

# Textbook Analysis and Evaluation

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Frequently EFL teachers at the Mexico City Campus of the ITESM<sup>2</sup> (*Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey*) receive many samples of new series or textbooks from different publishers. These new publications need to be checked and compared with those currently used in order to consider them for use in our classes. For this reason, a method for evaluating their appropriateness was created and applied by this author.

The following method is recommended to analyze and evaluate textbooks and series so that EFL teachers may apply it, and may correctly choose the best option for their teaching needs when choosing a new series or textbook.

The method utilized in the Mexico City Campus studied the four language skills, plus the activities in each of the books analyzed.

Once the presentation of language skills is taken into account, teachers need to elaborate a checklist for each skill (see sample), and choose categories they deem pertinent which will be used as headings in the checklists and which are listed as follows:

1. *Skill* or the ability to be developed by the student.
2. *Activity* or the principal exercise to be executed in order to develop the required skill.
3. *Place* or the location the activity is being carried out.
4. *Accomplishment* or the objective to be fulfilled through the activity.
5. *Activity to test acquisition stage* or the task to be performed to verify whether the skill has been effectively developed or acquired by the student.

After including these categories in the checklist, the teachers must write a list of activities for each of the language skills that, through their experience and knowledge, they have found to be successful in their classes. Then, each language section of each language skill in the textbook or series is revised by marking the activities that concur with the teacher's activities in the checklist.

Criteria must be established considering whether the textbook contains activities that help the student to develop each skill, as well as natural situations or settings with communicative activities for the speaking and writing skills. The criteria for evaluation used by this author are to some extent related to Harmer's specialist skills (1993: 183-184, 188) and Littlewood's (1981: 20) types of communicative activities to develop the language skills.

Harmer's specialist skills consist of predicting what is going to be heard, extracting specific information, understanding the general information, recognizing function and discourse patterns, and deducing meaning from context. Readers and listeners use these specialized skills when they read or listen and their comprehension of content is successful only if they master

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them. Furthermore, teaching these skills must be done in real-life like situations, and the tasks the listener or reader must carry out need to be realistic and motivating in order to have a useful purpose for text study (188).

Littlewood's types of communicative activities deal with functional and social interaction activities. For an adequate teaching-learning process, it is necessary that textbooks suggest the corresponding communicative activities to accomplish the communication planned for the practice. Littlewood (1981) points out that "the most efficient communicator in a foreign language is not always the person who is best at manipulating its structures. It is often the person who is most skilled at processing the complete situation involving himself and his hearer, taking into account what knowledge already exists between them . . . , and selecting items which will communicate his message effectively". (p. 4) Thus, students need to be exposed to situations or contexts in which they may develop skills to communicate what they want in the most effective way possible.

Students may be asked to do practice activities. For instance, if students are required to speak, they may carry out a conversational activity by working in pairs, in groups or role playing (Harmer: 132-133). If students are asked to write, their activities may vary from organizing ideas, writing an outline, writing sentences, applying new vocabulary, developing syntax in order to write in a coherent and understandable way, writing an informal letter, or from taking notes up to writing a report or essay.

Once the checklists are elaborated, the activities in each chapter of the textbook or series analyzed are revised.

Afterwards, criteria for evaluating must be done. The criteria chosen were the following:

1. Criteria for evaluating the listening skill:

- a. Understanding the main idea in a conversation.
- b. Emphasis in pronunciation (stressed words, intonation, word ending, reductions, etc.).
- c. Summary of the main idea in a conversation.
- d. Execution of practical tasks.
- e. Exposure to a situation. This means that the language to which students are being exposed (input) provides a setting or situation.

2. Criteria for evaluating the reading skill:

- a. Understanding the general idea in a reading text.
- b. Improving vocabulary by finding the meaning of words.
- c. Understanding the meaning from context (what comes before and after a word, phrase, sentence, etc.).
- d. Understanding the reading structure of a text.
- e. Scanning the reading.
- f. Discussing the reading.

3. The criteria for the speaking skill:

- a. Presentation of a setting or situation.
- b. Pair or group work.

- c. Realization of communicative activities (if the students express their thoughts, feelings, opinions by speaking out).
4. Criteria for evaluating the writing skill:
    - a. Exploring ideas.
    - b. Organizing ideas.
    - c. Improving vocabulary.
    - d. Developing syntax.
    - e. Punctuating.
    - f. Writing a draft.
    - g. Editing.
    - h. Executing communicative activities (if the students express their thoughts, feelings, opinions in writing).

In this way, by going through each language skill section of the textbooks and marking its activities in the checklists, the data may be gathered, described and analyzed. Then, based on the results and criteria for evaluation, teachers may decide what textbooks or series best suit their students needs in order to develop their language skills to the fullest.

#### References

- Harmer, J. 1993. *The Practice of Language Teaching*. London, England: Longman.
- Littlewood, W. 1981. *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction*. London, England: Cambridge University Press.