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Evaluation of Skills for Success-Reading and Writing Based on Criteria Designed by Alan Cunningsworth

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Abstract. This study aimed to evaluate the textbook “Skills for Success- Reading and Writing” based on the criteria of a good textbook by Cunningsworth (1984). This book is taught for level 1 at King Khalid University. A qualitative method with content analysis was used for collecting and analyzing the data. Cunningsworth (1984)’s criteria involve eight categories, language and content, selection and grading of language items, presentation and practice of new language items, language skills and communicative abilities, supporting materials, motivation, overall evaluation and adaptation and innovation. The findings revealed that the textbook meets all criteria of a good textbook by Cunningsworth. However, the author can make some improvements, such as developing more productive tasks, teaching the most frequent grammatical patterns, and finally, developing pronunciation and spelling tasks.

Keywords. Textbook evaluation, a good textbook, a bad textbook, Skills for Success Textbook.

1. Introduction

In this era, English is the lingua franca of communication in the global community. A study [1] states that textbooks are essential as they facilitate the teaching-learning process. Thus, the English teaching and learning process depends much on selecting textbooks and instructional materials as they are essential to ESL /EFL programmes. They are integral to teaching and learning English. Instructors strive to meet the student’s needs by following the textbook’s building and supporting it with supplementary materials [2]. Another study [3] states that evaluation is “a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose” (p.41). Rea-Dickens & Germaire [4] define evaluation as a process that examines the suitability and appropriateness of an activity. Evaluation of textbooks needs more attention within the teaching-learning contexts, like various aspects of the teaching programs [5]. Cunningsworth [6] distinguished between three types of textbook evaluation based on the time of evaluation: pre-used, in-use, and post-use evaluation.

On the other hand, Crawford, cited in [7], describes the negative effects of commercial textbooks. They may have inauthentic language, they may not reflect students’ needs, they are expensive, and they may deskill teachers. Cunningsworth [6] discussed the roles of English textbooks; they are sources for presentation material, a source of activities for learner practice

and communicative interaction, reference sources for learners on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, etc. A textbook is a source of stimulation and ideas for classroom language activities, a syllabus which reflects the objectives, a resource for self-directed or self-access work, and support for less experienced teachers who have not gained confidence yet. Abdel Wahab [1] stated the reasons for evaluating textbooks; one primary reason is to adopt a new coursebook; another reason is to identify strengths and weaknesses in textbooks; the last reason is to help teachers develop their profession.

1.1. *Statement of Problem*

Teachers face a mass of published teaching materials that cover different aspects of language learning. Some of these textbooks satisfy the general worldwide market; others are specific to a particular native language, age, skill, major and interest. These textbooks may serve them well if they are appropriately selected, but as Cunningsworth [8] states, published textbooks can be good servants but poor masters. Teachers should make a choice based on the student's needs rather than teaching the book as the objective of the course. In order to make good decisions in the selection of textbooks, many factors need to be evaluated and have the teacher's attention. This situation helps in giving more attention to conducting studies on textbook evaluation. In doing so, teachers will be able to select textbooks that are appropriate to their students' needs and fulfil the programme objectives.

1.2. *Objectives*

The objective of this study is to evaluate the "Skills for Success-Reading and Writing" textbook, which is taught at the diploma of the English language institutions and examine to what extent it fulfils the criteria of a good textbook. The criteria involve language and content, selection and grading of language items, presentation and practice of new language items, language skills and communicative abilities, supporting materials, motivation, and overall evaluation. The current study aims to answer the following research question:

Is the textbook "Skills for Success-Reading and Writing" a good one according to Cunningsworth's criteria [8], and in what way?

1.3. *Significance of the Study*

The widespread use of textbooks in education systems creates a need for material evaluation. Textbooks are the main sources of information and practice in any classroom. Evaluation of textbooks attracted educators and researchers. The selection of textbooks is a tough task. Teachers must get a good picture of its suitability. To evaluate a textbook, there are different criteria used. In this study, Alan Cunningsworth criteria are applied to "Skills for Success-Reading and Writing". It is a comprehensive checklist for textbook evaluation. The findings of this study could help academicians be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the English textbook "Skills and Success". It provides insights into a textbook's various components and helps in the application of linguistic theories.

2. **Theoretical Framework**

There are several methods used for textbook evaluation. AbdelWahab [1] presented three methods. The first is called an impressionistic method and consists of 19 points that need a focus to get a general impression about the book. They involve the organization, topics, layout, and visuals of the textbook. Second, the observation checklist method in which a list of criteria is checked in a certain order. The third method is called the in-depth method. It includes the investigation of certain features, such as the design of one specific unit or exercise.

Another method for textbook evaluation is presented by Alan Cunningsworth. He proposed a checklist of evaluation criteria in his book. This checklist contains the following criteria to follow when evaluating any textbook. They are:

A. Language content: It describes the kind of English in the textbook.

- a. Form and function: It assesses the focus of the textbook in teaching language aspects, either form or function.
- b. Aspects of language form: It describes the aspects of language form, such as phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse.
- c. Appropriateness: It stresses the matching of language used to its social context.
- d. Varieties: It describes several varieties, such as the type of dialect the textbook uses, the formality style it displays, and the medium used (written or spoken).
- e. Language skills: It is also concerned with the different individual language skills it teaches, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking or the integration of various skills. It describes the type of language skill that is taught. Receptive (written/reading, spoken/listening), productive (written/writing, spoken/speaking).

B. The selection and grading of language items: It discusses the following approaches followed by the textbook:

- a. Functional syllabuses and structural syllabuses: The functional syllabuses deal with the functions that are selected according to the situations in which the learner will use English. The structural syllabuses focus on the internal structure of the language rather than its use.
- b. Subject-centred approach vs student-centred approach: It means the selection of material is based on the internal structure of the language versus the students' needs.
- c. Grading and recycling: Grading refers to the speed of the students, whether it is steep, average, or shallow. Recycling means words are best recycled in different contexts to be learned adequately. Recycling is divided into two approaches, cyclical progression approach vs. linear progression approach.

C. Presentation and practice of new language items: It discusses two processes:

- a. The influence of theories of learning: The evaluation process focuses on the analysis of the following methodology of the textbook.
 - i. Behaviourist and cognitive views: Behaviourist view stresses that language learning is habit formation and occurs in response to external stimuli; on the other hand, the cognitive views involve learning through engaging conscious mental processes such as applying explicitly formulated rules.
 - ii. Inductive and deductive language learning: Inductive refers to a situation in which learners are presented with examples and are asked to induce the rules. Deductive learning is the opposite, in which learners are given explanations of the rules and then expected to apply the rules.
- b. Presentation and practice of grammar items: It focuses on the three stages in the presentation of new structures (grammar items): they are the presentation, the practice and finally, the production stages.

D. Developing language skills and communicative abilities: It discusses the techniques for developing language skills and communicative ability. It focuses on the balance and clear progression among the following three stages.

- a. Presentation

- b. practice
- c. Free production

E.The supporting materials: It gives some hints for evaluating the supporting materials as well as describing the kind of supporting materials the textbook contains.

- a. Visual
- b. Audio
- c. Teachers' book
- d. Vocabulary lists and indexes.

F.Motivation and the learner: Motivation has an impact on the effectiveness of learning. It varies from one situation to another and from one person to another. It is influenced by the following:

A.Psychological factors such as:

- a. Short-term objectives: It stresses the use of materials that lead to attainable short-term objectives.
- b. Appealing materials: The textbook should contain something that interests learners, such as an attractive appearance, and activities require the student's involvement.
- c. Whole-person approach: Textbooks are concerned with developing all aspects of the learner's personality, such as feelings and attitudes, and not only the cognitive aspect.
- d. Realism: It stresses that the interaction in the classroom is real as the students say what they think or feel.

B.Social and cultural factors such as:

- a. Geographical setting: the subject matter of the textbook displays the cultural content depending on the place of publication or the market for which the textbook is intended.
- b. Age range and class: These are factors that affect the cultural content of a textbook.
- c. Advantages of cultural-specific coursebooks: teaching materials become meaningful through being contextualized.
- d. Limitation of culture-specific coursebooks: The shortcoming of this type of textbook is that teaching materials are only relevant to students who have the same cultural background.
- e. Teaching cultural background with the language: Textbooks should prepare students who intend to study abroad to understand the social scene and use English appropriately.
- f. English as a second language: textbooks that are used in situations where English is used for communication besides the native language present English naturally in its role as a second language for a variety of purposes.
- g. Anthropological aspects of language: Cultural content in language programmes must be understood in its anthropological sense.

G.Overall evaluation: It involves evaluating the following:

- a. The objectives of the textbook
- b. The extent to achieve the objectives.
- c. Strengths
- d. Weaknesses
- e. Omissions

- f. The suitability of the textbook to certain learning situations
- g. The unsuitability of the textbook to certain situations
- h. Comparison with other textbooks evaluated.
- i. General conclusion

H. Adaptation and innovation of materials to suit individual needs and circumstances regarding students' level of education, social attitudes, intellectual ability and level of emotional maturity.

3. Empirical Studies

Several authors follow the criteria designed by Alan Cunningswrth [8] in the evaluation of English textbooks. Devi [9] investigated the appropriacy of the textbook "Look Ahead" based on Cunningsworth criteria. Qualitative research was employed to give descriptive data. The result indicated that the textbook "Look Ahead" fulfils the criteria of a good textbook suggested by Alan Cunningsworth. It matches 30 of 45 Alan Cunningsworth's checklist. This proves that it is appropriate for the age, grade, and maturity of the students.

Similarly, Gjergi [10] conducted a study to evaluate the textbook "Spark 3". He described the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook. He evaluated 55 statements that covered seven categories, language and content, selection and grading of language items, presentation and practice of new language items, language skills and communicative abilities, supporting materials, motivation, and overall evaluation. The textbook "Spark 3" fulfilled most of the criteria proposed by Cunningsworth. It reflects several characteristics of a good English textbook, such as an exciting layout and topics, integration of language skills and good vocabulary and finally, grammar explanation and tasks.

Jannah and Robiasih [11] evaluated two English textbooks of Mandiri and Solatif, for grade seven. The objectives were to determine whether these textbooks fulfilled the criteria of good textbooks and to examine the suitability of the two textbooks with the curriculum. The results showed that Solatif meets three criteria of a good textbook by Cunningsworth. They are aim and approaches, topics and methodology. On the other hand, it fails to meet one criterion, which is the teacher's book. The other textbook Mandiri meets none of the criteria of a good textbook.

Sulistiyana [12] conducted an analysis of the four English skills in the textbook "When English Rings a Bell". The criteria of Alan Cunningswrth [8] were used in the analysis of the textbook. The textbook was used in the teaching of the seventh grade of Junior High School. The goal of the study was to describe the types of skills used in the textbook. Three instruments were used to collect the data; they were interviews, an observation checklist, and a document. The findings indicated that the textbook covers the four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These skills are integrated into each chapter. Another result is that English skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing match the skills found in the checklist based on Alan Cunningsworth.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design:

A qualitative method with content analysis was used for collecting and analyzing the data. The content analysis covers the eight units of the textbook "Skills for Success-Reading and Writing". Descriptive qualitative data are provided based on Alan Cunningsworth's [8] criteria in the evaluation of textbooks.

4.2. Instruments:

The instrument used in the evaluation of the English textbook “Skills for Success-Reading and Writing” was the checklist designed by Alan Cunningsworth [8]. He is an expert who developed the criteria for a good English textbook. This textbook was used in some of the Saudi English language institutions. It is used for level one students at King Khalid University. The checklist used is presented in eight categories. Each category focuses on specific features. The categories are as follows:

- a. language content.
- b. Selection and grading of language items.
- c. Presentation and practice of new language items.
- d. Developing language skills and communicative abilities.
- e. Supporting materials.
- f. Motivation and the learner.
- g. Conclusion and overall evaluation.
- h. Adaptation and innovation of material.

5. Results and Discussion

This section provides a holistic evaluation of the eight units of the textbook “Skills for Success-Reading and Writing” based on Alan Cunningsworth’s [8] criteria. It presents the results of the content analysis divided into categories, sub-categories, and examples of material presented.

The first category is “language Content”. It is concerned with the following areas in the field of textbook evaluation:

- a. Form and function and aspects of language form:

The textbook “Skills for Success-Reading and Writing” includes a combination of language forms and language functions. Language forms are displayed in vocabulary and Grammar exercises such as “Preview the Reading”, “Vocabulary Skill”, and “Grammar” exercises. On the other hand, language functions are displayed in expressing observations and expressing thoughts, such as “Unit Question” and “Write what you Think” exercises.

- b. Appropriateness: The textbook stresses the students’ development in communicative competence in a comprehensive way. Appropriateness is displayed in the “Unit Question”, and “Write what you Think” exercises in the eight chapters of the book. Students can learn how to use languages in social situations related to business, global studies, sociology, physiology, psychology, ethics, and behavioural science.

- c. Varieties: The textbook uses standard, educated, southern British English without using any specific dialect. The style used in the passages and most of the questions are formal. On the other hand, some questions that are based on watching videos, listening to interviews, and writing emails require an informal style. The register used in the textbook is general, as the textbook is used in a classroom setting. The vocabulary items are not intended for a particular field or specific occupation. The textbook contains both written and spoken English. The written materials are displayed in two places, the hard copy of the book and the online exercises. On the other hand, the spoken audio is displayed online.

- d. Language skills: Each unit in the textbook deals with the four language skills reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The reading skill deals with reading articles, interviews, websites, emails, charts, graphs and tables, internet forums and blog posts. The writing skills deal with tasks at word, sentence, and paragraph levels. The speaking skill is practiced through pair and group discussions. In order to develop listening skill; students listen

to various audio materials in the Q classroom online to answer some comprehension questions and complete charts.

The second category is “The Selection and Grading of Language Items”. This section deals with the approaches followed by the textbook:

a. Functional syllabuses and structural syllabuses: The textbook is a combination of functional and structural syllabi. Functional syllabus deals with the functions that are selected according to the situations of language functions displayed in expressing observations and expressing thoughts such as “Unit Questions” and “Write what you Think exercises”. The structural syllabus focuses on the internal structure of the language rather than its use, such as “Preview the Reading”, “Vocabulary Skill”, and “Grammar” Exercises.

b. Subject-centred approach vs student-centred approach: The teaching material of the textbook is selected according to the student’s communicative needs. The material aims to give learners basic competence in most aspects of English at the elementary level, and thus it follows a student-centred approach. (a unit is equivalent to about six hours of work in class).

c. Grading and recycling: The new material of the textbook is steeply graded as grammar and vocabulary items are concerned. Every unit devotes one new grammar item and has about two practice exercises attached, with many more supplementary online activities. Every unit presents about 9-13 new vocabulary items and has about two practice exercises with other supplementary online ones in a variety of communicative activities. The vocabulary items have been chosen from the Oxford 3000 ready-made list of words to meet the needs of language learners (Lynn,2016). The progression of the textbook is linear. Every language item is presented exhaustively in different contexts before passing on to the next item.

The third category is “Presentation and Practice of New Language Items”. It discusses two processes:

A. The influence of theories of learning: The analysis of the methodology of the textbook involves the following:

a. Behaviourist and cognitive views: The textbook is influenced by a combination of the behaviourist approach and the cognitive one. behaviourist approach as it considers language learning as habit formation. It stresses the importance of repetition in learning through various offline and online activities and through audio-lingual practices. On the other hand, the textbook follows the cognitive approach as it involves learning through engaging conscious mental processes such as applying explicitly formulated rules.

b. Inductive and deductive language learning: The textbook follows deductive and inductive learning in teaching new vocabulary. Students are presented with the words in contexts and are asked to guess the meaning and vice versa, as presented in the “Preview the Reading” exercise. On the other hand, deductive learning is used in teaching grammar as learners are given explanations of the rules, and then they are expected to apply the rules, such as the sections of “Reading Skill”, “Writing Skill”, and “Grammar”.

B. Presentation and practice of grammar items: It involves three stages, presentation, practice and production. The textbook follows three stages in the teaching of grammar. Students are presented with rules first, then practice by answering some questions related to the rule, and finally, they are provided with an online activity for grammar expansion.

The fourth category is “Developing Language Skills and Communicative Abilities”. The textbook focuses on the balance in following the same previous three stages in developing language skills and communicative abilities. They are presentation, practice and finally, production. Reading comprehension is developed by presenting some questions related to the

topics to be discussed in groups and listening to a model online audio version of the passages, then the next stage is practicing reading and answering objective questions related to the passage, and the third stage is a production where students learn to read fast and produce some short answers to some questions such as “Write What you Think”. When writing skill is considered, the textbook presents the writing rule, followed by some objective questions such as multiple choice, matching, fill in the blanks and finally, the last stage, where students must write and produce the language they learnt in different contexts.

The fifth category is “Supporting Materials”. The textbook contains online activities and audio for the students to have more practice on each unit. Students can download the audio file selected from the audio track list presented in the textbook. The online activities include additional practice, videos, and online tests. The teachers’ book is very helpful in the preparation of the materials. The textbook is supported by a vocabulary list that is a part of the Oxford 3000. It consists of the most important words students need to succeed in English.

The sixth category is “Motivation and the Learner”. Motivation helps in the effectiveness of teaching /learning processes. It is influenced by psychological factors and Social and cultural factors.

A. Regarding the Psychological factors, the textbook is motivating as it deals with various fields of study to attract learners who have different interests. It deals with business, global studies, sociology, physiology, psychology, ethics, and behavioural science. Every unit in the textbook has a short-term objective that could be attained by the students at the end of the unit. The appearance of the book is attractive as it has good-quality pages, good-quality binding, pictures of different sizes, and diagrams. The activities require students’ involvement, such as the “Unit Question” and “Write What You Think” exercises. The textbook tries to develop all aspects of students’ personality such as feelings (i.e. What Makes you Laugh, Laugh more and Stress Less, How do Sports Make you Feel the Dangerous World, can we trust our fears), attitudes (i.e. The Right Job for you, and Making Medical Decisions), and cognitive aspects (i.e. How Much Information do People Need, and How are Children and Adults Different. The textbook stresses realism as the students’ interaction in the classroom is accurate, and the students say what they really think or feel.

B. On the other hand, regarding social and cultural factors, the textbook is not written for a specific nationality or ethnic group. There are some aspects of different cultures presented in the book. For example, the topic “The World in a City” describes some aspects of British culture; the topic “Immigrant Stories”, represents Chinese, Bangladeshi, and Nigerian cultures; the writing model in unit 3 displays the culture of Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Greece, and Saudi Arabia; The topic “ A Super Soccer Fan” and the section of “Reading Skill” in unit 7 display the Brazilian culture and finally, the topic “Across the World” involves some aspects of the culture of Norway, the Republic of Vanuatu, and Korea.

In addition, it is stated on the page of “Author and Consultants” in the textbook “Skills for Success-Reading and writing” that there are three Saudi Arabia cultural advisors who helped in giving consultations with regard to culture, such as Haifa Alnofaie, Sohaib Sandhu and Maha Mohamad Al Zaidi, who work in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the textbook prepares the students to understand different cultural content and use English appropriately. Finally, the textbook is suitable for the student’s age and linguistics level. It has simple language and easy grammar rules that match the needs of students at an elementary level.

The seventh category is “Overall Evaluation”. It involves evaluating the following:

A. The objectives of the textbook: The objectives are stated at the end of each unit. They are as follows:

- a. I can gather information and ideas to describe the duties of the job I want and give reasons why it is an excellent job for me.
- b. I can gather information and ideas to explain how a place changed because of international immigration or international culture.
- c. I can gather information and ideas to write a paragraph explaining how much vacation time I need and why.
- d. I can gather information and ideas to write a paragraph that explains what makes me or someone I know laugh.
- e. I can gather information and ideas to write a paragraph about a sport I like and how it makes me feel.
- f. I can gather information and ideas to write an opinion paragraph about how to make good decisions.
- g. I can gather information and ideas to write a paragraph about essential changes in my life.
- h. I can gather information and ideas to write one or more paragraphs about fear and how it can be avoided.

The textbook achieves the objectives successfully. Students must drill and practice until they are able to collect ideas and brainstorm to write the required paragraphs.

B. Strengths: This textbook helps students achieve academic success. The textbook has several advantages. The most essential one is that it has online integrated digital content besides the hard copy of it. Students can go online for additional practice and support. They can listen to a model reading by native speakers. Students can watch authentic videos anytime they want. It has comprehensive coverage of language and critical skills and integrates them in a communicative way. The textbook has various interesting topics that suit the different tastes of the students. The appearance of the textbook is appealing as it has audio and visual materials. Finally, the textbook contributes to the student's personal, social, and educational development.

C. Weaknesses and omissions: One weakness is that the textbook has tasks to develop receptive skills more than productive ones, as each unit consists of 15 receptive tasks but 11 productive ones. Another weakness could be that the grammatical patterns are not sequenced according to high-frequency ones. Finally, pronunciation and spelling are not stressed in this textbook.

D. The suitability and unsuitability of the textbook to certain learning situations: The textbook is suitable for learners at a beginning level. It is appropriate for EFL students from different cultural backgrounds. The textbook is not intended for advanced-level or university native speakers of English.

E. Comparison with other textbooks evaluated. The textbook is similar to "Spark 3" textbook as both fulfilled most of the criteria proposed by Cunningsworth. They reflect several characteristics of a good English textbook. On the other hand, the textbook "Skills for Success-Reading" and Writing is different from both "Mandiria and Solatif". Solatif meets three criteria of a good textbook by Cunningsworth, while the other textbook Mandiri meets none of the criteria of a good textbook.

F. Overall evaluation. The textbook evaluated according to Alan Cunningsworth's criteria is an excellent one. It has reflected all the eight features of a good English textbook. They are language and content, selection and grading of language items, presentation, and practice of new language items, development of language skills and communicative abilities, supporting materials, motivation, overall evaluation and Adaptation and innovation material. However, some improvements are preferred to be made by the author, such as developing more

productive tasks, teaching the most frequent grammatical patterns, and finally, developing pronunciation and spelling tasks.

The last category is “Adaptation and innovation of material”. The materials of the textbook are authentic and of a suitable level of difficulty. They include reading articles, interviews, emails, postings, charts, graphs, and tables. They also consist of watching videos and listening to interviews. Learners are exposed to language in real use.

6. Conclusion

The textbook “Skills for Success-Reading and Writing” is an essential source for teaching English to EFL students at an elementary level. The textbook evaluation is divided into categories, sub-categories, and examples of materials presented. This evaluation is based on the criteria designed by Alan Cunningsworth. The textbook reflects all the criteria proposed for a good textbook. It is based on teaching form and functions. It is appropriate for developing students’ communicative competence. It uses standard English with a formal style. It deals with the four skills reading, writing, speaking, and listening integrated into each unit. The textbook teaches both functions and structures of English. It follows the student-centred approach as it stresses the students’ communicative needs. The progression of the textbook is linear, as every language item is presented in different contexts. The textbook is influenced by both behaviourist and cognitive theories. The textbook shows that there is a balance and clear progression among the three stages of presentation, practice and production in the development of language skills and communicative ability. The textbook consists of different supporting visual and audio materials. It consists of a teacher’s book, an audio track list and a vocabulary list. The textbook motivates and develops the students’ feelings, attitudes, and cognitive aspects. Overall, the findings revealed that the textbook is excellent for beginners to learn and use English. After all, further research could be applied to other textbooks to help teachers, course designers, and policymakers to make wise decisions regarding the selection of the most appropriate textbooks. They could also make suitable modifications and adaptations to the materials to further improve the quality of textbooks and quality of education.

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