

Measuring the Value of the Algerian Primary School Textbooks ‘My Book of English’ through the Lens of Teachers and Their Approach and Abilities in Selecting and Evaluating E-Materials as Alternatives

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ABSTRACT: *The scenario of EFL teaching and learning may not be impressive if the textbook or other available teaching materials do not fit the context in which they are used. In this digital era, the textbook is not widely used as teachers find a plethora of alternatives on the web that assist in dealing with the imperfection of the textbook. However, evaluation of the textbook or any teaching e-materials is still vital to approach the needs of the teaching-learning process. This mixed-method study shed light on teachers’ analysis and evaluation of the textbook as well as their abilities to select and evaluate e-materials. Online questionnaires were administered to 25 teachers to analyze and evaluate ‘My Book of English’, and then online semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine teachers to explore how they select and evaluate e-materials. Data collection of the questionnaire was analyzed through descriptive statistics and the qualitative data of the interviews was analyzed using Nvivo 11 software. The findings reveal that primary school textbooks ‘My Book of English’ have low value and effect on the sample of the study. Additionally, EFL teachers use different criteria to select e-materials that suit their classrooms and the selected e-materials are also subjected to evaluation. However, it is recommended to conduct further studies that delve into teachers’ evaluation of teaching-learning materials and e-materials.*

KEYWORDS: EFL, Evaluation of the textbook, Primary school textbooks ‘My Book of English’, Teaching e-materials, Teaching materials.

Introduction

Teaching materials are one of the cornerstones in the teaching-learning process. In ELT classrooms, materials provide a source of language input and content to be taught. According to Tomlinson (2013), materials can be categorized into linguistic, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. In other words, they can be text, representations, or realia. Advancements in technology and the digitization of education enable teachers and students to access a plethora of materials that may contribute to English language learning and acquisition outside or within classroom borders. All over the world, the incorporating of technology into education is a thorny issue. In 2022, the Algerian Ministry of Education took the initiative to equip some primary schools with IT tools like digital boards and textbooks. However, this initiative is still in its infancy due to a set of challenges such as the digital divide that maintains the print textbook as the most preferable instructional material for EFL classrooms. Yet, it is arguable that there is no ideal textbook that can meet all the needs of all the actors in EFL contexts. As a result, the digital landscape is a pivotal alternative that may assist teachers in supporting or supplementing the print textbook and their teaching practices with appropriate e-materials. Nevertheless, teachers' judgments of the inappropriateness of certain content, for example, in the textbook or selection decisions of a given e-material should be done through thorough and critical evaluation procedures (Rahmat et al., 2016). This study aims to explore EFL teachers' analysis and evaluation of the value and effect of the primary school textbooks 'My Book of English', and delve into their abilities in selecting and evaluating the appropriateness of e-materials for teaching and learning. These goals lead to arise the following questions;

How do EFL teachers analyze and evaluate the value and effect of the primary school textbooks 'My Book of English'?

How do primary school teachers select and evaluate e-materials?

ELT Materials: Print Textbooks

EFL textbooks are published teaching and learning materials that are developed to enhance students' linguistic and communicative competence. They are a syllabus that mirrors the aim and the objectives of the curriculum, resources for materials presentation, activities, and ideas. They are also

considered as support especially for novice teachers (Cunningsworth, 1997, as cited in Richards, 2001). However, many scholars such as Richards (2001), McDonough et al. (2013), and Gholampour et al. (2023) argued that there is no ideal textbook that can satisfy the needs of all contexts. Additionally, the teaching-learning process itself is dynamic and entails a continuous evaluation that increases the probability of matching the content to be taught to the needs of the context in which it is taught.

Digitization: e-Materials

E-materials refer to all teaching and learning materials that are digital in nature. That is, they are in electronic formats such as digital textbooks, audio-visual, and online resources, and necessitate access through the utilization of electronic devices like smartphones and computers. E-materials are at the fingertips of teachers and students, but a large amount of the formers make the task of selection and adoption overwhelming (Allehyani, Burnapp & Wilson, 2017; as cited in Işık, 2018). R. Hall, L. Atkins, and J. Fraser (2014), reported by Sadaf (2017), suggest that digital-age teachers must critically evaluate the purpose, timing, and method of employing digital tools in their teaching. In the same vein, Chapelle and Hagelheimer (2004); as cited in Li (2017) urge teachers should know how to adopt e-materials. Thus, it is necessary to subject digital materials to a rigorous procedure of evaluation before being selected.

From Analysis to Evaluation

Any teaching and learning material is initially developed to address the major needs of a large spectrum of students with a variety of specific needs and interests. Given that, teachers' evaluation plays a pivotal role in approaching the uniqueness of the target users. In the ELT context, evaluation is "the process of measuring the value and effectiveness of learning materials" (Richards and Schmidt, 2002, p.354). This process essentially gauges the tangible effect of specific materials on their target users (Tomlinson, 2013). Evaluation goes through systematic steps of collecting data, interpretation, and then making judgments about the effect and the fitness of the material under evaluation to the contextual circumstances in which it would be used (Richards, 2014). Namely, before

teachers judge the value and the probable effect of a given material on their users, they need first to examine the material itself, and then the information gathered through a detailed analysis is the database to be interpreted and evaluated by teachers (Tomlinson, 2013). Thus, analysis is a mandatory step that assists teachers in making decisions about the relevance and appropriateness of any teaching and learning materials.

Developing Criteria of Evaluation

Decisions about the effectiveness of teaching-learning materials or e-materials have to be informed by sound principles. Tomlinson (2013) and Işık (2018) opine that for effective and reliable evaluation to occur, teachers should develop a set of evaluation criteria that take into account the teachers' principles and the situational contexts of teaching and learning. In parallel, Li (2017) believes that teachers who adopt digital resources should also develop principled frameworks that are aligned with their classrooms. Therefore, an effective evaluation is based on the teachers' ability to set the appropriate criteria for evaluation (McDonough et al., 2013). Moreover, teachers' use of e-materials requires other abilities that fall under the umbrella term digital literacy like navigating the web, evaluating resources and their suitability to the needs, interests, and styles of their learners. This implies that the criteria of evaluation are not set in stone, but they differ from one context to another (Gholampour et al., 2023). However, scholars' contributions to the field of materials development could provide methods, common ground layout and criteria of evaluation that can be adapted according to the specificity of the teaching-learning contexts. One of these methods is checklists which are considered structured frameworks for evaluating the global features of textbooks. The best-known checklists are Cunningsworth's checklist (1984, 1995) and Sheldon's (1988).

Methodology

This research is a mixed-method study that opted for two investigation tools; a checklist questionnaire and interviews. First, the checklist questionnaire was developed based on the above-mentioned checklists of textbook evaluation. The questionnaire was composed of three sections; the first one included questions about the respondents' profile, and the second

section involved a set of criteria (physical appearance, layout and design, teachability, language content, skills, topics, illustrations, activities, and supporting materials), to enable teachers to analyze the textbook and pave the way to the third section which is about the overall evaluation of the primary school textbooks 'My Book of English'. Following the flow of Tomlinson's beliefs (2013), the selection of the sample was because the evaluation of the effect of textbooks has to be by the target users, and since primary school pupils are not aware enough, the convenient choice is their teachers. Second, online semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain more insights into EFL teachers' selection and evaluation of e-materials.

Questionnaires' Results

General Information

The participants in this research are EFL teachers in Algerian primary schools, (48%) have bachelor's degrees while (44%) are master's graduates (Figure 1).

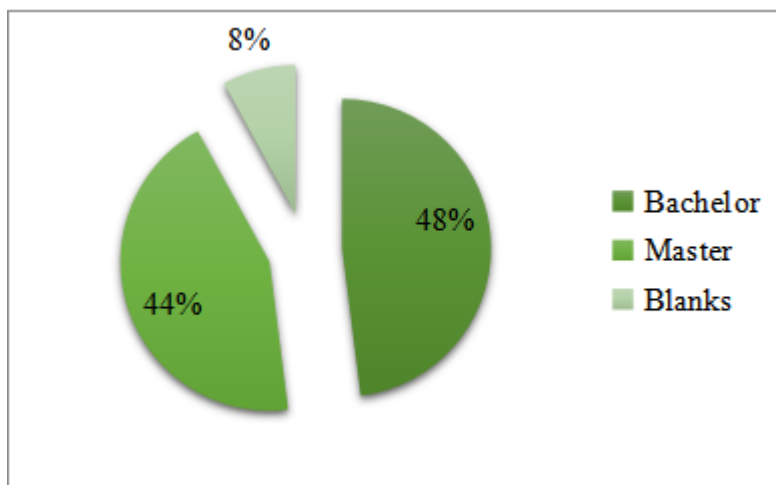


Figure 1. The respondents' profile

Most of the participants (n=11 out of 25) are novice teachers as shown in (Figure 2), but the frequency of teachers whose experience of teaching is more than two years is also significant (n=9).

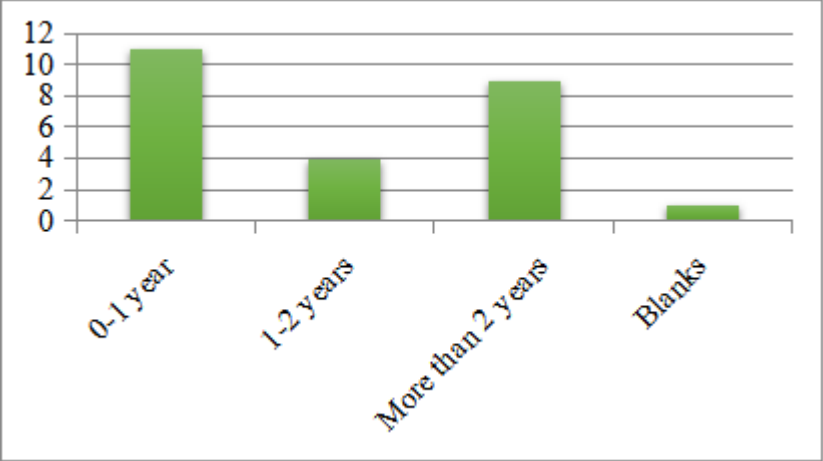


Figure 2. The respondents’ experience of teaching

The frequency of the teacher respondents who teach pupils of third and fourth-year primary school is high (n=18), yet the number of teachers who teach only third or fourth-year primary school pupils is equal (n=6) (Figure 3).

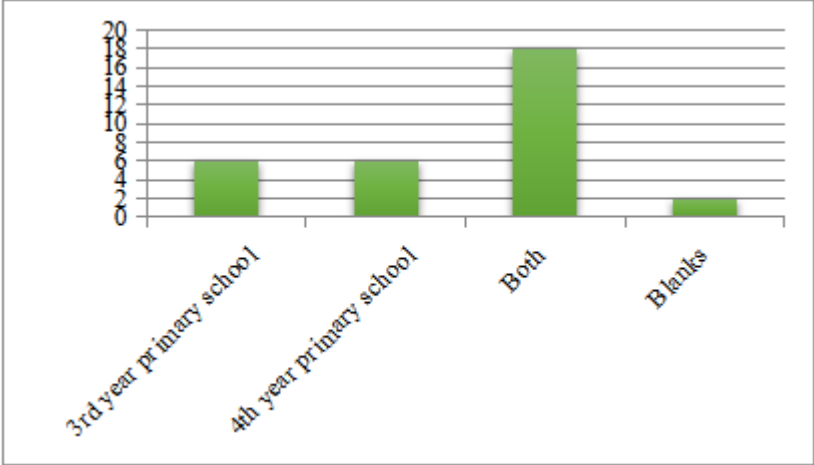


Figure 3. The levels the respondents teach

Textbook Analysis

Based on the analysis criteria provided in the checklist questionnaire, the respondents’ analysis of the physical appearance of the primary school textbooks indicates that ‘My Book of English’ have the necessary elements or criteria that make them physically quite acceptable for users. (Table 1) reveals that (48%) of the respondents agree that the cover page design is attractive and informative. Besides (32%) agree that the textbooks’ paper quality is solid and the font size and type are adequate.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
The cover page design is attractive and informative.	1(4%)	3(12%)	5(20%)	12(48%)	2(8%)	2(8%)
The quality of the textbook paper is solid and adequate for learning use.	0(0%)	2(8%)	6(28%)	8(32%)	6(24%)	2(8%)
The font size is suitable for 3rd year primary pupils (clear, easy to read).	1(4%)	3(12%)	5(20%)	8(32%)	5(20%)	3(12%)
The font type is suitable for	1(4%)	4(16%)	4(16%)	8(32%)	5(20%)	3(12%)

3rd year primary school pupils.						
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Table 1. The respondents’ analysis of the textbooks’ physical appearance.
Note. N=25

There is a discrepancy in the teachers’ analysis of ‘My Book of English’ layout and design. Although most of them agree on the existence of the criteria that make the textbook organized and well-designed, the frequency and percentage of the respondents are low. For example, only (28%) of the respondents agree that the colours of the textbooks are appealing and there is cohesion between units and sequences (Table 2).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
The colours of the textbook are appealing.	3(12%)	3(12%)	6(24%)	7(28%)	3(12%)	3(12%)
There are good pictures, drawing, and graphs in the textbook.	3(12%)	2(8%)	4(16%)	8(32%)	6(24%)	2(8%)
There is white space (pages are not too full and crowded).	4(16%)	3(12%)	4(16%)	9(36%)	2(8%)	3(12%)

There are unnecessary details in the textbook.	0(0%)	3(12%)	7(28%)	6(24%)	5(20%)	4(16%)
The headings are appropriately selected and sequenced.	4(16%)	3(12%)	8(32%)	6(24%)	2(8%)	2(8%)
There is cohesion between units and sequences.	5(20%)	2(8%)	6(24%)	7(28%)	2(8%)	3(12%)
The units of the textbook help in achieving the aims and objectives of the curriculum.	3(12%)	4(16%)	5(20%)	10(40%)	1(4%)	2(8%)

Table 2. The respondents’ analysis of the textbooks’ layout and design.
Note. N=25

Table 3 includes the analysis results of the teachability criteria of the primary school textbooks. 10 out of 25 teachers responded the textbook supports good teaching practices, while only five teachers answered that it is helpful in terms of lesson preparation and presentation.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
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	e					
The textbook support good teaching practices.	2(8%)	1(4%)	5(20%)	10(40%)	3(12%)	4(16%)
the textbook helps in minimizing teachers' preparation in terms of materials for lesson presentation, practice, etc.	7(28%)	2(8%)	6(24%)	5(20%)	1(4%)	4(16%)
The textbook takes into consideration the different abilities and styles of learners.	1(4%)	6(24%)	4(16%)	7(28%)	3(12%)	4(16%)

Table 3. The respondents’ analysis of the teachability criteria. Note.
N=25

Analysis of the teachers’ responses to the language and content criteria is presented in Table 4. From 8 to 12 out of 25 agreed upon the accuracy of the language used, grammar, and vocabulary, and the contextualization of the language presented. However, Table 5 indicates that there is a discrepancy in teachers’ responses with regard to the coverage of the four skills.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
The language used is accurate.	1(4%)	3(12%)	4(16%)	10(40%)	2(8%)	5(20%)
The textbook cover grammar items adequate for the 3rd year primary school level.	0(0%)	3(12%)	6(24%)	10(40%)	1(4%)	5(20%)
The textbook include materials for vocabulary and pronunciation presentation.	1(4%)	4(16%)	8(32%)	7(28%)	0(0%)	5(20%)
The materials for vocabulary presentation are adequate in term of the amount and complexity.	2(8%)	2(8%)	5(20%)	10(40%)	1(4%)	5(20%)
The	1(	0(	9	1	0(	5

materials include vocabulary load.	4%)	0%)	(36%)	0(40%)	0%)	(20%)
The vocabulary items are repeated for reinforcement.	0(0%)	3(12%)	4(16%)	12(48%)	1(4%)	5(20%)
Grammar and vocabulary items are contextualized and introduced in meaningful situations.	1(4%)	2(8%)	5(20%)	8(32%)	4(16%)	5(20%)

Table 4. The respondents’ analysis of the textbooks Language Content.
Note. N=25

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
The four skills of the language are equally covered.	1(4%)	2(8%)	7(28%)	7(28%)	4(16%)	4(16%)
The textbook contain sufficient materials for reading.	4(16%)	5(20%)	6(24%)	5(20%)	1(4%)	4(16%)

Table 5. The respondents’ analysis of the skills covered in the textbooks.
Note. N=25

Primary school textbooks include some interesting and up-to-date topics and illustrations (Table 6, 7). (44%) of the respondents agreed that there is a variety in the topics covered and (36%) of teachers said that the illustrations used promote the meaningfulness of the context.

	S trongly disagre e	D isagree	N eutral	A gree	S trongly agree	B lanks
The topics are interesting for pupils.	2 (8%)	1(4%)	5 (20%)	9(36%)	4 (16%)	4 (16%)
The topics are up- to date.	1 (4%)	5(20%)	4 (16%)	9(36%)	2 (8%)	4 (16%)
The topics are varied.	1 (4%)	0(0%)	7 (28%)	11(44%)	2 (8%)	4 (16%)

Table 6. The teachers’ analysis of the textbooks’ topics. Note. N=25

	St rongly	D isagree	N eutral	A gree	St rongly	B lanks
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	disagree				agree	
The illustrations are varied and attractive.	2(8%)	3(12%)	4(16%)	8(32%)	3(12%)	5(20%)
The illustrations are contributing to the meaningfulness of the context.	1(4%)	4(16%)	4(16%)	9(36%)	2(8%)	5(20%)

Table 7. The teachers’ analysis of the textbooks’ illustrations. Note. N=25

The textbooks involve learning activities that are acceptable for the participants in this study (Table 7).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
The textbook include activities to check comprehension and application.	1(4%)	1(4%)	6(24%)	9(36%)	3(12%)	5(20%)
The textbook include activities which evoke higher order thinking.	2(8%)	3(12%)	7(28%)	6(24%)	2(8%)	5(20%)

The activities are varied and with enough amount.	2 (8%)	3 (12%)	7 (28%)	8 (32%)	0 (0%)	5 (20%)
The instructions in the textbook are clear.	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	12 (48%)	2 (8%)	5 (20%)
The textbook activities promote creative, original production, and real life communication.	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	3 (12%)	5 (20%)

Table 7. The analysis of the activities provided in the textbooks. Note.
N=25

(48%) answered the instructions in the textbooks are clear, and (36%) said that the textbooks include activities to check comprehension and application. However, there was no agreement among the respondents about the existence of materials that support the textbooks like teachers’ guides (Table 8).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Blank
There are audio or CD ROMs with the textbook.	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	3 (12%)	6 (24%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)
There is a teachers' book which	2 (8%)	5 (20%)	5 (20%)	5 (20%)	2 (8%)	6 (24%)

provide guidance and techniques.						
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Table 8. The textbooks’ supporting materials. Note. N=25

The descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation) of the respondents’ evaluation of the primary school textbooks ‘My Book of English’ is negative (Table 9). The mean rating of 2 (out of 5) is marked in all the evaluative statements. The mean rating of 2.55 and 2.43 in the tenth and eleventh statements indicates that there is a low effect of the third-year textbook on the fourth-year pupils’ knowledge and skills of the English language. Besides, a mean rating of 2.68 is marked in the last statement, this implies that teachers are not satisfied with the textbooks despite the contradictions in the twelfth statement; the mean rating of 2.48 about the necessity to submit the textbooks to adaptations, but the standard deviation is 1.4 so there is no agreement about this statement.

	ean	M	t. Dev.	S
1. The textbook is attractive.	38	2.	.86	0
2. The textbook is organized.	24	2.	.04	1
3. The textbook is useful.	43	2.	.12	1
4. The textbook is informative about the English language.	38	2.	.16	1
5. The textbook is practical in terms of application and communication.	24	2.	.04	1
6. The topics are interesting for pupils.	24	2.	.14	1
7. The activities are engaging.	55	2.	.76	0
8. The illustrations are enhancing the grasp of the content.	48	2.	.98	0
9. The textbook supports good teaching and		2.		1

learning.	48	.03
10. There is a change in the 4th year pupils' knowledge of the English language.	2. 55	1 .19
11. There is a change in the 4th year pupils' skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening).	2. 43	1 .25
12. The textbook need to be submitted to adaptations.	2. 48	1 .4
13. Teachers depend on the textbook to prepare their lessons.	2. 15	0 .93
14. Teachers are satisfied about the textbook.	2. 68	1 .17

Table 9. The respondents’ evaluation of the textbooks. Notes.

1 Strongly disagree; 2 Disagree; 3 Uncertain; 4 Agree; 5 Strongly agree

Interviews’ Results

Nine EFL primary school teachers were interviewed online using semi-structured questions through ‘Facebook groups’ that were created for EFL primary school teachers to share knowledge and collaborate and they facilitate the researcher to reach out to the abovementioned sample. The participants’ responses were analyzed using Nvivo 11 software to extract the themes and subthemes relevant to the research question ‘How do primary school teachers select and evaluate e-materials?’

1. Teachers’ Use of the Textbook

All the interviewees (100%) answered that they either sometimes, rarely, or do not use the textbook in the classroom because it is not useful, and it does not meet their students’ needs. P2 said that: “it is static and unanimated”, as a result, they opt for alternatives.

2. Teachers’ Use of Alternatives

This category is divided into two themes with further subthemes;

2.1 Teachers Design their Teaching Materials

The interviewees said that they usually create their teaching materials regarding activities and tasks to fit their students’ level, and one of the participants created and published her textbook for the primary school level.

2.2 Teachers Search on the Web for Teaching Materials

The interviewees believed that the web offers a large number of resources with good quality that can be used in their classrooms like flashcards and audio-visuals. These materials are accessible and promote a joyful and entertaining learning environment.

2.2.1 Criteria for Selecting E-Materials

7 out of 9 interviewees showed their awareness in deliberately searching e-materials; their selection is based on certain criteria (Table 10) that differ from one teacher to another. P5 said that: “as a teacher I go through the materials before presenting them to learners...”.

Criteria	
-Relevance to the teaching lesson/aim of the lesson, sequence or unit	-Class size
-Learners’ styles	-Time
-Learners’ intellectual capacity	-Learners’ age
-Learners’ needs	-Authenticity
-Learners’ cultural background	-Usefulness
-Learners’ interests	-Familiarity
-Reliable websites	-Teachers’ method
	-Easiness and entertainment

Table 10. Criteria Used in Selecting E-Materials

2.2.2 Teachers Evaluation of Selected e-materials

Implementation of the selected e-materials is to be evaluated during, at the end, or after the class time, through measurable and succinct variables;

interaction, performance, assessment, and feedback. Most of the interviewees depend on observation to notice the effect of the e-materials they selected on their students' interaction and performance. Additionally, teachers devote time for assessment to measure the impact of the selected e-materials on their students' knowledge and skills. P1 said that: "in the last 10 minutes of each session, I assess my students so I can know if my materials worked correctly or if I have to change something".

Discussion

This research explored Algerian primary school EFL teachers' analysis and evaluation of the textbooks 'My Book of English' as well as their methodology and abilities in selecting and evaluating e-materials. The results of the questionnaire indicate that the textbooks have low value and effect on their target users_ the respondents. These results were supported by the interview results; the interviewees argued that the textbooks are not meeting their and their students' needs.

The questionnaire included criteria that enable teachers to analyze the textbooks' features and judge their values. Nevertheless, the number of gaps and neutral responses cannot be ignored, and they can be interpreted in different ways; as a significant number of the respondents were novice teachers and the questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the academic year 2023-2024 so the respondents did not go through the whole textbook yet and then they could not decide. Although Tomlinson (2013), Richards (2001, 2014), Işık (2018), McDonough et al. (2013) and others emphasize the importance of analyzing and evaluating ELT materials as inappropriate evaluation of the latter can affect the quality of teaching and learning.

Interviewing teachers unfold their attitudes to textbook use and preference to use alternative materials because they believe that they suit this category of students who need more interaction, physical movement, and enjoyment. Moreover, their selection of e-materials is based on certain criteria that are not similar for all of them. Besides, the selected e-materials are also subjected to evaluation during or after implementation by using other criteria of evaluation. This difference is due to the uniqueness of students' needs and the specificity of the teaching-learning contexts. The

findings imply also teachers' digital literacy abilities in using technology for teaching purposes; the use of criteria for selecting e-materials shows their abilities to critically customize technology adoption to the specificity of the teaching-learning contexts.

Conclusion

This study shed light on the analysis and evaluation of the primary school textbook 'My Book of English'; it also reveals EFL teachers' abilities in selecting and evaluating e-materials. The respondents; EFL primary school teachers as target users judge 'My Book of English' as having low value and effect. The textbook's characteristics and components are not highly pertinent to their students' needs. In addition, most teachers tend to prefer using e-materials instead of the textbook. Their selection and evaluation of e-materials are done deliberately by focusing on certain criteria to meet the uniqueness of the teaching-learning context. Moreover, the target sample has digital literacy abilities that enable efficacious technology use for teaching purposes. However, the findings are not to be generalized. First, the fitness of teaching-learning materials or e-materials varies from one context to another. Second, the number of respondents is not representative enough even though the period of administering the questionnaire lasted for five months. Third, the number of gaps and neutral responses may affect the results despite the use of triangulation. Therefore, further research about teachers' evaluation of ELT materials and e-materials is highly recommended with consideration of representative sample size. It is also important to conduct studies that enhance teachers' awareness, promote their critical digital literacy, and develop their technology use abilities.

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