



## EFL Teachers' Perspectives Towards the Use of Textbooks in Classroom

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Received: 1 June 2024 ▪ Revised: 20 August 2024 ▪ Accepted: 27 August 2024

### *Abstract*

This paper addresses the research of exploring EFL teachers' perspectives towards using textbooks, their strategies, and challenges in using the textbook in the classroom. The participants of the study were a diverse group of teachers at the language department at the University of Guanajuato, in Guanajuato, Mexico, encompassing various levels of teaching experience and proficiency levels. This was a case study utilizing the qualitative method as the approach, semi-structured, was conducted. The results showed that the perceptions were neutral towards using this material; the participants recognized the benefits and the disadvantages of using instructional material. There were two main difficulties expressed by the teachers: meaningful learning and cultural awareness. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in textbook use in EFL classrooms. Finally, these research findings are expected to help other EFL teachers make well-informed choices about textbook selection, adaptation, and enrichment to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

*Keywords:* teachers' perspectives, textbooks, EFL.

### 1. Introduction

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), textbooks have traditionally acted as essential resources for instructors, providing structured content and instructional guidance. However, the function and efficacy of textbooks in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom have been the topic of significant debate and study.

As stated by Ahmadi and Derakshan (2016), textbooks are valuable in each language classroom, and they have several roles in the English Language Teaching curriculum and help the process of language teaching and learning. The selection and use of instructional materials, specifically textbooks, are of great importance to decisions that have an important influence on teaching and learning outcomes in EFL environments.

The purpose of this study is to explore EFL teachers' perspectives on using textbooks in the classroom in the Universidad de Guanajuato English programs. Moreover, this research attempts to add to the existing body of information on EFL curriculum and material development by exploring the complex dynamics of textbook use in EFL classrooms. The findings of this study may help curriculum designers, material developers, and EFL practitioners make informed

choices about textbook selection, adaptation, and enrichment to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

## 2. Literature review

This section will provide a comprehensive discussion of the main concepts that integrate and complement the papers’ understanding and the theoretical framework, as well as a detailed exploration of the principles and ideas that support the research and contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject.

### 2.1 *English as a foreign language*

According to Si (2019), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is regarded as English as a Foreign Language. EFL means learning a language (English) in a non-English-speaking country. In the EFL field, the class is usually monolingual and lives in their own country (Krieger, 2012).

EFL refers to the teaching or the learning of a foreign language (English) by non-native speaker students in countries where English is not the principal language used in their country. In this context, students are learning a language because it is an essential tool for their professional growth and future. As is known, there are numerous languages in the world, and English is one of the most spoken ones, but the time for learning in the classroom for learners is limited. Teaching programs can only provide limited samples of language that teachers are required to teach. Due to this, students absorb part of what they are exposed to, misunderstand part of it, and forget part of it (Swan, 2012).

### 2.2 *Language textbooks*

Due to the fact that this article is based on EFL textbooks, it is important to understand what a language textbook is. Language textbooks are an essential part of EFL. As cited in Bojanic et al. (2016), according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, textbooks teach a particular subject and are used especially in schools and among colleagues. Textbooks, as cited in Mahrudin et al. (2023), are one of the learning tools that provide a variety of materials and are used by teachers as teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Pratma and Retnawati (2018) stated that textbooks are a learning media tool used as learning material in class. Textbooks help as a tool for learning and teaching material in class. This material contains certain types of things that help with a better comprehension of the subject seen in class. Widodo (2018) asserts in his article that textbooks carry messages described in the visual and verbal text; this serves as a complement to a better understanding.

EFL textbooks aim to provide learners with the necessary knowledge; textbooks usually combine contemporary and traditional approaches to language teaching and learning (Bojanic et al., 2016). Based on the given definitions from Bojanic, the English textbooks aim to convey the necessary knowledge, skills, and information about certain materials to prepare students for their cultural backgrounds.

Textbooks in language classes have been of great help to teachers; some teachers can find them useful and others may not, because it could be difficult for teachers to create their own language teaching materials. According to Mahrudin et al. (2023), textbooks, especially in English, are a teachers’ tool used as reference material for teaching and learning situations and have relevance in the textbook. Most of the time, teachers use commercial language textbooks because they are signed by the school administration for their use and fit the course outcomes, but sometimes these books do not fit with the students’ needs or the teachers’ teaching style. If this

does not fit with the teachers' styles, their beliefs can influence the instructional practices due to their attitudes being an essential factor in the effectiveness of the use of textbooks in the classroom. For instance, it is important to know the different teachers' perspectives on this kind of material.

### *2.3 Culture in the educational field*

The term 'culture' is discussed by Rajabi and Ketabi (2020), where they mention that culture refers to the system of knowledge shared by a group of people, beliefs, attitudes, and worldview, among others. Also, this includes material objects and knowledge about their purpose and use. In the field of English language teaching (ELT) pedagogy, numerous definitions represent the interaction between language and culture.

Culture in the EFL field, as mentioned by Gomez (2015), has been considered to be a static entity that represents the main collective sociocultural norms, lifestyles, and values that are learned and shared by the people of a community. Culture in EFL is represented in the textual and visual materials in English textbooks, either as presenting the culture of the target language (Wininger & Kiss, 2013).

This paper will focus on this concept related to the ELT field. As mentioned above, culture in EFL is represented in the textual and visual material in the commercial textbooks by representing the culture of the target language. Most of the textbooks used in EFL classes do not contain enough exercises that students can relate to and use their language. Even if the textbook serves as a tool for reference material for teachers, it does not work well for students. Due to this, the learning for students becomes slightly challenging because the content is not related to their context and does not connect with them.

### *3. The study*

The research question used in order to carry out this qualitative research was "What are the teachers' perspectives on using textbooks to promote language acquisition?" This question will help to discover and obtain specific data for the proposed objective of this research.

Thus, employing a qualitative methodology for this research holds meaningful advantages due to the complex nature of understanding teaching practices, material usage, and contextualized points. A qualitative paradigm can provide vital descriptive nuances often missed by empirical data alone regarding educational settings. In the qualitative methodology, first the object of the study is looked at by the researcher, who then determines the methods and types of data most likely to shed light on it (Heigham & Crocker, 2009). The flexibility and explanatory depth of qualitative research effectively match inquiries into EFL teachers' perspectives on the use of textbooks in the classroom. This approach amplifies educator voices through descriptive investigations of authentic educational contexts. By capturing rich narratives centered on teachers' experiences, the study builds more meaningful lines for understanding and transforming EFL materials, ultimately aiming to improve the effectiveness of textbooks in meeting the diverse needs of both teachers and students.

The method employed to carry out this research was the case study. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth analysis of almost every aspect of a subject to identify patterns and causes of behavior. The interest of this study lies purely in one particular case itself. Stake (1995), a leading case study researcher, defines three broad types of case study. In an outlier case, the researcher is familiar with the place where the research is going to be carried out.

By using a case study method, there is an opportunity to see the relationship between phenomena, context, and people and explore the causes of the phenomena by using many different

sources of data and triangulation. According to Yin (1994), the major strength of a case study is the opportunity to use many different sources of data. Also, Hays (2003) stated that the use of multiple methods and multiple sources as forms of triangulation makes case study findings more comprehensive. In this study, the study method helped to identify patterns in participants’ responses regarding the use of technology in the classroom and to note the different ideas of each participant, leading to a suitable conclusion. To obtain data within a qualitative paradigm, it is necessary to use instruments that help gather qualitative data, such as semi-structured interviews, which were the ones used in this study.

### *3.1 Context and participants*

This case study was developed in the language department of the Universidad de Guanajuato, which is located in the Guanajuato capital. The language department is known for its diverse language programs and varied student body, which results in an ideal environment for analyzing the perspectives of English as a foreign language teacher.

The participants of this study are a diverse group of EFL teachers, both men and women, from the same department. The majority of them have been taught English for approximately ten years. To collect a diverse range of perspectives, this study includes teachers from different levels in the department. Overall, the participants’ experience qualifies them to offer complete and diverse perspectives on the use of textbooks in EFL classrooms.

### *3.2 Inquiry tools*

In this research, interviews were conducted. According to Kathlin deMarrais (2003), qualitative interviews are used when the researcher wants to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular experiences. The goal of using interviews is “to complete a picture” as much as possible in front of the words and experiences of the participants. The intent is to discover that person’s view of an experience or phenomenon of study. The interviews that were used in this research were semi-structured interviews to gather nuanced data on teachers’ perspectives based on their direct textbook implementation. The implementation of semi-structured interviews allows deeper probing into EFL teachers’ beliefs, reasons, and decision-making processes regulating textbook implementation than restrictive surveys. Interviews embrace participants sharing anecdotes, frustrations, and adaptation strategies, which show richer rationales influencing behaviors beyond surface reporting (Dörney, 2007).

To design the interviews, the initial step involved identifying the principal themes based on the research question. Subsequently, a list of open-ended questions was developed, corresponding to each identified theme and designed to elicit detailed responses. Following this initial phase, the first step in conducting the interviews was the selection of participants. This process considered various factors, such as including teachers with different levels of experience.

During the interviews, the objective was to facilitate a guided conversation using the structured interview format while allowing participants the flexibility to discuss the topics they deemed significant.

Interview transcriptions were required for data analysis, allowing manual coding to identify key concepts and patterns in the responses, thereby allowing the draw of comprehensive conclusions.

#### 4. Data analysis and discussion

##### 4.1 *Structure and organization of classes*

At the moment of the interview, the participants were asked about the advantages and disadvantages. One of the participants said that textbooks have the base of contents such as grammar and vocabulary, among others, as can be seen above in the answer.

*“I think it is better to work with textbooks because you have the base of the contents like grammar, vocabulary etc.” (JM, Int.2)*

The teacher emphasized that using a book helps them to structure and organize their classes and lessons because it assures a measure of structure, consistency, and logical progression in a class. Also, another teacher mentioned that textbooks provide them with multiple resources, as mentioned by the participant “BM” in interview 2 (two).

*“I use the readings from the textbooks...some of the readings have interesting topics...sometimes it is hard to try to get, like listening material for the students.” (BM, Int. 1)*

The participant stated that for her, it is easy to find material in the textbooks that can be used in her classes that she cannot find or get easily. Both teachers mention the use of different material from the textbook in their English classes. Textbooks provide input into classroom lessons in different forms, such as text, activities, explanations, and so on (Huntchinson and Torres, 1994, as cited in Dinah, 2013).

The organization of the lesson is one of the most important parts of the English class. Most of the time, if the teacher does not follow a direct plan, it can be easy to follow the organization of a textbook, and look for the order of certain topics, and also use the material provided by them. As is mentioned by Dinah (2013), teachers’ ways of teaching usually depend on the use of textbooks in the classroom.

##### 4.2 *Engaging material and material adaptation*

Engaging material was another relevant concept that arose in the data organization. One of the teachers expressed that textbooks offer engaging activities for their students, while other teachers rather modify the activities in the textbooks because most of the time activities are not related to the students’ context. See the answers below.

*“Advantages, the students have a variety of fun activities, such as games, songs, puzzles and more, interesting for them.” (JM, Int. 2, Q.6)*

*“I often change the material to make it more relevant to my students’ culture. I also modify activities to match their skill levels.” (MV, Int. 3, Q8)*

As can be seen in the answers above, at the moment of doing the interview, the teachers were asked about the advantages and the disadvantages of the use of textbooks in the classroom, and also, they were also asked if they realized adaptations to the books they used. These two answers were interesting to discuss because we could see two different points of view. One of the teachers mentioned that students have a variety of activities that are interesting to them, while the other teacher mentioned that he prefers to modify or change the material to make it more relevant to his students. Irujo (2006) believes that teachers must have the ability to know how to choose the best material for instruction and to adapt or change materials in the textbooks. Also, according to Richards (2001), it is essential for teachers to develop the ability to adapt textbooks.

Another interviewed teacher also demonstrated that she thinks that it is important to find a way to balance textbooks, students’ needs, and learning styles in order to create engaging material for them, as can be seen in the following answer.

*“Finding the right balance between textbooks and student needs, means creating lessons that include interesting content and consider how each student learns.”*  
(MV, Int. 3, Q9)

First, an EFL textbook should suit the needs, interests, and abilities of the students. For students, textbooks should be attractive and should reflect students' needs and interests. Gilmore (2007) stated that by incorporating authentic forms of media like new clips, commercials, and podcasts, among others, can promote practical target language usage and culture while improving listening skills and engagement in students.

#### 4.3 Cultural awareness and meaningful learning

Two of the interviewed teachers mentioned that textbooks most of the time do not have meaningful activities for students due to the context not being related to the students' own context. One of them mentioned that textbooks contain vocabulary, words, or phrases that are not very likely for students to use, also, she made mention that most of the books are from the United States or England, so the vocabulary or the context of the readings are not the ones that students are related to. Because textbooks are not related to students' context, they do not have meaningful learning, as can be seen in the next sentences:

*“I do have to say that the topics, they are, they have vocabulary, words or phrases that it's not very likely for students to see or use,...they have vocabulary from those contexts and we do not have vocabulary from our context.”* (BM, Int. 1, Q. 6)

*“I often change the material to make it more relevant to my students' culture...”*  
(MV, Int. 3, Q8)

As can be seen, both participants agreed with the statement about their students' cultures. Therefore, the teachers believed that they should pay attention to the information about the culture in the textbook and that material from the textbooks should be authentic in order to be relevant for students' real lives and contexts. According to Richards (2001), as cited in Dinah (2013), authentic materials have a positive effect on the learners' motivation and learning because they relate more to the learners' needs.

One of the teachers, at the moment of being asked about her teaching methods, she mentioned that she teaches to their students the basics of the language grammar but that she also tries to use the students' own examples in order to make them the center of the class, as can be seen in the answer cited below.

*“I do teach them like the grammar points but I try also to have their own examples. I try to use topics where they are the ones being the center of the class and not just me giving them the information.”* (BM, Int. 1, Q. 3)

This answer can lead us to the concept of “meaningful learning.” This concept refers to educational experiences that actively involve learners by tapping into their interests, goals, and existing knowledge to create personally engaging and relevant connections. Gilmore (2011) stated that integrating examples and socio-cultural issues relevant to students' backgrounds would increase comprehension.

With this obtained data, we can conclude that cultural awareness and meaningful learning in EFL refer to intentionally incorporating intercultural elements and student-centered personal connections throughout English instruction to foster engagement, communicative abilities, and students' perspectives.

## 5. Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to understand and explore some perceptions that teachers of English as a second language hold regarding the use of textbooks in language classes. The results showed that the perceptions were neutral towards using this material; the participants recognized the benefits and the disadvantages of using instructional material. The findings demonstrated that the use of textbooks could be helpful for foreign language teachers in the organization and planning of language classes, as well could also be used as a support for teachers' teaching if they are used correctly. The activities from the textbooks can be adapted and modified to be relatable and interesting for students, and according to the obtained data, most of the time, books are not made in a real and relatable context for the students.

The purpose of this study was to gather perspectives regarding the use of textbooks in the classroom. The findings were intended to help other English teachers make well-informed decisions when selecting and using a textbook. Additionally, the findings should help teachers consider different opinions from other educators about how textbooks can be applied in classes as instructional material.

Despite some constraints, such as a limited number of participants and challenges with the data collection tools, this study provides useful information for solving class-planning and organization issues. By extending the number of participants, this research could offer deeper findings supporting the understanding of English instructors' attitudes toward textbook use in the classroom. For further research into the EFL teachers' perspectives towards the use of textbooks in the classroom, a comparative analysis of EFL students' perceptions besides teachers' perceptions on the use of textbooks in the classroom will be complimentary. The study will aim to set out to understand the students' preferences towards the use of this material in class, contributing to teachers making a clearer decision in the selection of textbooks.

As a novice English teacher, I have encountered and witnessed various challenges when it comes to using textbooks as teaching materials and when not to use them. I think this research has improved my understanding of the intricacy of using a textbook in the classroom and all the factors that influence choosing one.

## Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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