

An Evaluation of English Language Textbook from Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract: *The study aimed at evaluating 9-10th grade textbook from teachers' perspective. This study highlights the perception of teachers on an evaluation of English language textbook. To achieve this goal, an evaluation scale was developed on the basis of language teaching and learning criteria that determine the specifications of good quality textbook. The sample of the study consisted of 45 male and female secondary school teachers. The researchers developed a 31-item questionnaire and one open-ended to evaluate the textbook. Alpha formula was used in order to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were carried out to interpret the data. The questionnaire included six main domains: attractiveness of the text and physical make-up, subject and content, exercises and activities, language type, language skills and context. The findings showed that the degree of evaluation was moderate. However, there were no significant differences in the degree of evaluation of the textbook.*

Key words: *Textbook, material, evaluation of textbook, English Language Teaching (ELT).*

Introduction

Textbooks are one of the most important resources among teaching and learning materials. Since the 1960s textbooks have been implemented as a wide range of supplementary materials. Almost all of the schools use textbooks as teaching tool to present the material. Textbooks play a fundamental role in language classrooms. Actually, materials, especially authentic materials, play a significant role in foreign language teaching and learning. So the use of textbook in English teaching is really needed. According to Cunningsworth (1995:7–15) textbook itself should correspond to learner's needs, help to equip learners to use language effectively for their own purposes, facilitate student's learning process, have a clear role in mediating the target language and the learner. So, Textbooks play an important role in many language classrooms but recently there have been a lot of debates within the English language teaching profession that is the actual role of textbooks in teaching English as a foreign language. At the same time, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue "The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching (p. 315). On the other hand, Arguments have encompassed both the potential and the limitations of textbooks. Moreover, other issues that have arisen in recent years include textbook design and practicality, methodological validity, the role of textbooks in innovation, the authenticity of materials in terms of their representation of language, communicative textbooks, and balance in presenting the language skills as well as cultural components. Therefore, Sheldon (1988:239) reveals both theoretical and practical problems with textbooks. However, the aim of

this study is to evaluate the ninth and tenth grade English Language Textbook for Bangladeshis' secondary schools that was released in 2001. The title of the book is *English for Today*. The book is prescribed by *National Curriculum & Textbook Board* to be taught at the ninth and tenth grade in all government and private secondary schools in the country. The researcher chose to evaluate this book for two reasons: first, it is the last book for completing secondary schools and second, it has been using since 1991 and evaluating it is an educational necessity. More specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent is the textbook effective according to the attractiveness and physical make-up?
- To what extent is the textbook effective according to the subject and content?
- To what extent is the textbook effective according to exercises and activities?
- To what extent is the textbook effective according to language type?
- To what extent is the textbook effective according to language skills?
- To what extent is the textbook effective according to context?
- To what extent is the textbook effective according to the standard textbook?

Textbook as a teaching material: An overview

Textbook is a particular resource among the various ranges of teaching materials. It provides a clear framework for teachers and learners. It helps learners to know where they are going and what is coming next. So a textbook must follow a syllabus because it is arranged systematically. It provides ready-made texts and tasks which are likely to be of an appropriate level for most of the students. In addition, a textbook is the cheapest way for providing materials. Finally, a textbook provides useful guidance and gives learners enough autonomy. So a textbook has a good number of positive sides for the teachers and learners. On the other hand, there are some negative sides of a textbook. First of all, a textbook cannot always fulfill the individual demand of all students. It is not so much interesting for the class. A textbook may be very easy for the teachers and this leads to boredom and lack of motivation on the part of the learners. A textbook follows a particular methodology. That is why, it cannot allow teacher in diverse learning and teaching process. So, the main outcome of this discussion is a textbook that possesses some good qualities as well as some bad qualities.

Therefore, the relation between textbooks and language teaching is not something which has only recently been commented on. It has cropped up in writings about language over many centuries. Probably the most important issue in this argument is to consider how textbooks should be designed in order to be the best. It is necessary to be cautious in using a word 'best' rather than 'perfect' because according to Grant (1987: 118) "the perfect textbook does not exist, but the best book available for you and your students certainly does" (cited in McGrath 2002: 41). In English language teaching, the students are expected to master four skills, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking. To help the students learn deeply about those skills,

many textbooks were published to support the teaching-learning process. According to Brown (1995) the presence of a textbook is necessary to support teaching – learning process.

Arguments for and against using a textbook

In the history of second language acquisition research, the advantages and disadvantages of using textbooks have discussed in many ways. Finally it is revealed that the use of textbooks has its proponents and opponents. Sheldon (1988) identified three main reasons for which textbooks are heavily utilized. These are:

1. Developing their own classroom materials is an extremely difficult, arduous process for teachers
2. Teachers have limited time in which to develop new materials due to the nature of their profession
3. External pressures restrict many teachers.

Garinger (2001) adds a number of reasons for which teachers usually use textbooks. He said that Each of these (the reasons identified by Sheldon, 1988) is an accurate analysis of the strains teachers feel and using a textbook is one of the most efficient and readily available ways in which to relieve some of these pressures. Graves (2000) lists the following as some of the advantages of using a textbook:

1. It provides a syllabus for the course
2. It provides security for the students because they have a kind of road map of the course
3. It provides a set of visual, activities, readings, etc., and so saves the teacher time in finding or developing such materials
4. It provides teachers with a basis for assessing students' learning
5. It may include supporting materials (e.g., teachers guide, cassettes, worksheets, and video)
6. It provides consistency within a program across a given level, if all teachers use the same textbook. If textbooks follow a sequence, it provides consistency between levels (Graves, 2000, p. 174).

Graves (2000) discusses the disadvantages of using a textbook as well. He identified a list of eight disadvantages:

1. The content or examples may not be relevant or appropriate to the group you are teaching.
2. The content may not be at the right level.
3. There may be too much focus on one or more aspects of language and not enough focus on others, or it may not include everything you want to include.
4. There may not be the right mix of activities (too much of x, too little of y).

5. The sequence is lockstep.
 6. The activities, readings, visuals, etc. may be boring.
 7. The material may go out of date.
 8. The timetable for completing the textbook or parts of it may be unrealistic.
- (Graves, 2000, pp. 174-5)

McGrath (2002) states that a textbook is important because it sets the direction, content, and to a certain extent how the lesson is to be taught. Similarly he asserts it is significant to view the images that teachers have as this reflects their attitudes and beliefs toward textbooks which will impact on how teachers use textbooks.

Criteria for Textbook Evaluation

The evaluation of textbooks within education by different people has engendered a diversity of reasons in conducting themselves in such a process. Some regard this process as a matter of seeing how properly a new textbook works in a teaching/learning environment. To others, it designates the annual assessment of a language program for improvement and to the others, it gives the opportunity to determine whether or not adopt a particular book for use in class (Arikan, 2008).

Textbooks are, undoubtedly, one of the fundamental components of curriculums. Richards (2001) expresses that in some situations, textbooks serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. So, when it comes to evaluating textbooks, on the other hand, such points as layout and design, activities, language skills, language type, and subject and content come to the fore. The idea of evaluating textbooks is seen by some to be closely linked to the selection of textbooks. The evaluation helps the selection, which serves as an important decision-making process. Lynch (1996) defined evaluation as “the systematic attempt to gather information in order to make judgments or decisions” (p. 2). However, evaluation of textbooks is also considered to function as a kind of educational judgment. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:96) state “Evaluation is a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose”. To put forward the idea of textbook evaluation, Cunningsworth (1984) concludes that materials evaluation helps us to make decisions in selecting textbooks, form professional judgments as well as raise awareness of our teaching and learning experience. As the significance of evaluating textbooks, Cunningsworth (1995) proposes four criteria for evaluating textbooks.

One teacher may, therefore, look at a book in terms of its usability, flexibility and adaptability. On the other hand, another one may look at a textbook much more critically in terms of its theoretical orientation and approach.

The study

The research was designed by using descriptive research model. The data about the assessment of the textbook used 9-10th grades English teachers' perception. To achieve this objective, the research was designed by using descriptive research model.

Participants and settings

The participants of this study were 45 Bangladeshi school teachers in different experiences who taught in English classes 9-10 at the secondary school. They participated in the study from different parts of the country; all of them use Bangla as their native language. The present study consisted of (45) male and female English teachers, and it is classified according to independent variables as in tables (1-3).

Table 1. Sample distribution according to gender

Gender	Number	Percent %
Male	39	86.7
Female	6	13.3
Total	45	100

Table 2. Sample distribution according to region

Regional Variable	Number	Percent %
Capital area	22	48.89
Urban area	13	28.89
Rural area	10	22.22
Total	45	100

Table 3. Sample distribution according to Years of Experience variable

Experience Variable	Number	Percent %
1-4 years	11	24.4
5-8 years	12	26.7
More than 9 years	22	48.9
Total	45	100

Instrument

The survey questionnaire of the study consisted of three sections. All data, except handwritten responses to the two open-ended questions, would be coded and entered into a database for statistical analysis (Version 16.0). The first part of the questionnaire was used to

collect information regarding the teachers' background. The second part of the questionnaire required teachers to rank items from a list of textbook evaluation scale based on their experiences using English for Today for class 9-10 at the secondary schools of Bangladesh. To achieve this goal, an evaluation scale was developed on the basis of language teaching and learning criteria that determine the specifications of good quality textbook. For the statement of teachers, The Likert scale (Likert, 1932) asked individuals to respond to a series of statements by indicating whether the rate of statements are 'excellent', 'good', 'fair', 'poor', and 'totally lacking'. 'Excellent' may be assigned a weight of 5 points, while 'totally lacking' may get a score of 1. In the questionnaire, the Likert scale was followed (provided in Appendix A). These are used to elicit opinions rather than facts and are sometimes called 'opinionaires' (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

The third part of the questionnaire was an open-ended item aiming to elicit the teachers' experience and suggestion of using the textbook in classroom. The second part of the questionnaire was grouped under six domains as shown in table 4. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, Alpha formula was used as in table 4.

Table 4. The Cronbach's Alpha formula of instrument Reliability

Domains	Items	Alpha
Attractiveness of the text and physical make-up	(1,2,3,4)	.672
Subject and Content	(5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13)	.781
Exercises and Activities	(14,15,16,17,18,19)	.691
Language Types	(20,21,22,23)	.632
Language Skills	(24,25,26,27)	.682
Context	(28,29,30,31)	.716
Total	(31)	.935

The results of table 4 show that the range of reliability of domains was between (.632-.781), and total score (.935), all of these values are suitable for conducting such a study. In presenting the results of the study, the means, standard deviations and percentages of each item were calculated to describe and summarize the responses of students. The results of items that relate to each evaluation criteria were presented in tables and explanations were provided accordingly.

Result

For data analysis, a five- point scale was used, and the percentages were as follows:

1. (90 %) and more is an excellent degree of evaluation.
2. (80-89.9%) is a good degree of evaluation.
3. (70 - 79.9 %) is a moderate degree of evaluation.
4. (60 - 69.9 %) is a low degree of evaluation.

5. (Less than 60 %) is a very low degree of evaluation

Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-up

The first research question, 'To what extent is the textbook effective according to attractiveness of the text and physical make-up in the Textbook?' was measured through four items in the questionnaire and the responses are presented in Table 5 below.

Table5. Means and percentages of the Evaluation (N=45)

No	Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-up	Means	Percent %	Degree
1	The textbook appeals to the students	3.91	78.2	Moderate
2	The text interesting enough that students will enjoy reading it	3.60	72	Moderate
3	The layout and design appropriate and clear	3.60	72	Moderate
4	Illustration, tables, figures, graphs, charts, etc. provide appropriate representations of age, ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic level, and physical/mental ability	3.62	72.4	Moderate
Total score of Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-up domain		3.68	73.65	Moderate

**Maximum point of response 5 points*

The results of table 5 show that the degrees of evaluation for attractiveness of the text and physical make-up domains are moderate, where the percentages of response on these items were (78.2%, 72%, 72%, 72.4%, and 73.65%). For the total score of attractiveness of the text and physical make-up, the degree was moderate where the percentage of response was 73.65%.

Subject and Content

The second research question, 'To what extent is the textbook effective in terms of subject and content?' was measured through nine items in the questionnaire and the responses are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Means and percentages of the Evaluation (n=45)

No	Subject and Content	Means	Percent %	Degree
5	the subject matter is presented either topically or functionally in a logical, organized manner	3.80	76	Moderate
6	the reading selections are authentic pieces of language	3.70	74	Moderate
7	The textbook contain age appropriate reading level	4.00	80	Good
8	The text selections are representative of the variety of literary genres, and do they contain multiple sentence structures	3.61	72.2	Moderate
9	The materials objectives are clear to both the teacher and student	3.96	79.2	Moderate
10	There is sufficient variety in the subject and	3.77	75.4	Moderate

content of the textbook				
11	The subject and content of the textbook is interesting, challenging and motivating	3.49	69.8	Low
12	The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to students' needs as an English language learner(s).	3.51	70.2	Moderate
13	The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes	3.63	72.6	Moderate
Total score of subject and content domain		3.72	74.38	Moderate

**Maximum point of response 5 points*

The results of table 6 show that the degree of evaluation for subject and content domain is low on item 11, where the percentage of response on the item is 69.8%. The degree is moderate on items 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13 where the percentages of response on these items are 76%, 74%, 80%, 72.2%, 79.2%, 75.4%, 70.2%, 72.6% and 74.38%. For the total score of subject and content domain, the degree is moderate where the percentage of responses is 74.38%.

Exercises and Activities

The third research question, 'To what extent is the textbook effective in terms of exercises and activities?' was measured through six items in the questionnaire and the responses are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Means and percentages of the Evaluation (N=45)

No	Exercises and Activities	Means	Percent %	Degree
14	The textbook provide a balance of activities? (Ex. There is an even distribution of free vs. controlled exercises and tasks that focus on both fluent and accurate production).	3.55	71	Moderate
15	The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice	3.77	75.4	Moderate
16	the activities incorporate individual pair and group work	3.60	72	Moderate
17	Are the grammar points and vocabulary items introduced in motivating and realistic contexts	3.48	69.6	Low
18	The activities engage students in active learning? Are they appealing to a wide range of abilities and interests?	3.64	72.8	Moderate
19	The textbook's activities be modified or supplemented easily	3.48	69.6	Low
Total score of exercises and activities		3.59	71.73	Moderate

**Maximum point of response 5 points*

The results of table 7 show that the degree of evaluation for exercises and activities domain is low on items between 17 and 19 where the percentages of response on these items are between 69.6% and 69.6%. The degree is moderate on items 14, 15, 16 and 18 where the percentages of responses on these items are 71%, 75.4%, 72%, 72.8% and 71.73%. For the total score of exercises and activities domain, the degree is moderate where the percentage of response is 71.73%.

Language type

The fourth research question, 'To what extent is the textbook effective in terms of language type?' was measured through four items in the questionnaire and the responses are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Means and percentages of the Evaluation (N=45)

No	Language type	Means	Percent %	Degree
20	Is the language used in the textbook authentic, that is, like real-life English	3.44	68.8	Low
21	the language used at the right level for students' current English ability	3.70	74	Moderate
22	the progression of grammar points and vocabulary items appropriate	3.55	71	Moderate
23	the grammar points presented with brief and easy examples and explanations	3.66	73.2	Moderate
Total score of language type		3.59	71.75	Moderate

**Maximum point of response 5 points*

The results of table 8 show that the degree of evaluation for language type domain is low on the item 19 where the percentage of response on this item is 68.8%. The degree is moderate on items 21, 22 and 23 where the percentages of responses on these items are 74%, 71%, 73.2% and 73.2%. For the total score of exercises and activities domain, the degree is moderate where the percentage of response is 71.75%.

Language skills

The fifth research question, 'To what extent is the textbook effective in terms of language skills?' was measured through four items in the questionnaire and the responses are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Means and percentages of the Evaluation (N=45)

No	Language Skills	Means	Percent %	Degree
24	The materials include and focus on the skills that my students need to practice.	3.80	76	Moderate
25	The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.	3.59	71.8	Moderate
26	The textbook pays attention to sub-skills, that is, listening for gist, note-taking, skimming for information.	3.59	71.8	Moderate
27	The textbook highlights and practices natural pronunciation (that is, stress and intonation)	3.56	71.2	Moderate
Total score of language skills domain		3.63	72.7	Moderate

**Maximum point of response 5 points*

The results of table 9 show that the degree of evaluation for language type domain is moderate on items 24, 25, 26 and 27, where the percentages of response on these items are 76%, 71.8%, 71.8% and 72.2%. For the total score of language type domain, the degree is moderate where the percentage of response is 72.7%.

Context

The sixth research question, 'To what extent is the textbook effective in terms of context?' was measured through nine items in the questionnaire and the responses are presented in Table 10 below.

Table10. Means and percentages of the Evaluation (N=45)

No	Context	Means	Percent %	Degree
28	the textbook appropriate for the students who are using it	3.53	70.6	Moderate
29	the examples and explanations understandable	3.69	73.8	Moderate
30	students enjoy reading the text selections	3.58	71.6	Moderate
31	the textbook appropriate for the language-learning aims of the students	3.80	76	Moderate
Total score of context domain		3.65	73	Moderate

**Maximum point of response 5 points*

The results of table 10 show that the degree of evaluation for context domain is moderate on items 28, 29, 30 and 31, where the percentages of response on these items are 70.6%, 73.8%, 71.6% and 76%. For the total score of language type domain, the degree is moderate where the percentage of response is 73%.

Rank Order of domains and total score of evaluation

Table 11. Means and percentages of the total score Evaluation

Domains	Means	Percent %	Degree	Rank Order
Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-up	3.68	73.65	Moderate	2
Subject and Content	3.72	74.38	Moderate	1
Exercises and Activities	3.59	71.73	Moderate	5
Language type	3.58	71.71	Moderate	6
Language Skills	3.63	72.7	Moderate	4
Context	3.65	73	Moderate	3
Total score	3.64	72.86	Moderate	

**Maximum point of response 5 points*

The results of table 11 show a moderate degree of evaluation of *English for Today* for 9-10 classes from Bangladeshi teachers' perspective on total means score is 3.64, where the average percentage of response is 72.86%.

Teachers' evaluation of the Textbook

The seventh research question, "To what extent is the textbook effective in terms of the standard textbook?" was measured through the open-ended questions. Teachers perceived the mixed understanding and made suggestions based on their experiences of using the textbook in the classroom. A total of 27 teachers out of 45 stated their comments and suggestions (See Table 12). 18 students did not state any comment and suggestion.

Table 12 teachers' experience of using textbook

Statements	Number
This is a standard textbook.	6
The book provides variety of teaching materials.	5
The textbook has variety of activities.	3
The importance of four skills has been given in the book carefully	4
The important vocabulary chart has not been shown at the beginning of the topic.	4
Topics with a moral teaching and adequate grammatical elements should be included in this textbook.	3
More real life connected matters should be introduced through textbook	2
Total	27

Discussion

Teachers' responses to questionnaires indicating their perceptions of textbook evaluation are described in details in the result section. The subjects of the questionnaires were 45 school teachers across Bangladesh. The purpose of this study is to evaluate 9-10th grades textbook *English for Today* from teachers' perspective. In this section, the researcher is going to discuss about the evaluation from teachers' Perspectives.

Based on the results of textbook evaluation in this study, it is an interesting phenomenon that there is no significant difference in textbook selections. That is, the average frequency point for each feature of textbook has no statistically significant difference. However, it has found out that teachers still have different points of view on attractiveness of the text and physical make-up, subject and content, context and language type domain respectively. When asked, "Do you think this is a standard textbook?" One teacher replied that, "It seems to me *English for Today* is not perfect for these elements." (Source of data: open-ended question) On the other hand, most of the teachers agreed that this is a standard textbook. Another teacher replied that, "yes I think this is a standard book and it will help all of the students" (Source of data: open-ended question).

So, teachers have mixed perception regarding the standard of the textbook. Total means score also highlighted this perception very clearly (See Table 11).

In term of language type, the results indicated that the reading texts were meaning and authentic. However, some writings were difficult for most of the students. This is because students are required to write long paragraphs, essays or letters; they have also to deal with tables, figures and make comparisons. On the other hand, all sorts of writings in the textbook are guided and controlled; this does not give a good chance for students to write freely and express themselves through writing what they feel, enjoy and prefer. This may be due to the fact that neither teachers nor students were consulted when selecting the material or the content and subject of the textbook.

Therefore, regarding the subject and content, one teacher replied that, "topics with a moral teaching and adequate grammatical elements should be included in this textbook" (Source of data: open-ended question). In term of textbook material, one teacher replied that, "there are so many lesson have been given in the textbook" (Source of data: open-ended question).

When it comes to exercises and activities, most teachers were dissatisfied with it. In responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires, several teachers suggested that the activities designed in a more effective way. The teachers agreed that all skills and activities being taught in this book need more time to deal with them more effectively. When asked, "would you like to say anything else based on your experience of using the textbook with your students in the class?" one teacher replied that, "the book provides the students with a variety of materials such as reading texts, dialogues, pictures, diagrams tasks and activities" (Source of data: open-ended question). Another teacher replied that, "this is a standard textbook but exercise is necessary at the end of every lesson" (Source of data: open-ended question).

Another problem in common is that most teachers claimed that the present textbook is not attractive and various enough to arouse students' motivation of learning. Since a textbook plays an important role in English learning and teaching, whether it could be interesting to draw the attention of the students is a very important criterion for teachers to evaluate from.

Concluding remarks

From the discussion section, it is clear that the participants of the study have shown overall satisfaction with the textbook *English for Today* for classes 9-10. Therefore, almost all respondents think that *English for Today* textbook moderately provides a balance of domains. Nevertheless, the entire textbook package is well organized and it contains a wide variety of useful supplementary materials. , it can be an effective textbook in the hands of a good teacher and instructors should not be discouraged from using it with the appropriate learner audience. It should be organized with the goal of facilitating communicative competence.

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