An Evaluation of Select Moroccan ELT Textbooks: Investigating Social, Cultural, Linguistic and Pedagogical Issues

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This study is an evaluation of the content of select Moroccan English language teaching textbooks. It is organized into nine chapters. The first chapter opens with a section that provides background of the study highlighting the importance of textbooks and the indispensability of the practice of textbook evaluation to promoting the quality of textbooks. The second section discusses the purpose of the study which is to examine the extent to which the social, cultural, linguistic and pedagogical content of three second year Baccalaureate ELT textbooks currently used in Moroccan public high schools aligns with the principles of the Standards-Based Approach. The third section provides the rationale of the study and states that the importance of the study resides in the central role textbooks play in presenting, illustrating and organizing the official curriculum to be taught in the classroom and their vulnerability to various and multiple forms of discrepancies that have the potential of negatively affecting the both the process and the outcomes of the teaching and learning activities. This study therefore hopes to draw the attentions of ELT practitioners in Morocco to the viability of using textbook evaluation to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these textbooks and suggest ways in which these potential defects can be overcome. It also aims to sensitize teachers, supervisors, textbook designers and educational policy makers about the role textbook evaluation can play as a reflective practice that can boost not only the quality of future ELT textbooks, but also the teachers’ professional development. The fourth section presents four main research questions that are addressed in the study, while the last two sections deal mainly with hypotheses and organization of the study, respectively.

The second chapter contains five main sections which provide an overview of the theoretical framework of the Standards-Based Approach which officially guides the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in Morocco with specific reference to ACTFL (1996) and MNE (2007). The first section presents a summary of different approaches to textbook evaluation and justifies why SBA best suits the aim and scope of the present study. The second section offers a brief summary of the history of SBA, while the third section contains a description of the
nature and types of standards. Section four discusses the adoption and adaptation of this approach to the Moroccan ELT context, while the last section explores ways in which textbooks are generally perceived within the framework of SBA.

The third chapter offers a review of previous textbook evaluation studies that have investigated ways in which various social, cultural, linguistic and pedagogical issues are represented in ELT textbooks around the globe. The first section lists various types of textbook evaluation and the second section presents the taxonomy of different textbook evaluation frameworks as identified in the literature. The third section reviews a number of textbook evaluation studies that have explored several social issues including the quantitative and qualitative representation of gender, age, race and social class. The fourth section offers insights into various studies that have investigated cultural issues relevant to the quantitative and qualitative representation of cultural perspectives, practices and products of both foreign and local cultures in ELT textbooks. The fifth section introduces a number of studies that have examined the representation of several quantitative and qualitative linguistic issues concerning the selection, presentation, gradation, sequencing and recycling of grammar, vocabulary and language functions lessons. The sixth section overviews a number of textbook evaluation studies which have explored the extent to which ELT textbooks align with the pedagogical requirements of the SBA and ways in which they represent content standards related to the goal areas of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. The last section is an attempt to summarize previous textbook evaluation studies that have been conducted in the Moroccan context so as to identify gaps that would help situate the present study and relate to the previous literature.

The fourth chapter deals with the research design and the method adopted during the study. It is divided into four main sections, the first of which presents an overview of the textbook evaluation methods that are frequently used in the literature, while the second section provides insights into the nature, scope and use of content analysis a research method designed for textbook evaluation studies. The third section delves into the research design and data analysis procedures; it explains the processes of formulating coding categories and the procedures of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The last section presents a description of the materials used throughout the study, which consist in three second year Baccalaureate ELT textbooks: Gateway to English 2, Insights into English 2 and Ticket to English 2.

The remaining five chapters present and discuss the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the social, cultural, linguistic and pedagogical content of the three textbooks under investigation. The fifth
chapter provides insights into the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of social issues; namely, gender, age, race and social class. The main findings indicate that the three textbooks contain instances of quantitative imbalances of gender, age, race and social classes with regard to their frequency of appearance, visibility, space and firstness. The findings also reveal a number of qualitative problems related to the misrepresentation of these categories since the three textbooks contain instances of biased overgeneralizations, stereotypes and inauthentic representation related to the social roles and occupations associated with males, females, adults, teenagers, children the elderly, Asiana, Blacks, Caucasians, Latinos, lower class, middle class and upper class characters.

The sixth chapter presents findings of the analysis of the cultural content of the three textbooks. It provides results quantitative analysis of the frequency of appearance, visibility, space and firstness of different cultural perspectives, practices and products of both local and foreign cultures. It also presents findings of qualitative analysis of the cultural content contained in the three textbooks. Several quantitative discrepancies related to the imbalanced representation of both foreign and local cultures are identified alongside a number of qualitative problems concerning several instances of cultural stereotypes and misrepresentations of both foreign and local cultures.

The seventh chapter offers insights into the findings of the analysis of linguistic content of the three textbooks. It gives a detailed account of the analysis of grammar, functions and vocabulary lessons with special focus on the selection, presentation, gradation, sequencing and recycling of the content of these lessons as included in these textbooks. The chapter offers statistical counts of the activities, exercises and pictures are aim to promote presentation, practice and production stages of the lessons. The qualitative analysis reveals several problems related to issues of selection, presentation, gradation, sequencing and recycling newly introduced language items.

The eighth chapter discusses findings of the analysis of the pedagogical content of the three textbooks with regard to the presentation of contents that promote the standards included within the five goal areas of Communities, Cultures, Connections and Communities. The quantitative analysis indicates that there is an imbalanced quantitative representation of the eleven content standards and that some standards are promoted more than others. The qualitative analysis reveals that the ways in which some activities are organized and sequenced throughout the three textbooks does not allow for effective promotion of these standards despite their quantitative abundance.
The last chapter of the study offers a discussion of the results in light of the literature and in relation to the previously advanced hypotheses. In general, the findings of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the social, cultural, linguistic and pedagogical contents of the three textbooks support largely the four hypotheses claiming that these textbooks may contain several instances of social, cultural, linguistic and pedagogical bias. The discussion further maintains that the results of the present study corroborate the findings of previous studies and demonstrate the viability of textbook evaluation in identifying weaknesses within ELT textbooks. The chapter concludes with implications for educational policy-makers, textbook designers and teachers.

The general conclusion consists of three main sections, the first of which revisits the four research questions and offers an overview of ways in which each one of these questions was answered by the findings of this study and checks the extent to which the hypotheses were confirmed. The second section presents a number of implications and recommendations addressed to textbook designers, teachers and educational policy makers for the purpose of improving the quality of current and future ELT textbooks. The third section of the general conclusion provides suggestions to inform future researchers about possible research topics in the field of ELT textbook evaluation in Morocco.

It is noteworthy that textbook evaluation is a process that never ends; ELT textbooks can be evaluated as often as innovation in the field of English language teaching is taking place. ELT textbooks should continuously be investigated to identify the extent to which they align with the newest updates of language teaching approaches and methodologies. Also, researchers would be interested in examining teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards the current ELT textbooks and generate an overview of their expectations, interests and suggestions that would inform future textbook design. Researchers could also be interested in conducting micro-evaluation of tasks and activities that are presented in current textbooks to identify the extent to which the tasks and activities are capable of promoting sub-skills and competencies underlying the eleven content standards of the five goal areas. Additionally, similar studies could be conducted on other ELT textbooks used in teaching other levels to see the extent to which the findings of the present study can be generalized for all ELT textbooks used in Moroccan public high schools.