

## Albanian Case: English Textbook Evaluation in High Schools as Part of the English Curriculum

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### Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to evaluate the two English language textbooks (from different publishing houses - levels 2, 3, 4) currently used at high schools in Albania from the high school English teachers' point of view. For this purpose, a 38-item questionnaire was developed about the five sections of the textbooks (vocabulary, reading, grammar, language functions, and pronunciation practice) and their practical concerns. Thirty public high school teachers, out of forty-four that teach English in the city of Ebasan, with more than five years of teaching experience were asked to reflect on the questions by checking one of the four options included. The results indicated that the textbooks are not acceptable from the teachers' point of view considering their five sections and their practical concerns.*

**Keywords:** curriculum, English textbook, evaluation, high school, textbook selection

### 1. Introduction

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue that the textbook has a vital and positive role to play in the teaching and learning process, especially during period of change. "Textbooks survive and prosper primarily because they are the most convenient means of providing the structure that the teaching-learning system, particularly the system of change, requires." (ibid:317) The situation in Albania has shown us that problems do not exist with our teaching materials, yet the necessity of the textbook cannot be neglected. The situation also implies that as teachers it is important for us to evaluate, select and adapt teaching materials to meet our teaching and students' learning needs in order to have high learning potentials.

It is a fact that selecting and evaluating textbooks in English or any other context is of great importance. However in Albania, there is limited research conducted to evaluate the English textbooks that are already in use or those that are intended for use in future. In most of these studies, the researchers have themselves evaluated different textbooks by means of the checklists and questionnaires suggested by other scholars. However, the primary users of textbooks are the language teachers, in our case English teachers. So a comprehensive evaluation can only be carried out while the teachers and their points of view are also taken into consideration.

### 2. Literature Review

Textbooks play a pivotal role in language classrooms in all types of educational institutions - state schools, private schools, language schools – all over the world. Despite the development of new technologies that allow for higher quality teacher-generated materials, demand for textbooks continues to grow, and the publishing houses respond with new series and textbooks every year either foreign or local. Many students working with a textbook feel secure and have a sense of progress and achievement. Cuuingsworth (1995) argues that textbooks are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presenting materials by the teachers, a source of ideas and activities, a reference source for students, a syllabus that reflects pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence.

According to Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979), information on textbook selection is useful since it is sometimes part of the EFL teacher's responsibility to select the textbook s/he will use in a certain class. Such a decision should be made carefully and systematically, not arbitrarily. They add that even in countries where the choice of the textbook does not directly involve the teacher, teachers may be asked to submit reports on the usefulness of the textbooks they are already making use of. Several possible criteria and procedures for carrying out a sound selection of appropriate textbooks have been suggested. However, selecting an appropriate textbook is not a wholly objective process. While many guidelines are

suggested, the individual subjective judgments of the teachers are central to it.

The textbook evaluation, on the other hand, is an applied linguistic activity through which teachers, directors, textbook publishers and materials' developers can make judgments about the efficiency of the materials for the people using them. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) declare that textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond suggestive assessments and it helps them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Questions

- ❖ To what extent are the textbooks acceptable in terms of vocabulary presentation and practice?
- ❖ To what extent are the reading sections acceptable in presentation and practice?
- ❖ To what extent are the textbooks acceptable in terms of grammar presentation and practice?
- ❖ To what extent are the textbooks acceptable in terms of presentation and practice of language functions?
- ❖ To what extent are the textbooks acceptable in terms of pronunciation practice?
- ❖ To what extent are the textbooks acceptable considering practical concerns?

#### 3.2 Materials

The materials to be evaluated in this paper included the two English language textbooks (from 2 different publishing houses) currently taught at Albanian high schools.

#### 3.3 Instruments

The data collection instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire prepared by the researcher. In order to do so, several questionnaires suggested by different scholars were analyzed and the items relevant to the textbooks under study were selected. A 38-item questionnaire was prepared and a pilot study was conducted with 5 female and 5 male teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience. The final questionnaire (see Appendix) included 38 questions.

#### 3.4 Participants

The population for this study consisted of the high school English teachers in the cities of Elbasan, Albania that are actually teaching English at high schools. The sample included 44 high school English language teachers out of which 30 accepted to answer the questionnaire.

#### 3.5 Procedure

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the English language textbooks currently in use at high schools in Albania. In order to do so, the following steps were taken. After a pilot study of the questionnaire prepared by the researcher, the 38-item questionnaire about different characteristics of the high school English language textbooks was finalized. 30 (thirty) English language teachers were given the questionnaires, and let answer the questions on their own. The questionnaires were collected a few days later so that the participants would have enough time to reflect on the questions. Later these survey results were quantified and analyzed in order to answer the research questions.

### 4. Results

For analyzing the survey data collected by means of the questionnaire, first the answers were quantified. Each option of the items was ranked (not at all 1, not satisfactorily 2, to some extent 3, to a great extent 4). In order to provide a clear picture of the responses given to the 38 items of the questionnaire, the items were grouped together and analyzed (Vocabulary, Reading, Grammar, Language Functions, Pronunciation Practice and Practical Concerns). Median was selected as the best representative of central tendency among the three measures of central tendency because of the fact that it is less affected by the extreme data at either end of the scale (1 and 4). The individual items of the

questionnaire were in fact grouped together and analyzed based on the median of the answers given to them. Table 1 provides the results of descriptive statistics applied.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics: the results of Medians, Means and Standard Deviations

	Median	Mean	SD
Vocabulary	2	2.16	0.572
Reading	2	2.16	0.435
Grammar	2	2.52	0.580
Language Functions	2	1.85	0.629
Pronunciation Practice	2	1.92	0.652
Practical Concerns	2	2.07	0.544

As it can be seen, the mode and median of the items about the Vocabulary section of the textbooks turned out to be 2. The mean (2.16) can also be considered as 2 with 95% confidence level. Since number 2 represents the second option of the answers (not satisfactorily) it was concluded that the textbooks are “not satisfactorily” acceptable in terms of Vocabulary presentation and practice. Similar results were obtained considering the Reading sections and Pronunciation Practice sections of the textbooks. The textbooks are also “not satisfactorily” acceptable in terms of Practical Concerns. However, the mode and median of the items about the “Grammar” section turned out to be 3. The mean (2.52) can be considered as 3 with 95% confidence level. Since number 3 represents the third option of the answers (to some extent) it can be concluded that the textbooks are “to some extent” acceptable in terms of “Grammar” presentation and practice. Considering the Language Functions sections of the textbooks under analysis, the mode and median of the items about turned out to be 2. However, the mean (1.85) cannot be considered as 2 with 95% confidence level, but 1. Since number 1 represents the first option of the answers (not at all) it can be concluded that the textbooks are “not at all” acceptable in terms of presentation and practice of Language Functions.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study offer convincing evidence that the English language textbooks that are currently taught at high schools in Albania, case of Elbasan city, do not meet the teachers' expectations. The results expand the existing research in the area of textbook selection and evaluation in our country. However, in order to be able to make more sound judgments about different characteristics of these textbooks, more research of this kind needs to be conducted.

Findings of this study may offer insights for those involved in educational administrations, syllabus design, curriculum planning and materials development. Different sections of the textbooks can be modified by the committee of textbook developers of the Albanian high schools in order to improve their quality. Teachers may also get insights from the findings and employ different strategies to compensate for the weak points of the textbooks.

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**Appendix: Questionnaire**

Sections of the textbook		To a great extent	To some extent	Not satisfactorily	Not at all
Vocabulary	1. Does the vocabulary load throughout the textbooks seem to be reasonable for the students of each level?				
	2. Are the vocabulary items systematically graded from simple to complex items?				
	3. Are the vocabulary items repeated in subsequent lessons for reinforcement?				
	4. Are the vocabulary items presented in a variety of ways?				
	5. Are the vocabulary items introduced in motivating and realistic contexts?				
	6. Do the new items receive sufficient practice through different kinds of exercises?				
	7. Do the vocabulary exercises promote internalization of the previously and newly introduced items?				
Reading	8. Are the texts interesting for the students?				
	9. Are the texts authentic pieces of language?				
	10. Do the texts cover a variety of topics and themes?				
	11. Do the topics dealt with meet local and national standards?				
	12. Are the topics up-to-date?				
	13. Do the texts serve as a window into learning about the target language culture?				
	14. Do the texts present information in a way that the students will understand?				
	15. Is the content age-appropriate?				
	16. Are there enough exercises and activities accompanying the texts?				

Sections of the textbook		To a great extent	To some extent	Not satisfactorily	Not at all
Grammar	17. Is the number of grammatical points introduced in the textbooks appropriate?				
	18. Are the grammatical points presented in an increasing level of difficulty?				
	19. Are the new grammatical points presented in a meaningful context to facilitate understanding?				
	20. Are the explanations easy to understand?				
	21. Are there enough examples accompanying the explanations?				
	22. Do the grammatical points receive sufficient practice through exercises and activities?				
	23. Are the grammatical points repeated and reinforced in subsequent lessons?				
Language Functions	24. Is the number of language functions introduced in the textbooks appropriate?				
	25. Are the language functions presented in meaningful contexts?				
	26. Do the language functions introduced accompany practice of different kinds? (e.g. in pairs, in groups) help				
	27. Are the language functions repeated and reinforced in subsequent lessons?				
	28. Do the language functions exemplify English in its authentic use?				
Pronunciation	29. Are the pronunciation points presented in meaningful contexts?				
	30. Is there enough practice accompanying each pronunciation point introduced?				
Practice	31. Are the pronunciation points repeated and reinforced in subsequent lessons?				

Practical Concerns	To a great extent	To some extent	Not satisfactorily	Not at all
32. Are the objectives explicitly laid out in the introduction part?				
33. Do the textbooks support the goals and objectives of the program and the curriculum?				
34. Are the textbooks sufficiently challenging for the students?				
35. Do the textbooks raise the students' interests in further language study?				
36. Does each textbook cohere both internally and externally with the other ones in the series?				
37. Do the textbooks contain periodical review sections and exercises throughout lessons?				
38. Is the methodology proposed to the teachers appropriate for the teaching/learning situation and the students?				

