



Case Study: An Evaluation of an ESP Textbook Used at the College of Business Studies in Kuwait from the Learners' Perspective Regarding Its Alignment with Future Career Requirements

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Abstract

A key aspect of learning English is evaluating the materials. It is regarded as a cornerstone in the field of English for Specific Purposes. The purpose of this study is to evaluate an ESP textbook that is taught at Kuwait's College of Business Studies. It looks at how learners perceive the textbook. The study also aims to determine whether the textbook helps in preparing learners for their future business careers. A series of research instruments, including a questionnaire, a checklist, and interviews, were developed for this purpose. The results proved that the learners' opinions of the textbook varied. While a minority of students felt that the textbook was unsuitable for their level of English proficiency, the majority of students liked it and thought it was useful and met their requirements. The results also proved that the textbook prepared the learners for their future careers to a certain degree.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, English as a Foreign Language, English Language Teaching, checklist, Assessment

Introduction

One of the most well-known subfields of English language teaching (ELT) since the late 1960s is English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), ESP has drawn a lot of attention (Knight, 2022; Liu & Hu, 2021). ESP is a learner-centered method of teaching ESL that emphasizes improving proficiency in certain subject areas. According to Anthony (2018), ESP is a method of teaching languages that focuses on the language and skills that students will need for their future academic or professional aims. It helps students meet these needs by using both general and discipline-specific teaching resources and techniques. The most practical way to reveal the language abilities needed by the teaching-learning system in general and ESP in particular is through textbooks and resources (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

ELT and ESP in Kuwait

English Language in the Educational Framework in Kuwait

Following that, learners began their college studies, during which they are required to do further English studies. According to Dehrab (2002), certain colleges, such as The College of Technological Studies, The College of Health Studies, and The College of Nursing, under the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET), utilize English as their primary medium of instruction. Generally, public colleges and universities that do not focus on science and technology use Arabic as their primary language of instruction, with a limited number of EFL courses available. Learners are only required to enroll in ESP courses that are crucial to their field of study.

ESP in Kuwait

Before the development of ESP, students studied English in General English (GE) classes that only touched on commerce, science, technology, medicine, and other fields. This naturally did not satisfy or meet the needs of the learners; thus courses and modules teaching business English, nursing English, engineering English, and so forth became a necessity. Ever since ESP first surfaced in the 1960s, it has evolved into a major component of ELT. Early in the 1980s, Kuwait's colleges and institutions strongly embraced ESP, offering ESP courses to college students in response to the growing demand for specialized English in specific fields. Learning English would help learners in understanding other modules they are working on in English that relate to their subject of study, thereby better preparing them for their academic life and future employment, as stated by Dehrab (2002).

Context of the study

The study evaluates the textbook Business Results, which is used by students in the College of Business Studies (CBS) in Kuwait. Accounting, Banking, Management Information Systems, Logistics Management, HR Management, Marketing, Financial Management, Computer, and Applied Statistics are the programs that are offered in CBS. Each program lasts for two academic years. The program requires students to pass an entry exam known as a placement test. If they pass the exam by acquiring 60% (or more) of the exam questions correctly, they enroll in GE1, which is the first credited English language module. If they fail the exam, they must enroll in two GE modules, the E 099 (preliminary English course) and E 101 (General English 1). Two ESP modules, 201, 'Writing for Business,' and ESP 154 (English 2), precede these two courses. Graduates can enroll in ESP 204 (English 3), an advanced ESP course, only after completing these two courses.

The goal of CBS's curriculum designers is to provide learners with the required level of English proficiency that they would need for their future employment in business-related fields. Therefore, it is crucial to make sure that learners can compete in the labor market and have a sufficient level of English proficiency. We must conduct the current study from the perspectives of business students to determine if the current textbook meets the pedagogical requirements and adequately prepares them for their future employment.

Literature Review

The Role of Textbooks in the ESP Classroom

Teaching English involves several significant elements. Textbooks and other teaching resources that language teachers frequently employ are essential components in EFL classrooms. The best ELT/EFL textbooks are the ones that offer flexibility, creativity, and efficiency. They should meet the learners' needs. However, CBS has criticized previous ELT/EFL textbooks for social and cultural biases like stereotyping, sexism, and gender discrimination. Some instructors contended that the artificial construction of those textbooks prevented them from adequately preparing students for real-world language usage.

Some researchers anticipated that, even though textbook materials were not made especially for language learners, the majority of the textbooks could meet the learners' demands. Additionally, researchers claimed that textbooks offered learners opportunities to assess their learning outcomes and plan for future coursework. They also claimed that suitable textbooks enabled teachers to improvise and to modify their lessons to suit the needs of

their students. Cunningsworth (1995); Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998); Fajardo-Dack (2016); Knight (2022); Richards (2017).

One of the most well-known subfields of English language teaching (ELT) since the late 1960s is English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), ESP has drawn a lot of attention (Knight, 2022; Liu & Hu, 2021). ESP is a learner-centered method of teaching ESL that emphasizes improving proficiency in certain subject areas. According to Anthony (2018), ESP is a method of teaching languages that focuses on the language and skills that students will need for their future academic or professional aims. It helps students meet these needs by using both general and discipline-specific teaching resources and techniques. The most practical way to reveal the language abilities needed by the teaching-learning system in general and ESP in particular is through textbooks and resources (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

Furthermore, Cunningsworth (1995) highlighted the various functions that textbooks fulfill in the ESP curriculum. He made the case that textbooks served as a syllabus that reflected pre-assigned learning objectives, presented the spoken and written material, encouraged communicative interaction, sparked ideas for classroom activities, served as a language reference for learners, allowed for self-directed learning, and assisted less experienced teachers. He listed four reasons why textbooks are used in ESP classrooms:

1. Their purpose is to teach English as a foreign language.
2. ESP textbooks support learning by stimulating cognitive processes in specific situations.
3. They motivated students by promoting enjoyment and creativity.
4. They provide ESP learners with opportunities for self-study or reference.

Nevertheless, a number of scholars (e.g., Cunningsworth (1995); Fajardo-Dack (2016); Knight (2022); Richards (2017)) contended that textbooks should not be the exclusive source of instructional materials, even though they played a vital role in the classroom. For instance, according to Cunningsworth (1995), textbooks in ESP programs were unable to meet the wide range of needs of all their users. He also argued that a strong reliance on a single textbook limited teachers' flexibility and creativity, which in turn limited their ability to contribute to the learning process. Furthermore, Fajardo-Dack (2016) asserted that teachers must adhere to the curriculum and textbooks, regardless of their suitability for their learners' needs. Furthermore, according to Richards (2017), textbooks had a significant influence on the subjects taught in the classroom, and teachers felt

constrained by their textbooks in terms of what they could teach to their students. In this scenario, ESP teachers could supplement the textbooks to foster the development of new ideas tailored to the specific needs of their students. Herein lies the role of supplementary materials, which were considered beneficial additions. Furthermore, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) noted that when students used supplementary materials for their own learning practice, they could increase their exposure to the language. Despite differing opinions, the general consensus was that textbooks were quite valuable in the teaching and learning process. Some researchers stated that evaluating textbooks could help instructors go beyond subjective evaluations by giving them useful, reliable, and organized information about the information in the textbooks. Textbooks should align with the needs and interests of learners, and they should accurately reflect the context of specific fields. We should carefully choose textbooks to meet the unique needs of learners and align with the institution's philosophies (Knoch & Macqueen, 2022; Macalister & Nation, 2020; Mishan, 2005; Tomlinson, 2012; Viana, Bocorny, & Sarmiento, 2019).

Textbook evaluation

According to many researchers, textbook evaluation aided educators and curriculum designers in problem-solving, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and making well-informed decisions because it gave them valuable insights into the subject matter. It also aided in the professional development and advancement of instructors. Evaluation was an ongoing process that aided in the development of educational initiatives, the assessment of accomplishments, and the enhancement of efficacy. Since material evaluation has a significant impact on what students learn, it should be the primary focus of any curriculum. This demonstrated that, despite the limitations of using "textbooks," they were still essential. Teachers had to evaluate textbooks to see whether they were appropriate for their teaching and learning situations. (Byrd, 2001; Ellis, Skehan, Li, Shintani, & Lambert, 2020; Siegel, 2021).

Cunningsworth (1995) asserts that the development of ESP for specific fields of study necessitates textbooks that align with the context, learners' interests, and the demands of their future careers. ESP textbooks were typically considered distinct from other standard English language teaching textbooks since they placed more value on the subject matter. He believed that "it is [therefore] of crucial importance that careful selection is made and that the materials selected closely reflect the aims, methods, and values of the teaching program" (p. 7). Therefore, while choosing a new textbook, it is important to conduct an evaluation to ensure that it suits and fulfills specific requirements for learners.

Sheldon (1988) recommended evaluating textbooks to determine their suitability. According to him, there were reasons to evaluate textbooks. He believed that evaluation was beneficial to educators and others who built curricula because it assisted them in making key decisions regarding education and administration. As a result, they would be able to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of the textbooks that were currently available and discover a solution to the never-ending challenges of selecting from a wide variety of options. Richards (2017) defines evaluation as the process of judging the effectiveness of the materials and textbooks used to achieve the desired teaching and learning outcomes. Therefore, textbook evaluation was an essential element for both the learning and teaching processes. Not only is textbook evaluation a fundamental component of every educational program, but it also plays a significant role in defining the content that learners learn. For that reason, the evaluation of the material would be the most important aspect of any program (Richards, 2017).

Checklists to Evaluate

McGrath (2016) asserted that checklists, among other evaluation tools, could assist instructors in determining the suitability of an ESP textbook and identifying areas for modification or addition. One of the benefits of using checklists, according to him, is their organization, which allows for the consideration and subsequent "checking off" (p. 26) of all important points for review. He also mentioned the use of checklists for comparison. They made it easier to make decisions and to let decision-makers compare different sets of textbook information. Additionally, he asserted that teachers preferred checklists due to their ease of use and flexibility, which allowed them to customize them by adding or removing different assessment items (p. 27).

Many studies (Ellis et al., 2020; Mukundan, 2007; Mukundan & Kalajahi, 2013) suggest that using checklists to evaluate materials both before and after use could be beneficial. For example, Ellis (1997) stated that checklists could help teachers figure out which textbooks would work best for their needs before they even used them. After using a guide, they could use checklists to determine its strengths and weaknesses and if it "worked" (Ellis, 1997: 36). That kind of evaluation was called a retrospective assessment. However, McGrath (2016) recommends a "cyclical" process for textbook evaluation (p. 14). Any type of evaluation must constantly check the textbook's pedagogical worth and usefulness (Ellis, 2018).

Methodology

The objectives of this study were to evaluate the quality of the textbook Business Results and to determine whether it was suitable for the

curricular requirements of the course from the learners' perspectives. We utilized quantitative methods for data collection and analysis to accomplish these objectives.

Research questions

1. What impressions of the textbook "Business Results" did learners have?
2. To what degree did the textbook equip the learners for their prospective careers?

Participants

The study involved 122 students enrolled at CBS. The backgrounds of the participants were similar to each other. As All participants were native speakers of Arabic. As part of their formal schooling in Kuwait, they all spent 12 years studying English for 45 minutes a day. The level of English proficiency of most of the students was intermediate, as they all finished the required GE module (101) and ESP module (154) as prerequisites to the ESP module (204). The learners in ESP (204) encountered the same textbook, Business Results, across all subjects.

This study also involved ten English language instructors employed at CBS. The language instructors held a minimum Master of Arts degree in TESOL, TESL, or TEFL, along with teaching experience in ESP spanning from 5 to 30 years.

Instruments

In this study, a checklist was developed by including a number of elements from a range of checklists that had been published in the past. Cunningsworth (1955: 3-4, 61, 80), Sheldon (1988: 242-245), and Straszniczky (2010: 48-49) wrote these checklists. We distributed a questionnaire to 112 English-learning students, evaluated textbooks using a checklist, and conducted interviews with instructors and learners throughout the study to collect data.

We translated the learners' questionnaire into Arabic, taking into account that some learners might struggle to provide satisfactory responses due to the language barrier. We conducted semi-structured interviews with the instructors and learners. We utilized a pre-prepared list of questions as a guide. We conducted the interview in Arabic to give the learners more freedom to express themselves.

Data Collection and Analysis

The learners were presented with a questionnaire that was generated in Microsoft Forms and distributed to them. The questionnaire contained

several questions, and the participants were required to rate each question using a Likert scale with five points. Additionally, we utilized Microsoft Forms to calculate and display the relevant percentage for each scale point, along with the average responses for the items.

We later conducted interviews with the instructors and learners to further validate the questionnaire responses.

Results

The data collected from the questionnaire intended for the ESP learners with cross-reference to their responses in the interviews were analyzed to gain insight into whether the textbook used was beneficial to their learning of the required ESP skills and their future careers.

Research Question 1

The first research question was to investigate learners' perceptions toward the textbook.

RQ 1: What impressions of the textbook "Business Results" do learners have?

The price of the textbook is reasonable:

In terms of the pricing of the textbook, 56% of the learners found it convenient, with 38% agreeing and 18% strongly agreeing. On the other hand, 35% of the learners were neutral, and 9% of them did not find it convenient. Sheldon (1988) proposes that all students should have access to and afford a copy of textbooks, ensuring efficient learning and a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.



Figure 1- The price of the textbook is reasonable

They layout and design are appropriate and clear:

Many of the learners said that the layout and design were appropriate and clear, whereas a minority of the students did not agree with this evaluation. This demonstrates that learners appreciate the value of having more color, visuals, and fewer items on the page altogether.



Figure 2- They layout and design are appropriate and clear:

The textbook offered a suitable balance of the four language skills:

The majority of learners agreed that the textbook offered a suitable balance of the four language skills. Only 25% of the learners expressed neutrality, while a minority held no belief at all.

The language used is at the right level for my current English ability:

In spite of the fact that 46% of the learners agreed with the belief that the language used was suitable for their current level of English proficiency, 27% strongly agreed. One may claim that only a small percentage of the students thought that it was challenging for them.



Figure 3- The materials provided an appropriate balance of the four language skills



Figure 4- The language used is at the right level for my current English ability

The subject and content of the materials is interesting, challenging and motivating:

The majority of learners considered the subject matter and content of the materials to be interesting, challenging, and motivating. The majority of learners considered the topic and content of the materials engaging, demanding, and inspirational. However, 4% did not agree, and 26% chose to remain neutral. This could potentially lead to a range of student preferences.



Figure 5- The subject and content of the materials is interesting, challenging and motivating

There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook:

A significant proportion of learners held the belief that the textbook offered sufficient diversity in terms of both content and subject matter. On the other hand, one-quarter of the participants believed the textbook did not provide them a wide variety of subjects and content.



Figure6- There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook

The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to my future needs as an English language learner:

Regarding the subject matter and content of the textbook, and its relevance to the future requirements of English language learners, the majority of respondents expressed that the textbook's subject matter and content, along with its relevance, align with their future expectations. This was considered the case since the textbook was relevant to the learners' future needs. On the other hand, 23% of participants maintained their neutrality, and 5% of participants were of the opinion that it does not fulfill their requirements for the future.



Figure 7- The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to my future needs as an English language learner

Research Question 2

RQ 2: To what degree does the textbook equip the learners for their prospective careers?

This question can be answered by understanding the instructors' future needs and what learners will be expected to do in their future careers, then comparing this to the textbook.

- be familiar with business vocabulary and terminology
- master the art of composing business letters, memos, and emails
- demonstrate proficiency in reading a variety of documents

- having the ability to manage business phone calls and receive messages
- have a strong oral command of the English language

It is evident that learners need to familiarize themselves with business terminology. They should also be able to write, read, listen, and speak effectively in order to do diverse tasks at work.

Some learners shared their thoughts on whether the textbook helped them prepare for their future jobs.

ST1: I believe it needs more business vocabulary.

ST6: I need to work on my business English more.... I'm going to take some extra classes... the book was good, but I feel like it didn't focus enough on writing.

ST4: I think it really met my speaking needs and helped me communicate...

ST26: It doesn't help us get ready for future jobs.

Learners' opinions on the textbook vary. While ST3 found the textbook helpful in improving her speaking skills, ST4 and ST26 felt it didn't adequately prepare them for future careers, leading ST4 to consider additional English courses.

Discussion

The majority of learners believed the textbook met their future needs. It provided extensive reading and listening/speaking practice but neglected writing skills. It also provided tasks similar to professional ones, such as answering the phone, writing memos, and reading emails. It also provided numerous viewpoints, including interviews with expert speakers and case studies of real companies. In a study conducted by Laborda (2005), where he evaluates a textbook from students' perspectives, he discovered that students preferred elements that were work-related, dealing with circumstances that might aid them in their future employment. However, some learners disagreed, believing the textbook did not adequately prepare them for their future professions. The students' varying attitudes towards the textbook, as demonstrated by student 4 and student 24, could account for this difference in perspectives:

ST 4: I liked the textbook, but it did not focus on the writing skills.

ST 24: Speaking was neglected.

The response from ST4 validated the assertion that the textbook did not handle all language levels in the same manner. Teaching business writing is crucial, as it holds equal importance to reading, speaking, and listening, necessitating the use of supplemental materials. As a result, the learning

process should not rely just on textbooks as its primary source of material. In this particular case, it is necessary to consider supplementary materials since they have the potential to be beneficial in the case where a textbook falls short in a certain area or does not address it in a manner that is satisfactory (Cunningsworth, 1995). ST24, on the other hand, expressed her opinion that the textbook did not lay enough focus on speaking skills. In my opinion, this is more of an issue with the instructor than it is with the textbook. The textbook recommended that students initiate conversations through exercises and discussion topics. It is the responsibility of the instructor to give the learners the opportunity to improve their speaking abilities.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that there is no textbook that is ideal, and there is no single textbook that will satisfy all users.

The study's results might have limitations due to their focus on a limited number of learners and their applicability solely to the 'Business Results' ESP textbook. It would be worthwhile to consider conducting larger-scale research to evaluate other ESP textbooks taught at CBS, as well as larger-scale research to evaluate ESP materials used in other colleges and institutes associated with PAAET and determine the extent to which the ESP materials assist in preparing learners professionally.

Conclusion

The research aimed to explore the learners' perspective on the Business Results textbook used in teaching the ESP module 204 at the College of Business Studies for women in Kuwait and assess its effectiveness in preparing the learners for their professions. Decisions about the future of textbooks may be based on the results of textbook evaluation (Siegel, 2021). We must evaluate textbooks for ESP programs and ELT in general to develop and improve a curriculum. This work has contributed to the area of ESP, particularly by underlining the importance of textbooks in ESP programs. It also relies on previous research showing the importance of evaluating ESP textbooks to confirm whether they are suitable for students' needs, thereby achieving program objectives.

Students differ in their perspectives regarding the textbook. There are students who found the textbook to be quite engaging and that it addressed topics that were relevant to their careers. Additionally, the textbook was visually appealing and offered students a variety of graphs, tables, and images that aided in their understanding. Additionally, the majority of students appreciated the textbook because it provided a suitable balance of the four language skills. However, a number of students expressed a variety of dislikes towards the textbook. They believed that the textbook was beyond their current level of English proficiency. Furthermore, certain students held

unfavorable opinions regarding the textbook, as they perceived that it failed to address topics that were relevant to their future requirements. Additionally, the results suggest that the textbook may be able to assist students in preparing for their future careers to a certain extent. Although it did not emphasize writing, which is a critical skill, it did emphasize the other three language skills, which are also of great importance in the performance of a variety of tasks in a wide range of professional settings.

Future studies could investigate deeper into this issue. Further research is necessary to explore the students' viewpoints and measure their level of satisfaction with the textbook. Their points of view can reveal specific data about any shortcomings associated with the textbook. Finally, one can say further studies can be conducted to observe how the textbook is used in the classrooms and to what extent it meets the learners' future needs.

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