

TEXTBOOK EVALUATION AND MATERIALS SELECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH FOR NURSING COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Elena Spirovska Tevdovska

Faculty of Health Sciences, South East European University, Tetovo, Republic of North Macedonia

e.spirovska@seeu.edu.mk

Abstract: *The paper analyses the process of textbook selection and materials adaptation in the context of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses and in the context of English for Nursing course. Textbooks and materials are essential components of ESP course design, which frequently contribute to the success or failure of the course in completing the course objectives. However, the process of selecting a specific textbook for the course, which will address the course objectives, is not straightforward or simple. In the ESP literature, the views about the need of using textbooks in ESP courses are polarised. The study will examine the benefits of using textbooks in ESP context, which include available sources for the students and facilitate the class preparation for the teachers, as well as the drawbacks which include the impossibility of finding a textbook which corresponds entirely to learners' needs. The research includes the evaluation of the selected textbook in the context of English for Nursing. The evaluation is based on the literature review on the topic of textbook evaluation in ESP and language teaching and learning context in general. The evaluation described is based on the set of criteria provided by Miekley (2005), which includes the following criteria: content, vocabulary and grammar, exercises and activities, attractiveness of the text, the quality of the teacher's manual and the context. Two textbooks are examined and compared, in order to select the appropriate one. Apart from the textbook analysis, the paper aims to provide suggestions and recommendations regarding materials adaptation and development of materials which can be used in English for Nursing and Medical English Courses.*

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; English for Nursing; textbook; evaluation.

1. Introduction and rationale -do we need a textbook?

Textbooks undoubtedly play a significant role in course design and materials selection in teaching and learning contexts. However, the selection of a specific textbook depends on numerous variables, including the needs analysis, the target population, the course design, the number of teaching hours, the course goals and objectives. Apart from the factors which are listed, the selection depends on the evaluation of a specific textbook, which determines which textbook and/or materials will be used in a specific teaching and learning context. Therefore, the importance of the textbook evaluation process is obvious.

Among the arguments in favour of selecting and using a textbook in both General English and ESP is the argument presented by Hutchinson and Torres (1994).

They argue that among the benefits of using a textbook in ESP context, one of the most significant one is that the textbooks provide a logical list of topics to be explored in the teaching and learning context,. In addition, the textbooks provide the necessary language through different texts and activities, as well as other supplementary materials, including grammar explanations, vocabulary support and practice.

Following the movement in ELT theory that supports the collection of materials rather than selecting a textbook, Hutchinson and Torres (1994:316), argue in favour of the textbook by stating the following: "There is an emphasis on individual freedom and creativity over effective performance. It's a sort of 'back to nature' appeal. Wouldn't it be better if we all baked our own bread, preferably from our own home-grown, organic wheat, rather than buying a cut-and-wrapped loaf at the supermarket? In reality, of course, the convenience of the supermarket is overwhelming in determining our choice. The important conclusion to draw surely is not that we should encourage everyone to make their own bread, but that we should educate people to be more informed, more discerning, and more influential consumers."

Therefore, we can conclude that textbooks always meet certain needs of teachers and students alike. Excluding a textbook from the collection of materials in ESP and General English teaching and learning context is possible. However, it would involve significant and moreover unnecessary workload for the lecturers and a possibility of selecting and using materials that are of an inappropriate quality and design.

How do we define the textbook evaluation process and which steps do we need to undertake when conducting textbook evaluation? Are there any particular issues that we should be aware of when selecting textbooks in the context of teaching English for specific purposes? Hutchinson and Waters (1993:96) define the textbook evaluation process as follows: "Evaluation is a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose. Given a certain need, and in the light of the resources available, which out of a number of possibilities can represent the best solution? Evaluation is then, concerned with a relative merit. There is no absolute good or bad- only degrees of fitness for a relative purpose".

The definition stated above, describes the essence of textbook evaluation. In any teaching and learning contexts, despite their importance, availability or characteristics, ideal textbooks do not exist. However, the importance of textbook evaluation is evident, since a variety of textbooks are available on the market.

Williams (1983) developed a method for textbooks selection and evaluation. He developed a scheme for evaluation, which included up-to-date methodology, guidance for non-native language teachers, needs of language learners and relevance to the learning environment. Williams (1983:253) discusses the importance of the principles of textbook selection and evaluation, summarising the importance of textbooks in language teaching context as follows: "The textbook is a tool, and the teacher must know not only how to use it, but how useful it can be. Finding out will involve distinguishing between method in the use of printed materials, and method in face-to-face teaching. It will involve using discretion in adapting textual materials to the needs and interests of pupils, choosing only those materials and methods which are based on sound linguistic and pedagogical principles. The textbook will continue to play an important role, but it will not be a tyrant." The value of a good textbook is also defined, as the previous quote

illustrates it, by defining what a good textbook isn't – or it will not be a “tyrant”. In other words, we cannot expect even from a properly chosen textbook to be the only driving force behind the course syllabus, course aims and the assessment.

The importance of textbook evaluation is discussed by various authors: Azarnoosh, M., and Ganji, M. (2014:62), when discussing the importance of evaluation, state the following: “Moreover, evaluation is quite an important part of the educational process. It is essential for the use of instructional materials such as textbooks since they can serve as a syllabus and a self-study source for learners”.

Saraigh (2015:61) summarises the process of materials selection and textbook evaluation in ESP context (English for Nursing in this case) as follows: “Here, teachers must use class time effectively and teach the aspects which the learners themselves deem to be most urgently required”. Thus, another variable must be taken into consideration when selecting or evaluating a textbook. Very frequently, the syllabus, the materials and the weekly activities have to highlight and address the importance of effectiveness and utilising the limited time which is at our disposal when selecting and evaluating the textbook and the materials.

Furthermore, the availability of appropriate textbooks has to be taken into consideration. According to Pasalic, M., and Plancic, B. (2018:211) ...”some ESP niche areas suffer from acute course book deprivation mostly for the lack of research and publishers’ interest.” Although textbooks for certain ESP areas are easily accessible (for instance Business English) , the choice of textbooks for English for Nursing is limited.

2. The process of textbook evaluation in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) setting

If we analyse the ESP teaching and learning context, we have to take into account that some principles of textbook and materials evaluation in this context are similar to textbook selection in other ELT contexts, while other principles are different and specific for the ESP contexts. First of all, how do we define the notion of evaluation in the ESP context?

Dudley-Evans and St John (2003:128), define evaluation as “a process which starts from deciding on the information which should be gathered and ending with bringing change in the current situation”. Furthermore, they point out that in ESP teaching and learning context, evaluation is concerned with the effectiveness of learning, achieving the set objectives and evaluation of the resources available. Here, we include textbooks and materials evaluation. Utilising textbooks and assessing the optimal use of a textbook in a specific context is clearly an essential part of the evaluation process.

Taking into consideration that the process of textbook selection can be a complex process, it is logical to define the steps prior to commencing the process of textbook evaluation. Hutchinson and Waters (1993: 96), divide the textbook evaluation process into four major steps:

- Defining criteria
- Subjective analysis
- Objective analysis
- Matching

Hutchinson and Waters (1993) describe the first steps as essential even in the

course design stage. During the stage of defining criteria and the subjective analysis, it is important to reflect on the criteria and what realisations of the criteria do we expect in the course objectives.

The subjective and objective analyses include analysis of content, methodology and criteria including price and availability of textbooks. The content includes evaluating the language points, the macro and micro-skills, the text types, the types of topics, the organisation of the material and sequencing.

The methodology analysis includes the following: teaching and learning theories underpinning the course, tasks and activities needed, teaching and learning techniques implemented, aids and applications available and the necessary guidance and support for the lecturer and learners alike.

Miekley (2005) provided a list of questions and a checklist in order to evaluate a textbook. A simplified version of Miekley's model is used in the process of textbook evaluation. The following aspects of a textbook are included in the evaluation described in our study.

1. Content

- The organisation of the subject matter. Topics or functions are presented in a logical manner
- Authentic reading texts
- Real life issues

2. Vocabulary and Grammar

- Grammar is logically presented.
- New words are presented in various ways (glossaries, synonyms, and context.
- New vocabulary is recycled/ repeated.

3. Exercises and Activities

- Interactive and task based activities.
- Clear instructions.
- Critical thinking is promoted through activities.
- Grammar is used in context.

4. Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-Up

- The cover of the book is appealing
- The visuals/ pictures are of a high quality
- The illustrations are not distracting

5. Context

- The content is appropriate for the course goals and objectives
- The textbook is appropriate for the students.
- The textbook is appropriate for the lecturer.

6. Teacher's manual

- Provides methodological guidance
- Provides correct/ suggested answers

7. Supplementary materials

- Audio visual materials are incorporated
- Tests and materials are provided

3. Description of the target population and teaching and learning context

The textbook evaluation process described in the study was conducted for the purpose of materials selection and evaluation in the context of teaching English for

Nursing as a part of the Faculty of Health Sciences. The Faculty is the last, or the newest, to be accredited as a part of the academic offer by the South East European University in North Macedonia. The Faculty offers two study programs: Nursing (General) and Physiotherapy.

The newly accredited Faculty program, designed for future nurses and physiotherapists, listed one foreign language course per semester, designed for 45 teaching hours and 15 weeks per semester. The language offer includes a choice among Medical English, Medical German, local languages (Albanian or Macedonian), or general English or German language courses. The target population for these courses consisted of 38 students, both male and female students, coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Albanian, Macedonian, and Turkish). This group of students was subject of placement testing in English and Macedonian language upon enrolment. It was determined, according to the placement test results that the language proficiency of the majority of the students varies from A2 to B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference.

The preliminary placement test results indicated the level of English language proficiency, which was one variable which determined the course design and materials selection. Another variable that was taken into consideration was the insight from discussion with the Faculty officials and experts in the field of teaching English for Nursing.

The Faculty officials (the Dean of the Faculty and the coordinator for the Nursing Practicum part) indicated that they expect from the language programs to be professionally oriented as much as possible, preparing the students for their future nursing and physiotherapy career. As a result, the course objectives had to prioritise the following:

- vocabulary acquisition and learning,
- using the new words in meaningful contexts,
- speaking practice
- listening practice
- Technical writing: medical reports, patient conditions check forms, summary of patients' injuries and treatment, discharging notes and similar tasks.
- The discussion with an expert from a field and a professional who had been working as a Medical English and English for Nursing lecturer in higher education offered valuable insight in the process of textbook selection. The lecturer specified the following guidelines which were taken into consideration.
- Selecting a textbook is very important, especially when establishing a new course which hasn't been taught before.
- The course name Medical English can be misleading. The materials and content for Medical English are more suitable for students of the Faculty of Medicine. For the described target population, a textbook for English for Nursing is necessary.

The target vocabulary should include (but not limited to) the following topics:

- Admitting and discharging patients
- Vital signs
- Hospital staff
- Hospital rooms and equipment

- Hygiene
- Nutrition
- Instruments
- Emergencies and first aid.

As a result of the directions described above, the process of syllabus design and textbook selection commenced. Several textbooks existed already on the market. They were available, appropriate for the described context, up to a certain extent and corresponding to the course aims and objectives.

4. The selection process

Two textbooks were compared and evaluated against the checklist. The first one was the textbook Oxford English for Careers: Nursing 1. The language level was defined as ranging from A2 to B2. The textbook, according to the description, is designed for nursing students and nursing professionals whose intention is to work in English-speaking environment. It was accompanied by audio material for listening comprehension and a teachers' book.

The second textbook was Career Paths English: Nursing. The student's book was accompanied by a Teacher's pack and guide, as well as a Digital Books application which could be downloaded by using the code specified in the student's book. It is designed for nursing professionals, enhancing the language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing and addressing relevant and career oriented topics.

The textbook selected was the second one: Career Paths English: Nursing. The reasons are explained in the following paragraph.

The textbook was well organised and the progression of the material and topics was logical. The textbook series was organised into three items (textbooks). Each textbook, part of the series, offered over 150 vocabulary items related to Nursing, listed in a glossary at the end of the textbook. The target vocabulary was presented in context and with definitions and synonyms. The reading texts were authentic and relevant. Each unit had relevant listening passages, accompanied by tasks. Each unit was accompanied by speaking and writing tasks, which were meaningful and practice related. Grammar was used in context, although not overly emphasised. The activities were interactive, promoting critical thinking. The teacher's book offered, besides the answer key, a methodological guidance and tests. The digital software, which was not available for the other textbook which was considered, offered interactive practice, supplementary visual material (videos) and task based activities. It also offered opportunities for self- check and peer check. More importantly, the topics listed were career oriented and very specific. The tasks provided possibilities to relate students' practical work with their content area courses and knowledge. This is a summary of the reasons for selecting "Career Paths English: Nursing" over the other textbook, based on the provided checklist:

1. **Organization and Progression:**
 - The textbook series was clearly and well-organized with a logical progression.
2. **Vocabulary and Grammar:**
 - Over 150 nursing-related vocabulary items were provided in each

- textbook, listed in a glossary in an alphabetical order and in a user friendly manner.
- Target vocabulary was presented in context with definitions and synonyms.
 - Grammar was used in context without being overly emphasized, which was in accordance with the course objectives.
3. **Content, Authenticity and Relevance:**
 - Reading texts were authentic and relevant to nursing- thus increasing the exposure to relevant and target language.
 - Listening passages were relevant and accompanied by meaningful tasks, increasing the practice and exposure to authentic dialogues and conversations.
 4. **Interactive and Critical Thinking Activities:**
 - Activities were interactive and promoted critical thinking among students.
 - Speaking and writing tasks were meaningful, career content and practice-oriented
 5. **Supplementary Materials and Teacher's Support:**
 - The teacher's book provided methodological guidance and tests, along with an answer key, which was useful as a teaching support.
 - Digital software accompanying the textbook offered interactive practices, supplementary visual materials (videos), and task-based activities.
 - It provided opportunities for self-check and peer check.
 6. **Career Orientation and Practical Application:**
 - Topics were career-oriented and highly specific to nursing, shifting the focus from language learning to content and language learning.
 - Tasks allowed students to relate their practical work with their content area courses and knowledge.
 7. **Assessment**
 - The content of the textbook is grouped in 3 units. Each of the units is accompanied by tests which provide the basis for assessment.
 - The tests include reading comprehension, vocabulary and listening skills.
 - The textbook includes a number of tasks and activities (writing and speaking tasks) which are included in the assessment and constitute grading criteria (homework, speaking competency, CV writing).

These reasons suggest that "Career Paths English: Nursing" met the criteria of the evaluation checklist effectively, offering a comprehensive and engaging learning experience for students studying English for Nursing. The inclusion of interactive elements, authentic materials, and career-specific content likely made it a strong choice for the context of teaching English for Nursing within the specified language proficiency range of A2 to B1.

5. Conclusion

From the process of textbook evaluation and the review of literature, it can be concluded that the process of textbook evaluation and selection is not simple and straightforward. In the context of ESP, the process of textbook selection involves several steps, which can be summarised as follows:

- Assessment of learners' language proficiency
- Assessment of learners' and Faculty program needs
- Selecting a method for textbook evaluation
- Taking into consideration other relevant factors: supplementary materials, digital software, the price and availability

We can conclude that the process of textbook selection and evaluation depends on several different variables. Some of the issues emerging from the process, although relevant, cannot be influenced by the lecturer or the institution. Above all, we, as ESP practitioners, have to take into consideration that an ideal textbook does not exist. We can select wisely, evaluate carefully, use supplementary materials and adjust according to the course goals. But above all, we have to be ready to revise, to reselect and re-evaluate the textbooks, the materials and the digital software available. Change is the driving force behind every successful ESP program.

References:

- [1]. **Azarnoosh, M., and Ganji, M.** (2014) "ESP book evaluation: The case of management course book." *International Journal of Secondary Education*, Vol. 2(4), pp 61–65.
- [2]. **Dudley-Evans, T., and St. John, M. J.** (2003) *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- [3]. **Grice T., and Meehan, A.** (2009) "Oxford English for Careers: Nursing 1". Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [4]. **Evans V. and Salcido K.** (2018) "*Career Paths: Nursing*". Express Publishing.
- [5]. **Hutchinson, T., and Waters, A.** (1993) *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [6]. **Hutchinson, T., and Torres, E.** (1994) "The textbook as agent of change". *ELT Journal*, Vol. 48(4), pp. 315-328.
- [7]. **Miekley, J.** (2005) "ESL textbook evaluation checklist", *The Reading Matrix*, 5(2). http://www.readingmatrix.com/reading_projects/miekley/project.pdf [online]
- [8]. **Pasalic, M., and Plancic, B.** (2018) Issues affecting selection and evaluation of ESP teaching materials. *Transactions on Maritime Science*, 7(2),pp 210–218.
- [9]. **Saraigh, E.** (2014) "Designing ESP Materials for Nursing Students Based on Needs Analysis", *International Journal of Linguistics*, Macrothink Institute, Vol. 6 (4), pp59-70.
- [10]. **Williams, D.** (1983) "Developing criteria for textbook evaluation", *ELT Journal*, Vol. 37(3), pp 251- 255.