooks do not include audio materials (CDs). It appears that there is a lack of providing audio materials and the reason underlying this deficiency may be related to the Ministry of Education. This highlights that students may miss the opportunity to learn in flexible and adaptive environment that made them gain better achievement. Teachers frequently have a lack of resources such as supplementary materials and technological infrastructure which effective the use of the textbook (Abdelaty, 2023). However, a study by Tok (2010) indicates that textbooks include CDs which make the learning environment interesting and enjoyable for the students. This implies that each textbook needs to be attached to CDs to be used in classroom to develop listening skills. For example, using audio materials would help students to distinguish between the different dialects and accents in one country, thus students can understand synchronic variation.

Despite the availability of audio CDs, it appears that videos are not included with in the textbooks. The limited use of video materials in classrooms may be due to constraints on class time. However, incorporating videos such as movies, television programs, and news broadcasts could offer valuable insights into English-speaking cultures and enhance language learning. Videos provide a richer context and more experience that can complement the learning achieved through audio

materials alone. In conclusion, the integration of both audio and video materials in textbooks is essential for a more comprehensive language learning experience. Addressing these gaps could significantly benefit students by improving their listening skills and providing a deeper understanding of English culture.

Chart 2: Audio materials

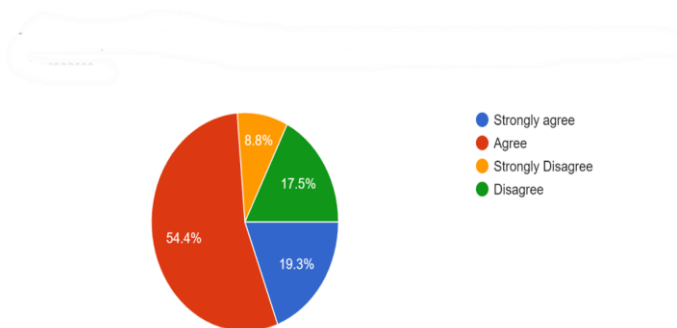


8-3 Balance of English language skills activities.

The balance of English language skills activities is essential for fostering comprehensive language proficiency among students. By providing opportunities for speaking, listening, reading, and writing practice, teachers can ensure that students develop their skills. The analysis of data shows a significant result concerning this item (73%) of teachers responded that there is a balance of four skills activities.

However, (26%) of teachers reported that the current textbooks fail to provide a sufficient balance of English language skills activities. This finding aligns with Abdelaty's study (2023) that the textbook did not sufficiently address the linguistic and communicative needs of their students, as it often focused on grammar and vocabulary at the expense of speaking and listening skills. Another research by Ghorbani (2011) found that there is not a well-balanced pattern among four English language skills. This may lead to impact on the students' learning achievement. It may be worth stating that textbooks with suitable number of activities for four skills are effective rather than focusing on some skills. This quality requires that policymakers re-evaluate and subsequently update textbooks to better align with students' language development and achievement.

Chart 3: Balance of English language skills activities.

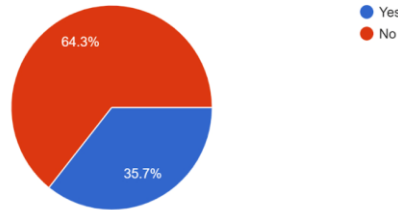


8-4 Balance between textbooks and lesson time.

The balance between textbooks and lesson time in the classroom is a central aspect of effective teaching and learning. Textbooks serve as structured resources that provide content, activities, and guidance for instruction, while lesson time represents the allocated duration. The below chart shows that (64%) of teachers agree that there is no balance between textbooks and lesson time. This aligns with the study by Pathan et al (2016) that the syllabus is not suitable as time is not enough to complete the tasks and activities in the lessons which force teachers to ignore listening and speaking.

With only 45 minutes, teachers often struggle to cover all tasks and activities outlined in the textbooks. For example, teachers reported that they focus more on grammar activities rather than other skills such as speaking and listening. Pathan et al, (2016) confirm that time is not enough to complete the tasks and activities in the lessons which forces teachers to ignore listening and speaking. However, (36%) of teachers responded positively that the allocated time is appropriate for current English textbooks. There is a clear need for policy-makers in Libya to update textbook content about the 45-minute lesson structure. Aligning educational materials with practical classroom constraints is essential. By achieving this balance, teachers can implement differentiated instruction strategies, more group work or discussion among students.

Chart 4: Balance between textbooks and lesson time.

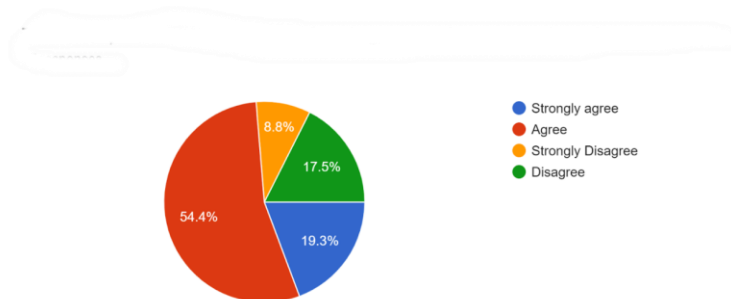


8-5 English textbooks' topics related to students' needs.

English textbooks are vital in shaping the teaching and learning process by carefully selecting topics that effectively meet students' needs. The current study analysis reveals that (73%) of respondents likely agree that English textbooks directly address students' educational and developmental needs. Many teachers highlight the importance of incorporating authentic materials to better expose students to real-life language use (Abdelaty, 2023). Similarly, a study by Pathan et al, (2016) found that only 31% of the teachers replied that the syllabus is relevant to the students' needs because it is rich with the basic vocabularies that the students need. Topics are often selected based on educational standards and curriculum guidelines set by curriculum designers.

However, (27%) of teachers selected the choice of disagree that English textbook topics are related to the students' needs. This highlights that certain topics in English textbooks may not align with their cultural contexts. Several teachers found the textbook content insufficient to meet their students' needs (Abdelaty, 2023). Additionally, the texts are long and the topics are boring for most students (Pathan et al, 2016). To ensure English textbooks remain relevant and effective, ongoing evaluation and adaptation are essential. This process would help address the developing needs of students in a rapidly changing educational landscape, ensuring that the materials used in the classroom truly reflect the interests and requirements of students.

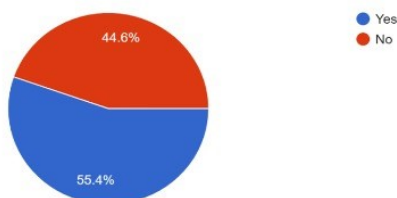
Chart 5: English textbooks' topics related to students' needs.



8-6 The content of textbooks and students' learning level.

The content of English textbooks and its alignment with students' level is a critical aspect of effective education. Those who are working on textbook selection should bear in mind the target students' level (Habtoor,2012). The analysis of data shows a significant result concerning this question (56%) of teachers responded that the content of textbooks is related to students' level. Textbooks typically focus on introducing fundamental vocabulary and basic grammar structures. However, (44%) of teachers agree that there is no relation between the content of textbooks and students' level. A study by Pathan et al,(2016) state that English textbooks are out of students' levels. Another study indicates that teachers do not consider the difficulty level of the reading text as well as the ability levels of the students (Owu-Ewie,2014). This highlights the importance of collaboration between textbook designers and educators to ensure that content is suitable for students' levels.

Chart 6: The content of textbooks and students' learning level.

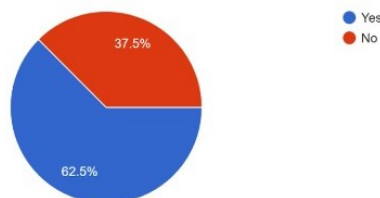


8-7 Textbooks and socio-cultural context of students.

Analyzing data about the relationship between textbooks and socio-cultural reveals that (62%) of English language teachers agree that the current textbooks take into account the cultural context of students. Textbooks serve not only as educational resources but also as reflections of societal values, norms, and perspectives. Analyzing textbooks through a socio-cultural lens involves understanding how they embody and transmit societal values, norms, and perspectives to students. Abdelaty (2023) confirms that learning English in Libya is influenced by cultural factors, such as attitudes, religion, and the influence of Arabic on English language learning.

The below chart also shows that (37%) of respondents disagree that the current English textbooks are designed about students' socio- cultural context. The textbook has a lack of cultural appropriateness, using examples of content that is either culturally insensitive or unfamiliar to students (Abdelaty, 2023). Also, Pathan et al, 2016) confirm that syllabus contains materials which are not related to the students' culture. For example, "all the participants agreed that the syllabus is not designed especially to suit the Libyan culture because there is not much focus on the way of life in Libya, food, religion, which makes it out of local cultural touch" (Pathan et al, 2016:27). These findings suggest that policymakers and curriculum developers may consider socio-cultural factors when selecting or developing English textbooks. This ensures that educational materials reflect societal diversity and promote inclusive education. Therefore, it is recommended that EFL textbooks should reflect appreciation and respect upon multi-cultures and community plurality, which include various cultural values and local, national, and global wisdom (Ayu, 2020).

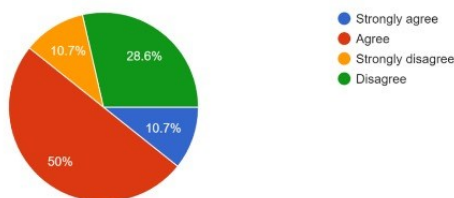
Chart 7: Textbooks and socio-cultural context of students.



8-8 Textbooks size and students' age

The size of textbooks for primary students can optimize learning at different stages. In this chart, (60%) of teachers responded positively that textbooks are appropriate for their students' age. For example, teachers should know the age of their students and what they are capable of reading at that level (Owu-Ewie, 2014). Textbooks designed for younger primary students (ages 6-12) typically have larger, more colorful visuals, and simplified text. These elements support their cognitive development by presenting information in digestible chunks and reinforcing key concepts through visual aids. Age appropriateness of textbooks is crucial to effective learning (Owu-Ewie, 2014). The data also indicate that (40%) of respondents indicate that textbooks size is not suitable for their students' age. From this result, the current English textbooks require update to meet the students' age which would reflect positively on their learning. The implication is that policy-makers in Libya need to revise the existing English textbooks to better align with the age and developmental stages of students.

Chart 8: Textbooks size and students' age



9- Conclusion:

As can be seen above, the evaluation of English textbooks in Libyan primary schools reveals significant insights into their current effectiveness and suitability for teaching English. Through a comprehensive questionnaire targeting primary school English teachers, this research has identified areas where existing textbooks may fall short in meeting the educational needs of students. The respondents expressed that there is no balance between textbooks and lesson time. Key findings underscore the importance of revising and modifying English textbooks to better align

with the language learning objectives and pedagogical practices suitable for Libyan students. The implications of this evaluation extend to textbook developers, Ministry of Education officials, and pedagogical experts. Collaborative efforts are essential to refine and enhance curriculum materials, ensuring they are relevant and effective. By enhancing the quality and relevance of English textbooks, stakeholders can ensure more effective language instruction and improved learning outcomes for students in Libyan primary schools.

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