

Designing Teaching Course Textbooks for Standardized Use at University Level

*Abbar Ghalem**

*Department of English
Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts
Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret, Algeria*

ghalem.abbar@univ-tiaret.dz

Received: 09/10/2025

Accepted: 08/12/2025

published: 26/12/2025

Abstract

Teaching materials, particularly course textbooks, play a crucial role in language learning. Researchers have noted that providing the same textbooks to students across different classes allows teachers at various universities to deliver consistent instruction and assessments. Additionally, these pre-designed syllabi can outline what students are expected to achieve and what they will encounter next. By creating tailored course textbooks for EFL university students, educators can standardize both teaching and evaluation processes. This study emphasizes the advantages of using course textbooks and advocates for their adoption across all universities. It operates on the premise that textbooks are a widely favored resource in English language curricula. Consequently, developing specialized course textbooks for EFL university students can streamline the learning experience and ensure high-quality instruction.

Keywords: Course textbooks. ELT, EFL students, syllabus, academic curriculum

* Corresponding author: Abbar Ghalem

1.Introduction:

In universities across Algeria, EFL teachers are granted full autonomy to develop their own instructional materials. While these materials may align with the course learning objectives, their content and delivery often vary significantly from one teacher to another. As a result, the same course can be taught in entirely different ways depending on the instructor and teaching context. This inconsistency arises because each teacher designs their course based on their personal interpretation of the intended objectives. In this scenario, the teacher is seen as the primary source of information, while students are relegated to passively absorbing the pre-prepared content provided by their instructors.

On the other hand, course textbooks hold considerable value and influence. They offer teachers structured guidance on syllabi, teaching methods, and the content to be covered. Typically authored by one or more experienced teachers or subject matter experts, textbooks are recognized as one of the most essential classroom resources. They not only provide core content but also supplement teaching with additional materials, ideas, and activities that can be utilized throughout the academic year. Therefore, integrating a course textbook as a key resource alongside other teaching materials could streamline instruction and create a more standardized and cohesive learning experience.

2. Teacher-made instructional materials

Selecting appropriate instructional materials for classroom use, particularly at the college level, is often seen as a challenging endeavor. Despite this, there has been little to no formal evaluation of teacher-created courses. According to Angell, Du Bravac, and Gonglewski (2008), the materials teachers choose for their classrooms frequently shape the syllabi and, in some cases, the entire language program. There are several reasons why English instructors opt to use their own custom-designed courses. Sometimes, their choices are influenced by personal beliefs about what teaching materials should include. Other factors might include the visual appeal of the materials, the ease of preparation, and how well the activities align with the class schedule.

As Crawford (1994) points out, these materials are “teaching resources intentionally created by the teacher or collaboratively with students to foster meaningful teaching and learning in the classroom.” However, such materials can sometimes reflect conflicting instructional approaches to the teaching and learning process. They are often subjective, shaped by the teacher’s interpretation of the learning objectives. As a result, the same course can be taught in vastly different ways by different instructors across various universities.

Maher (1986) argues that teacher-made courses are primarily suited for teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners. He emphasizes that “all forms of ESP should be customized to meet the specific purposes and needs of the learners.” Similarly, Allwright (1982) observes that these materials tend to be “inflexible and often mirror the pedagogical, psychological, and linguistic preferences and biases of their creators.”

3. Benefits of Course Textbooks in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Course textbooks serve as fundamental teaching tools and should be selected based on their educational value and alignment with program objectives. They hold a crucial role in English language instruction, making them a highly visible element of EFL programs. Research on their role in teaching has revealed several important benefits.

3.1. Course textbooks are credible teaching resources

Course textbooks are valuable teaching tools, offering a selection of materials and activities to support effective learning. They are often viewed as credible sources since they are written by experts and provide reliable information. In addition to guiding students, textbooks also serve as a support system for EFL teachers by offering structured instructions, clear explanations, and practical guidance. Richards (1993) emphasizes the importance of textbooks from a resource-based perspective. He pointed out that textbooks should be seen as sourcebooks rather than rigid course books. In his view, their purpose is to support and enhance teaching rather than limit it. However, for textbooks to serve as effective resources for creative instruction, teachers must develop the ability to evaluate and adapt published materials (Richards, 1993, p. 490).

Moreover, Robinson (1991) and Nunan (1991) emphasize that instructional materials play a vital role in language learning. This explains why discussions about their importance are commonly found in nearly all books on course design. According to Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) and Nonaka (2001), materials not only offer learners a diverse and engaging source of information but also contribute to increasing their motivation, ultimately supporting the learning process.

3.2. Course textbooks contribute to the uniformity of teaching and evaluation.

Course textbooks are often considered the "visible heart" of any English Language Teaching (ELT) program. Researchers have identified several benefits of using textbooks. For instance, Richards (2005) explains that they help standardize both instruction and assessment, ensuring that students across different classes receive the same material and are evaluated in a consistent manner. Additionally, many teachers recognize the advantages of structuring the

curriculum around a series of ESP course books, as they provide a clear roadmap of learning objectives and expectations. Crawford (1994) also emphasizes the significance of textbooks, highlighting their role in facilitating effective teaching and learning. According to the course textbooks are better use to allow:

a-**Negotiation:** A textbook provides a basis for discussion and interaction, allowing students and teachers to engage with the material in meaningful ways.

b-**Accountability:** It serves as a transparent record of classroom activities, ensuring that all stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administrators, can track what is being taught and learned.

3.3. Course textbooks support and enhance the achievement of learning objectives

Course textbooks are designed with clearly defined learning objectives, outlining what students are expected to achieve and what they will encounter next. According to Kayapinar (2009), these textbooks serve as ready-made syllabi that present a well-structured and balanced selection of language content, making them easy for both teachers and students to follow. As teachers progress through each unit, there is consistency in topics and genres across the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This structured approach is particularly beneficial for less experienced teachers, as the pre-designed activities and lessons simplify lesson planning. Additionally, many EFL textbooks include achievement tests for each unit and a teacher's manual, providing further support for effective instruction.

In modern classrooms, textbooks remain a fundamental part of most language programs. Riazi (2003) emphasized that, after teachers, textbooks are the most significant element in second and foreign language learning environments. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) further noted that in some EFL contexts, where English is not widely spoken outside the classroom, course textbooks become the primary source of language exposure. They provide essential language input and structured practice, helping learners develop the skills they need. In certain cases, textbooks serve as a supplementary resource to teacher instruction, offering additional support in the ESL learning process. For many educators, they form the foundation of lesson content, ensuring a balanced focus on different language skills and guiding the types of language practice students engage in during class. Ultimately, textbooks shape the structure and nature of teaching and learning in language classrooms.

In the same vein, Ansary and Babayi (2002) highlighted several key reasons for using textbooks in language learning:

- a) Textbooks provide a structured framework that helps organize and pace the curriculum.
- b) Students often associate textbooks with purpose and direction in their learning.

- c) Without a textbook, learners may feel that their education is not being taken seriously.
- d) In many cases, textbooks function as the syllabus, outlining the course structure.
- e) They offer pre-designed teaching materials and learning activities, reducing preparation time for teachers.
- f) Textbooks are a cost-effective way to supply learning resources.
- g) Students without textbooks may struggle to stay engaged and may become overly reliant on teachers.
- h) Most importantly, for inexperienced teachers, textbooks offer a sense of security, clear guidance, and instructional support.

All these factors contribute to the widespread use of course textbooks in English language curricula. Additionally, because textbooks undergo rigorous testing before being published, they provide students with a sense of credibility and reliability. Moreover, as Sheldon (1988) points out, students often anticipate using a textbook as part of their learning experience.

4. Assessing the effectiveness of EFL course textbooks

It is essential to recognize that no textbook is flawless, which is why teachers should have the flexibility to incorporate additional materials that best suit their unique teaching environment and student needs. For a course textbook to be truly effective, it should be both challenging and attainable, introducing fresh concepts while remaining relevant to students' prior knowledge and experiences. Additionally, it should promote creativity, engagement, and enjoyment in the learning process.

Instead of criticizing EFL teachers for strictly adhering to a specific textbook, Wright (1992) suggests that educators should be equipped with clear guidelines to help them choose course books that align with their teaching requirements. As a result, selecting the right textbook becomes one of the most crucial decisions a teacher can make. Nunan (1991) further emphasizes that using a structured evaluation process can simplify textbook selection, ensuring that the chosen materials align with students' needs and interests while also supporting the institution's educational philosophy on language learning (1991, p. 32).

When developing an EFL course textbook, the primary focus should be on analyzing course objectives. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest, Kipling's six "honest serving men" — What, Why, When, How, Where, and Who — can serve as a guide in this process.

Other key considerations include setting realistic goals, selecting appropriate materials, and establishing methods for assessment and evaluation.

Although numerous frameworks exist for evaluating teaching materials, such structured approaches are less common in the EFL field. This raises the question of where to find reliable guidance for making well-informed decisions in designing effective textbooks. Various scholars have proposed different strategies to help course designers adopt a more systematic and objective approach. Many have developed evaluation checklists based on broadly applicable criteria. These detailed checklists employ various methods to assess how effectively a textbook meets the intended learning objectives.

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of checklist-based approaches in evaluating course textbooks, as well as to facilitate comparison, two specific models are presented: Allen Tucker's (1975) system for evaluating beginner-level EFL/ESL textbooks and Penny Ur's (1996) criteria for EFL/ESL course book assessment, introduced 21 years later.

Furthermore, Tucker (1975) presents a three-part evaluation system for assessing course textbooks:

1. A set of criteria designed to align with fundamental linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical principles (p. 355).
2. A rating system to assess the textbook's strengths and weaknesses.
3. A visual representation, such as a chart or graph, that compares the evaluator's assessment of the textbook against an ideal model, making it easier to interpret the evaluation results at a glance.

The challenges associated with textbooks have been widely discussed by various researchers. Tomlinson (2005) suggests that evaluating teaching materials not only helps us understand how they function but also contributes to both language acquisition theory and teaching methodologies. Additionally, he views materials evaluation as a form of action research that can enhance instructional practices.

Selecting an EFL course textbook involves making decisions about what to teach, how to teach it, and who will deliver the instruction. To address these concerns, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) developed a framework designed to evaluate textbooks comprehensively, regardless of how they are implemented in the classroom. This framework takes an in-depth approach by analyzing individual activities and their relationship to key pedagogical elements.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also provide a model for assessing students' language needs, drawing from contemporary research in second language (L2) instruction and general textbook evaluation. Their framework gathers data on various factors, including the purpose of the course, students' learning preferences, available resources, learner characteristics, and the context in which the English course will be conducted.

Moreover, evaluating course textbooks requires analyzing both subjective needs (material requirements) and objective solutions (content and structure). Given their central role in the teaching and learning process, textbooks should be carefully assessed based on two key aspects: strengths and opportunities.

.41. Strengths of Course Textbooks

Textbooks play a significant role in fostering communicative competence. In today's professional world, language proficiency, communication skills, and business-related abilities are increasingly viewed as essential, alongside academic qualifications. However, linguistic competence alone is not sufficient—it must be integrated with sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence to ensure effective communication in real-world contexts.

Additionally, textbooks offer flexibility. Some course books are designed to be adaptable, allowing educators to modify content based on learners' proficiency levels and specific teaching objectives. Tomlinson (2005) highlights this adaptability, stating that “textbooks provide a structure for the management of the lesson as a social interaction and a basis for negotiation between all the relevant parties.” This structured approach ensures consistency in teaching while also allowing room for customization to meet diverse learning needs.

4.2. Opportunities provided by course textbooks

Although often seen as just a basic necessity, course textbooks are actually a valuable and organized resource that offers many chances for growth beyond merely passing a test. When used wisely, they can serve as a strong asset for in-depth learning and skill enhancement. Below is a summary of the main opportunities that course textbooks provide, organized for better understanding.

4.2.1. The Design Plan for Understanding

Often seen as just a requirement, the academic textbook actually has a much deeper role: it acts as the foundational plan for a field of study. Unlike the scattered information you might find through casual research, a textbook offers a well-structured way to learn. It doesn't just

throw facts at you; it tells a story, leading the learner from basic ideas to more complex ones in a clear and organized manner.

This organized approach is one of the textbook's biggest advantages. It gives students build a clear understanding of the subject. Before diving into complicated theories, students first get a grip on the basic elements that support them. This step-by-step method helps avoid the knowledge gaps and confusion that can happen when learning from random sources. So, the textbook serves as a dedicated guide, carefully constructing a student's understanding from the ground up, making sure that every new idea is securely linked to a strong foundation of previous knowledge.

Additionally, this plan is made up of reliable and expert-reviewed content. In a time when there's so much information out there, the textbook is like a well-organized collection of agreed-upon knowledge. Its material usually goes through strict reviews by specialists, ensuring a level of trustworthiness that's hard to find online. This lets learners dive into the material with confidence, allowing them to focus on understanding rather than worrying about whether the information is accurate.

4.2.2. Developing Intellectual Skills

More than just a collection of facts, a textbook serves as a complex training ground for the mind. Its main role goes beyond simply providing information; it focuses on developing the crucial intellectual skills needed for success in both school and future careers. Engaging thoroughly with a textbook is an active endeavor that exercises the brain in critical thinking, synthesis, and independent exploration.

Reading any page from a textbook is like a workout for your brain. It requires the reader to pinpoint key arguments, assess supporting evidence, and follow detailed lines of reasoning. This is very different from just passively taking in information; it creates an active conversation between the reader and the content. This practice sharpens the ability to break down complicated issues and evaluate the truth of various claims—a skill that is essential in any job.

Additionally, textbooks demonstrate and teach the skill of synthesis. A single chapter often condenses years of research and various scholarly viewpoints into a clear and understandable format. By seeing how experts connect different pieces of information, students learn to combine data from multiple sources to create a unified understanding. This skill to grasp the bigger picture and link ideas is what defines true expertise. Thus, a textbook is not merely a source of information but a masterclass in how knowledge is structured and conveyed within a field.

4.2.3. Active Engagement and Self-Assessment

A modern textbook acts like an interactive toolkit, meant not just to teach but also to help with practice and self-evaluation. It's filled with teaching features that change reading from a passive task into an exciting, hands-on learning experience. These tools give students the power to take charge of their own educational path.

One of the most important features is the clearly defined learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter. These objectives create a strategic guide, helping learners focus on the most important concepts. After each chapter, brief summaries provide a great way to solidify knowledge, allowing students to reinforce the key ideas and remember them for the long haul. This "preview and review" cycle makes study time more efficient and effective.

The best chance for active learning is found in the resources at the end of each chapter. Practice problems, review questions, and case studies act like a practical workshop. They push students to use theoretical knowledge in real-life situations, connecting abstract ideas to real-world applications. Working through these exercises is a form of low-pressure self-assessment, helping learners spot their weaknesses, measure their understanding, and build confidence before formal tests. This ongoing process of doing, checking, and improving is key to mastering the material.

4.2.4. A Gateway to In-Depth Exploration

While thorough, a well-designed textbook also acknowledges that it serves as a starting point rather than the ultimate goal. It acts as a curated gateway, opening up a broader universe of scholarship and inquiry for those whose curiosity is ignited. It guides students on how to navigate the wider academic landscape.

The most useful tool for this exploration is often the bibliography or "recommended reading" section. This is a carefully selected list of the most important books, journal articles, and primary sources in the field. For a student working on a research paper or simply wanting to dive deeper into an interesting topic, this bibliography is a priceless treasure map, saving countless hours of aimless searching and directing them straight to authoritative and relevant works.

Moreover, many textbooks include primary source materials—like historical documents, legal opinions, or literary excerpts—right within their pages. This gives learners a direct, unfiltered experience with the original materials that scholars study. It simplifies the research process and encourages students to form their own interpretations, promoting a more mature and independent connection with the subject matter. In this way, the textbook nurtures the instincts of a researcher.

4.2.5. Encouraging Independent and Lifelong Learning

The main benefit of a course textbook is that it helps develop intellectual independence. It serves as a tool that enables people to become self-directed learners for life. The skills and habits gained from using textbooks wisely can be applied to any new area one wants to learn, even after the course is over.

A textbook is accessible whenever needed, letting students look over a topic before class, review it afterward at their own speed, or dive into a related subject that interests them. This kind of flexibility promotes a feeling of control over one's education. Students are no longer just relying on the teacher for information; they can find it on their own, which boosts their confidence and independence.

The ways to interact with a textbook—like the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) method—teach a structured way to handle complicated information. This skill is probably the most important lesson learned. By figuring out how to learn from a well-organized text, a person prepares themselves to face new challenges, update their skills in a changing job market, and seek knowledge for personal growth throughout their life. Thus, the textbook is a lasting gift: it offers not just the knowledge needed for the current course but also the tools for a lifetime of intellectual development.

5. Conclusion:

To conclude with, unlike teacher-created materials, which are often influenced by personal interpretations of learning objectives, course textbooks are typically developed by experts and carefully reviewed to standardize the teaching and learning process. These textbooks are designed to meet students' needs while aligning with instructional goals, ensuring consistency and coherence in education.

Moreover, standardized teaching materials help maintain the quality of instruction and unify learning objectives across universities. Given these benefits, there is an urgent need to develop and implement uniform textbooks for all university courses throughout Algeria, promoting a cohesive and structured educational framework.

6 List of references:

- Allwright, R. (1982). What do we want teaching materials for? *ELT Journal*, 36(1), 8-12.
- Angell, J., DuBravac, S., & Gonglewski, M. (2008). Thinking globally, acting locally: Selecting textbooks for college-level language programs. *Foreign Language Annals*, 41, 562–572.

- Ansary, H., & Babayi, E. (2002). Universal characteristics of EFL/ESL textbooks: A step towards systematic textbook evaluation. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 8(2).
- Crawford, J. (1994). The role of materials in the language classroom: Finding the balance. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 80-91). Cambridge University Press.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kayapinar, U. (2009). Coursebook evaluations by English teachers. *Inonu University Journal of the Faculty of Education*, 10(1), 69-78.
- Maher, J. (1986). The development of English as the international language of medicine. *Applied Linguistics*, 7, 206-218.
- Nonaka, T. (2001). The importance of authentic language in SLA. Retrieved April 4, 2017, from <http://members.aol.com/mrNonaka/index.htm>.
- Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. Prentice Hall.
- Riazi, A. M. (2003). What do textbook evaluation schemes tell us? A study of the textbook evaluation schemes of three decades. *Shiraz University Journal*.
- Richards, L. (1993). What culture? Which culture? *ELT Journal*, 46, 39-49.
- Richards, J. C. (2005). The role of textbooks in a language program. Retrieved November 2007, from [website link if available].
- Robinson, P. (1991). *ESP today: A practitioner's guide*. Prentice Hall.
- Sheldon, L. E. (1988). Evaluating ELT textbooks and materials. *ELT Journal*, 42(4), 237-246.
- Tomlinson, B. (2005). The future for ELT materials in Asia. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 2(2), 5-13.
- Tucker, C. A. (1975). Evaluating beginning textbooks. *English Teaching Forum*, 13, 355-361.
- Ur, P. (1991). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wright, C. (1992). The benefits of ESP. *Cambridge Language Consultations*. Retrieved September 22, 2009.