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DIALOGUES IN LEARNING: EVALUATING UNDERGRADUATE TEXTBOOKS AT AN-NAJAH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: Textbooks play a pivotal role in education, serving as the cornerstone of teaching and learning processes. They provide essential content, activities, and guidance necessary for both learners and teachers to achieve educational objectives effectively. Scholars emphasize the significant influence of textbooks on fostering independent and responsible learning among students. A good textbook not only equips learners with the necessary knowledge and skills but also encourages them to take ownership of their learning journey. Additionally, textbooks are invaluable resources for educators, simplifying lesson planning, enhancing learner comprehension, and optimizing instructional efficiency. This abstract explores the multifaceted importance of textbooks in education, drawing insights from scholarly literature to underscore their indispensable role in promoting effective teaching and learning practices.

Keywords: Textbooks, Teaching and learning, independent learning, educational resources, Pedagogical effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

A textbook is the heart of teaching and the most important element of the educational process. It is the primary source of information and activities that help learners practice the language as well as support teachers in achieving the desired goals) Graves, 2000:175(. With regard to independent and responsible learning, Basturkmen (2010(, confirmed that a good textbook encourages students to be independent and take responsibility for learning. Textbooks are also considered an essential tool in teaching and learning as emphasized by Minh (2007(who showed that textbooks can facilitate teachers' jobs, ease learners' understanding and save time and effort.

The success of the educational process depends mainly on the quality of the selected textbook. In selecting the textbook, all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process should participate in selecting the materials or in choosing the objectives (Raba, 2007). When selecting textbook to be used, teachers need to analyze and evaluate it to determine its suitability to the learners' level, needs, age, and interests. The process of textbook analysis

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helps teachers determine their strengths and weaknesses and then decides what areas need to be modified or changed to make them more suitable for learners. Through analyzing textbooks, teachers make valuable judgments and gain insights about the type of activities involved to choose the approach to render ideas behind each part of the textbook (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2010).

According to Byrd and Schuemann (2014), textbooks are valuable tools that are considered the basis for the teaching and learning process. However, there is no single perfect textbook that fits completely the teaching settings. As a result, teachers need to analyze and evaluate the chosen textbook to adapt it to the curriculum, teacher, and students.

Despite the importance of textbook content analysis, studies focusing on analyzing conversational textbooks are very limited. It is known that teaching individuals English conversation skills is very essential but is not an easy task. Teachers are challenged to select the appropriate content, activities, and techniques that stimulate learners to use the language fluently (Ur, 2012). To ensure successful teaching of these skills and achieve the desired goals, teachers need to analyze and evaluate the textbook to determine its merits and demerits, reveal the language used in it and determine the effective and suitable classroom pedagogy (Cerezo, 2007). Speaking a foreign language in the right way is one big problem student's face and using think-pair- and –share activities could be a good solution and could enrich both creative and interactive activities in the textbook.

In recent years, the nature of language teaching has changed. Whereas traditional education has been based on primitive methods in which language learning was viewed as a matter of habit formation, memorization, repetition, and imitation, now the main goal of modern teaching methods is to communicate. Therefore, developing students' oral communication ability has become the basic priority for teaching which in turn affects what language teachers are supposed to teach (Littlewood, 2007). Because of the significant role of speaking, researchers like Bailey)2005(and Goh)2007(emphasized the role of teaching pedagogies, types of activities and types of materials.

Milova (2015) emphasized that teaching conversation is the most important phase of the language learning process. Teachers can develop students' conversation skills by bringing real-life situations to the classroom where they got the opportunity to deal with real problems and use the language automatically. This can be achieved by using effective procedures and various activities such as role-play activities, discussions, brainstorming, simulations, interviews, and debates.

Sze)1995), stated that conversation is the oral exchange of information that is based on conversational competence. This type of competence can be developed by keeping it as a goal for language teaching. The type and quality of the activities and materials used to teach conversation within the classroom have a great role in the success or failure of the teaching process. Besides, the good practice of language is the basis for developing students' conversational skills. This does not include systematic memorization or repetition drills, but by engaging students in activities that motivate them to produce the language themselves.

Statement of the problem

A good textbook content is one of the most important resources for teaching all language skills and it is the teacher's responsibility to select the appropriate textbook that helps them fulfill the desired goals. Therefore, they need to analyze the content of the selected textbooks carefully to understand their nature and to determine whether or not they possess the characteristics that are important to help students produce the language properly, naturally

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and fluently. Based on this ground, the researcher conducted this study and related the final judgment of a good textbook to the five rubrics that entail all the learning dispositions.

Questions of the study

This study answers the question "What is the level of existence or frequency of the five rubrics with the different learning dispositions in a conversation English textbook for second-level university students?

Purpose of the study

This study aims to determine if the conversation textbook used for second-level university students is appropriate or not and this can be done according to the level of existence or absence of these rubrics: topic consistency, frequency of drill use, type of syllabus, self-expressing activities, and the appropriate type of language they use.

Significance of the study

The finding of this study may yield valuable information for conversation textbook writers. The result of this study may also point out the need for improving and modifying some of the textbooks' weak points according to the five rubrics that contain learning dispositions. The information gathered may provide ideas about what and how modification should be implemented, and how can we develop the conversation textbook which should include the five variables in a consistent, fair, and good way. Besides, the findings of this study provide valuable information for oral communication courses as they shed light on different aspects of what should a conversation textbook be like, and how can they develop their students' conversation skills.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Several previous studies have focused their attention on analyzing conversation textbooks. The researcher was able to come up with some of these studies and arranged them chronologically.

In the area of suitable communicative activities to be used for teaching oral proficiency, Fukut et al.)2017(assured authentic activities that match with meaning, and the learners' language use are found to be suitable and promote students' language proficiency. Similarly, Romney and Holsworth (2016) in their study reviewed a specific system and created some rubrics for selecting a new EFL oral communication curriculum. They focused on the context of the textbook and determined the areas that need to be changed to make it more appropriate for students. Similar in content, but different in the region, Ellif and Maarof (2011) revealed that textbooks used for teaching oral communication for the Saudi EFL third-year university students are not rich with activities that promote natural communication.

In the area of teaching natural and authentic communication, Gómez-Rodríguez (2010) found that all the textbooks used in Colombia for teaching communication using English do not include adequate communicative activities, thus, they do not promote students' communicative competence. Effective teaching along with suitable and natural content can produce effective communication.

In the area of self-expression activities that an effective communication textbook should include, Akutsu (2006) showed that an oral communication textbook included many direct strategies, but it lacks indirect strategies. If an activity included in a textbook used for communication focuses on form more than on contextual meaning, it will fail to achieve fluent and authentic communication among learners (Ellis and Ellis 1994).

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Gibson (2004) conducted a study about the effect of class size on teaching English conversation skills. This study mentioned the difficulties faced by teachers in developing this type of skill in large classes and how to overcome them.

The findings showed that applying some effective Raba techniques can be useful and facilitate teachers' jobs during the teaching process. One of the most effective activities is the group work and peer work that enhance students' interaction and engages them in discussions that suit their interests.

To sum up, most of the studies presented in the literature review have shed light on the importance of analyzing the contents of the textbooks to understand their nature and determine what aims they serve. Some studies rely on specific standards and certain variables during the analysis process that is compatible with their goals as what Fukuta et al. (2017) follow in their study. The researcher agrees with what Ellif and Maarof (2011) and Gómez-Rodríguez (2010) found in their studies that there are not enough activities in the textbooks that promote natural communication among students. The present study suggested that an effective textbook for teaching communication that is fluent, natural, and authentic should be in the line with the five rubrics that contain learning dispositions mentioned earlier in the study.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This study followed content analysis research design which is an appropriate research method to analyze the conversation textbook for second -year English Majors and TEFL Majors in An-Najah National University concerning the five-item rubrics that emphasized the inclusion of all the learning dispositions such as persistence, flexibility, motivation, questioning and problem solving skills. These learning dispositions are included in interactive activities, creative activities and self-expressing activities which are rubrics included as focal ideas to refer to in the process of content analysis. The study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020.

Instrumentation

The only tool used was the five-item rubrics that include all the learning dispositions to determine the appropriateness or the inappropriateness of the conversation textbook which can be achieved according to the level of existence or absence of these rubrics in the textbook. These rubrics are topic consistency, frequency of drill use, type of syllabus, self-expressing activities, and the appropriate type of language they use. This tool allows the researcher to calculate the frequencies of each item in the conversation/oral communication textbook that is used in An-Najah National University for second-year students.

Choosing the textbook

An oral communication textbook for second-level university students was used in implementing this study. At this level, students should be exposed to activities that consider the five variables to develop their speaking and oral communication skill.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This section illustrates the results that were obtained after analyzing the oral comprehension textbook. The following five-item rubric was used: 1-topic consistency 2frequency of drill use 3-type of syllabus 4- self-expressing activities and 5- the appropriate type of language they use.

Interpretation regarding topic consistency

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Do all the textbook units have topic consistency or topic inconsistency? If topics are consistent, this means that the textbook is organized in a complementary way. For example, the same topic is internally connected smoothly and coherently until it is complete. This completion is basic in the sense that it emphasizes content and exchanges ideas that can stimulate and promote students' communication.

Unit title: the art of conversation

Model dialogue (a conversational skill that deals with culture): What topic should you avoid when talking to strangers? What topics are taboos for your culture? What topics are taboos for you personally? Why do people like to learn bad words in other languages? By answering these questions adequately and appropriately, we can say that the topic is consistent and students can adequately communicate the topic. In this way, the conversation will be structural, situational, and notional. The conversation and oral communication textbook emphasizes on situational syllabus and focuses on what language needed in various situations and how to use it in a certain context, for example how to use language (when you are talking to foreigners, in arguing, on birthdays), but the textbook doesn't provide enough exercises for practicing. For example: From conversation and oral communication textbook p.106:

Booking an airline ticket

Call and book an airline ticket. The airline agent will need information such as time and day of departure, class, smoking, and non-smoking section and day of return, the traveler wants to know the price, seating, and whether it is a direct or nonstop flight.

Keywords and phrases

Departing, arriving, flight number, tourist, business, or first class, direct or nonstop, check-in time. Using these words or phrases, book a ticket with an airline agent. After you have done this once, reverse roles and do it again. When you do it again. When you play the agent, be sure to confirm all details about the ticket.

Interpretation about drilling activities

Language patterns are basic in achieving better communication. These chunks and patterns can be better learned and taught via drills whether repetitive, substitutional or transformational. The goal of using drilling activities is to produce and practice utterances and chunks to be used for meaningful communication.

For example: From conversation and oral communication textbook p.39:

Hobbies

I have a talent for (verb) ing-I have a talent for writing poems.

I have been (verb)ing for 5 years- I have been playing tennis for 5 years.

I (verb) 3 times a week- I go in for sports 3 times.

Interpretation concerning self-expressing activities

The role of these activities is to enhance meaning rather than form through encouraging students to generate their own language, and so they can be motivated and actively engaged in all class tasks.

For example

From conversation and oral communication textbook p.83: (empathic listening application). Describe a relationship in which you need to use the skill as well as the attitude of empathy.

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What is your usual response to this situation? How does your attitude influence your listening in this relationship? Specifically, what will you do to apply empathy the next time in your interaction in this relationship? In such situations, learners are to explain and describe the relationship between attitude and empathy.

Interpretation concerning activity type (Interactive activities and creative activities)

In interactive activities, it is important for participants to be of equal proficiency in the target language. These activities involve a conversational exchange between students whereas non-interactive activities can be performed alone. Creative activities such as creating interviews and working with peers to adapt them allow students to engage with meaningful topics and get to know each other. Non-creative activities focus more on form, and students memorize language that may not relate to their real lives. Non-interactive activities:

Table 1. Scale and result.

Scale	Name of the	+/-topic	Main	Percentage of drilling	Number of activities expressing	Activities
Result	Conversation and oral comprehension	+	Situational	20%		
8	Creative:3 Interactive:0					

Source: Author

Table 2. Scales and frequencies.

Scales	Frequencies
Topic consistency	5
Type of syllabus	8
Frequency of drill use	4
Self-expressing activities	8
The appropriate type of language they use Creative activities	3
Activities types: Interactive activities	0

Source: Author

For example, from English street oral communication:

Hello, may I speak to Kate?

I think you have the wrong number. What number you are calling?

22173131

This is 2117313

Oh, I'm sorry.

This activity can be performed alone since necessary information is already present. In such activities the existence of an interlocutor is unnecessary; therefore, they are categorized as non-interactive. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the

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analysis

Oral communication textbook analysis

Table 2 shows that: The total number of exercises in the conversation textbook that are related to the different scales is 28. The frequencies range from 3-8. The lowest frequency is found in activity types which are creative activities and there aren't activities related to interactive type. The highest frequencies are found in both syllable organization and activities for self-expression. Both syllables of the syllabus and activities for self-expression are equal.

Conclusions

After the data analysis, it was found that the conversation textbook for second-level university students lacks interactive activities. It was also found that there were not enough exercises that encourage students to practice the language naturally, which is the key to develop their speaking skills. For successful teaching, teachers need to look for the appropriate textbook that fits their goals and helps students developing their oral communication skills. An effective conversation textbook should include creative and interactive activities that create a good class discussion and communication which is important for language learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above-mentioned conclusions, the researcher recommended the following:

1.   Teachers should not underestimate the role of textbooks in facilitating the learning process. They have to increase the quality of their teaching and use various activities to enrich the educational process.

2.   The educational institution should conduct training courses for teachers on how to select the appropriate textbook and what rubrics should be taken into consideration when analyzing textbooks.

3.   More interactive and practical activities must be included in textbooks to enhance students' interaction, and so improve their conversation skills.

4.   More studies need to be conducted about analyzing conversational textbooks.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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