# AN EVALUATION OF ENGLISH WRITING TEXT AT THE PREPARATORY YEAR, NAJRAN UNIVERSITY, SAUDI ARABIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This small scale study is an attempt to evaluate the English writing text at the preparatory year. It stresses to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of the existing textbook, like content, presentation, organization and exercises. It also focuses to find out whether the textbook able to fulfill the aims and objectives of teaching English writing skill and the learners' needs. Finally, some suggestions have been made for selecting a suitable textbook.*

**Keywords:** Criteria, Writing textbook, Evaluation, Selection

## INTRODUCTION

Textbook is one of the most important aids in teaching any particular subject or skill, which lays down the facts to be taught and more or less, determines the methods of teaching. Policy makers and syllabus designers may prescribe ideal policies and syllabus but it is the textbook only which determines how the prescribed syllabus will be taught. It is an indispensible tool in the hands of a teacher. The teacher usually teaches on the basis of textbook. According to Sheldon (1988), course books "represent for both students and teachers the visible heart of any ELT program". He (ibid) further states that many of the ELT textbooks fail "to describe adequately the language levels of target learners (the indiscriminate use of terms like 'beginner' and 'intermediate' abounds); the production of workbooks or exercise pages that demand microscopic handwriting; the omission of course rationales stating exactly who the book is intended for, or how the material is selected and sequenced; a surrender to the economic pressures that demand a maximum textual density on each page; and the production of teacher's books that are little more than student editions with inserted answer keys". Therefore, textbooks are to be written in adherence with the given subject-area content and objectives of the national curriculum, and in harmony with general educational goals.

Despite several efforts made by the various bodies, like syllabus designers, teachers and the administrators, the students of Saudi Arabia are always found inefficient in English writing skill. It would be wrong to say that teachers and students are only responsible, though there are many other factors as well. As mentioned earlier selection of an appropriate textbook is one of the key aspects of a successful language program. Like other students in the Kingdom, the students of Preparatory Year, Najran University also feel learning English writing skill as a herculean task. By keeping in mind textbook as one of the major factors of successful teaching, the present study is an attempt to evaluate the writing text *Interactions 1* by Cheryl Pavlik and Margaret Keenan Segal, at the Preparatory Year, Najran University, prescribed by the Academic Council of the university.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the investigator in this study is to evaluate the writing text prescribed at the Preparatory Year. It is important that the writing textbook be studied with a view to find out the demerits and suggest ways and means to remove them. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the following questions:

a. Does the textbook meet the needs of the learners?

    b.   Is the subject matter of the textbook organized properly?

    c.   Does the book have proper style of presentation?

    d.   Are the contents in the book authentic and up to date?

    e.   Is the book written in simple and easy language, and devoid of misprints and confusion?

    f.   Are there any irrelevant materials in the book?

## Statement of the Problem

As pointed out earlier, no study has been conducted at the Department of English Language, Najran University, regarding the evaluation of writing text book. Since teaching of writing is one of the most important skills of ELT, therefore, a study on evaluation of the writing text can prove to be significant one for the improvement of quality of the writing text book. The findings may prove to be an asset for the Department of English Language, Najran University as well as the other universities in the Kingdom.

## Limitations of the study

The study is limited to two areas only. Firstly, due to the shortage of time it is difficult to examine all the textbooks, i.e. Reading, Listening and Speaking and Grammar. Therefore, it is limited to the writing textbook only. Secondly, the teachers who teach existing writing text have better understanding of the book. So, only these teachers have been selected as the participants for the study.

## Criteria for Textbook Selection

Selection of a suitable textbook is very crucial at any level of language teaching classroom. The importance of such selections increases as we go down from higher levels to the elementary levels. In facts, the lower the class the more important is the task of selecting the textbooks. The reasons are many, such as letter, size, paper, printing, illustrations, pictures, language, technical terms, comprehension and understandings. There are many scholars and researchers who have suggested a wide range of criteria for textbook selection or evaluation. Among them the works of Hutchinson (1987), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Sheldon (1988), Andrade (1990), Skierso (1991), Brown (1995), Cunningsworth (1995), Harmer (1996) and McGrath (2001) are significant. McGrath (2001:19-21) has listed a number of learner factors such as age range, proficiency level in the target language, reasons for studying the target language, sex distribution and so on. Following the learner factors is a list of learner needs, for example dialect, language-skill emphasis, language-system emphasis (grammar, vocabulary, phonology) and attention to mechanics (spelling, punctuation). There is also a list of teacher factors such as language competence, methodological competence and awareness, experience of teaching the kind of learner for whom the materials are intended etc. (ibid). Nunan cited in Alamiri (2008):

"Materials are, in fact, an essential element within the curriculum, and do more than simply lubricate the wheels of learning. At their best, they provide concrete models for desirable classroom practice. They act as curriculum models and at their very best they fulfill a teacher development role".

The evaluation tools and techniques may serve as a guideline for the selection and review of textbooks. Besides evaluation the principles of preparing textbooks should also prove valuable contribution in producing better textbooks. It is felt by educationists that evaluation procedure should be helpful to researchers, evaluators, authors and reviewers in several ways. A textbook can be evaluated in different ways. It is desirable to evaluate most of the aspects which may be related to the use of the textbook. They can be divided into two categories, academic aspects and physical characteristics. Academic aspects cover the areas like selection of content, organization of content, explanation, higher cognitive process, stimulating and maintaining interest, individual differences, exercises etc. Physical characteristics includes legibility, usefulness etc.

According to Hutchinson (1987: 37-38):

"…material evaluation plays such an important role in language teaching that its potential for influencing the way teachers operate is considerable. Materials evaluation can and should be a two-way process which enables teachers not just to select a textbook, but to develop their awareness of their own teaching/ learning situation".

Apart from "the physical characteristics of textbooks such as layout, organizational, and logistical characteristics the other important criteria that should be incorporated are those that assess a textbook's methodology, aims, and approaches and the degree to which a set of materials is not only teachable but also fits the needs of the individual teacher's approach as well as the organization's overall curriculum" (Litz, 2005).

Andrade (1990) suggests that textbook evaluation should consider 'adult appeal, individual differences, motivation and attitudes, educational background, social context, presentation / practice, and linguistic /social / discourse / strategic competence' as the key categories. Skierso (1991) proposes a different kind of criteria for textbook evaluation. She suggests that the first step of material evaluation is to collect information about students' background, the course, syllabus, and the learning context. She then divides materials into five subsections: bibliographical data, aims and goals, subject matter, vocabulary and structures, and layout and physical makeup (ibid).

Sheldon (1988) has proposed some of the key elements of ELT textbook evaluation. A few of them can be quoted as the following:

*"Rationale*-Why was the book written in the first place, and what gaps is it intended to fill?

    - Are you given information about the Needs Analysis or classroom piloting that were undertaken?

    - Are the objectives spelt out?

*User definition* - Is there a clear specification of the target age range, culture, assumed background, probable learning preferences, and educational expectations?

*Accessibility* - Is the material clearly organized?

    -Can the student find his or her location in the material at any point, i.e. is it possible to have a clear view of the 'progress' made, and how much still needs to be covered?

    - Are there indexes, vocabulary lists, section headings, and other methods of signposting the content that allow the student to use the material easily, especially for revision or self-study purposes?

    - Is the learner (as opposed to the teacher) given clear advice about how the book and its contents could be most effectively exploited?

*Linkage* - Do the units and exercises connect in terms of theme, situation, topic, pattern of skill development, or grammatical/lexical 'progression'?

    - Is the nature of such connection made obvious, for example by placing input texts and supporting exercises in close proximity?

    - Does the textbook cohere both internally and externally (e.g. with other books in a series)?

*Appropriacy* -Is the material substantial enough or interesting enough to hold the attention of learners?

    - Is it pitched at the right level of maturity and language, and (particularly in the case of ESP situations), at the right conceptual level?

    - Is it topical?

*Cultural bias* -Are different and appropriate religious and social environments catered for,

both in terms of the topics/situations presented and of those left out?

- Are students' expectations in regard to content, methodology, and format
  successfully accommodated?"

Cunningsworth (1995) advocates four criteria for evaluating textbook in language program:

"1. They should correspond the learners' needs. They should match the aims and objectives of the language-learning program.

2. They should reflect the uses (present or future) which learners will make of the language. Textbook should be cohesion that will help equip students to use language effectively for their own purposes.

3. They should take account of students needs as learners and should facilitate their learning processes, without dogmatically imposing a rigid "method".

4. They should have a clear role as a support for learning. Like teachers they mediate between the target language and the learner."

## METHODOLOGY

Cunningsworth (cited in Al Yousef, 2007) remarked that since "different criteria will apply in different circumstances", it is on the teachers or researchers to design their checklists according to their priorities (ibid). By keeping in mind above criteria, the study follows the questionnaire method and it has been developed by the researcher on the basis of related literature.

### Questionnaire

There were 22 multiple choice items in four point likert scale (1 point for each strongly agree, 2 points for each agree, 3 points for each disagree, and 4 points for each strongly disagree) included in the questionnaire. To make the evaluation of the textbook complete in all respect, almost all the aspects of textbook such as content, organization, presentation, and exercises are included.

### Sample

The users' views are most effective and genuine way of identifying the qualities of a textbook (Cunningsworth, 1995). Since teachers are one of the real users of textbooks, so information was gathered from them only with the help of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to 22 male teachers of the Preparatory Year, who were teaching the textbook to the students of Level 1.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After collecting the raw data, scores were converted to percentile and they were analyzed and presented in the form of tables, figures with the help of the Excel program for its meaningful results.

### Organizational Feature

This portion of the questionnaire (Items 1-6) covers the areas like units, chapters, sequence of the chapters and the size and format of the text. It also focused on the arrangement of the topics and sub topics, and their appropriateness in lengths and coherence to different parts. The results of this section can be depicted in the figure 1.

In response to the item 1, *"the book includes meaningful table of contents, glossary and index"*, majority of the participants were highly in favor (27.27% Strongly Agree and 59% Agree) and only a few respondents (13.64% Disagree) were against it. In a similar way the item 2 *"Layout is consistent and chapters are arranged logically"* also received highly positive response (27.27% SA and 54.54% A). But majority of the respondents were highly passive (41.82% SDA and 31.82% DA) and only a few (21.27% A and 5.09% SDA) were positive in reply to the item 3 *"Chapters provide clear and*

*comprehensive introductions and summaries"*. They believed that a clear cut introduction and a summary for each chapter of the text is very crucial for a suitable textbook. The items 4, *"Information is accurate & current",* 5 *"Reading level is appropriate for age/grade"* and 6 *"Size and format of print is appropriate"* of the questionnaire received positive response. In reply to the above items (4, 5 and 6), 31.82% strongly agree and 59% agree, 18.18% strongly agree and 59% agree, and 50% strongly agree and 41% agree respectively.

**Figure 1. Organizational Feature**
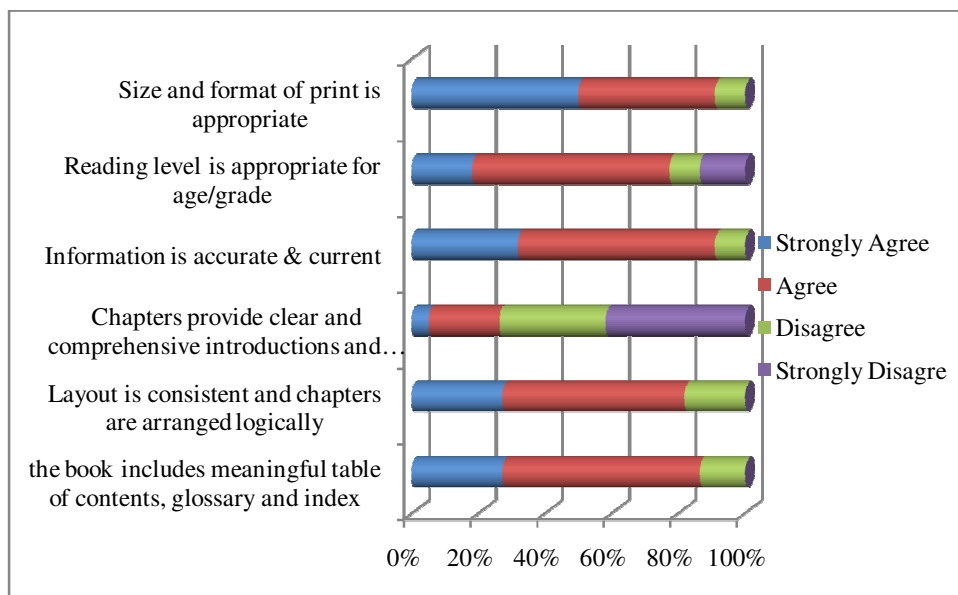


**Content**

Questions (items 7-14) related to this field discussed about the accuracy, adequacy and authenticity of the contents of the chapter and also about the subject matter. It tries to explore whether the contents are up to date and their relation to the prescribed syllabus. Table 1 in the following reveals the picture of the respondents' opinions regarding it.

**Table 1. Contents of the Textbook**

| Items | Contents | SA | A | DA | SDA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Content of the textbook is relevant and appropriate to the context | 09.09 | 45.45 | 13.64 | 31.82 |
| 8 | The textbook provides Real-life applications | 00 | 45.45 | 22.73 | 31.82 |
| 9 | Activities are appropriate | 00 | 27.27 | 41 | 31.82 |
| 10 | The chapters have the required depth of the subject matter | 23.64 | 51.46 | 20.36 | 4.54 |
| 11 | Non text content, like pictures, is accurate and well integrated into the text | 00 | 63.64 | 22.73 | 4.54 |
| 12 | Activities apply to a diversity of student abilities, interests and learning styles | 4.54 | 45.46 | 41 | 09.09 |
| 13 | It will facilitate the acquisition of specific competencies | 00 | 32 | 40.73 | 37.27 |
| 14 | It is culturally sensitive | 00 | 50 | 50 | 00 |

In response to the item 7, "*Content of the textbook is relevant and appropriate to the context*", the opinions of the respondents were almost equally divided. There were 9.09% and 45.45% of respondents strongly agree and agree respectively, while 13.64% and 31.82% respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. In a similar way, the item 8, "*The textbook provides Real-life applications*", also received a parallel response. In reply to this item 45.45% respondents were agree, on the other hand 22.73% and 31.82% were disagree and strongly disagree respectively. But regarding the item 9, "*Activities are appropriate*", a great number of respondents replied in a negative way. There were 31.82% strongly disagreed and 41% disagreed and only 27.27% agreed to it. Majority of the respondents expressed positively to the item 10, "*The chapters have the required depth of the subject matter*". In response to it, 23.64% strongly agree and 51.46% agree, while only 20.36% disagree. There were 63.64% (A) of respondents show inclination to the item11, "*Non text content, like pictures, is accurate and well integrated into the text*", while only 22.73% (DA) were passive. Interestingly, opinion regarding the item 12, "*Activities apply to a diversity of student abilities, interests and learning styles*", was sharply divided 45.46% agreed but another 41% disagreed. While replying to the item 13 "*It will facilitate the acquisition of specific competencies*", a great majority i.e. 32.27% (SDA) and 40.73% (DA) expressed opposite opinion, but a few, 32% (A) show hope on the existing textbook. In response to the item 14, "*It is culturally sensitive*", the opinion among the respondents was equally divided. 50% (A) teachers show positive and the other 50% (DA) have doubt on it.

## Presentation

This section of the questionnaire (15-19) tries to find the learners interest, background knowledge, appropriacy of language etc. Figure 2 in the following shows the findings of this kind.

**Figure 2. Presentation of the Textbook**
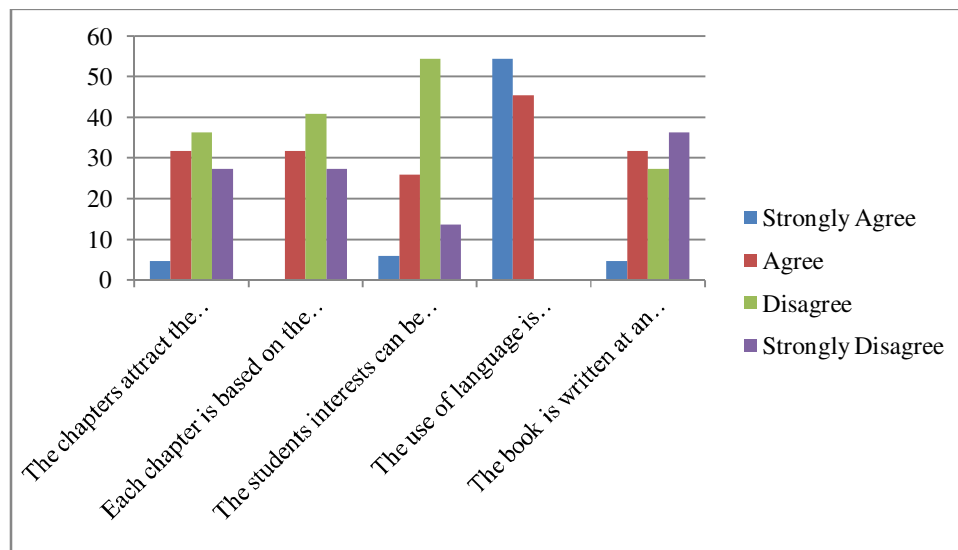


The above figure depicts the findings regarding the presentation of the writing textbook. In answer to the item 15, "*The chapters attract the attention of the students*", a large number of respondents i.e. 27.27% (SDA) and 36.36% (DA) believed that the textbook lacks the qualities to attract the students, while only a few number, 31.82% (A) and 4.54% (SA) show positive. As far as item 16, "*Each chapter is based on the previous knowledge of the students*", is concerned, a higher percentage of the respondents: 41% and 27.27% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively, but 31.82% agreed on it. In reply to the item 17, "*The students interests can be sustained throughout the chapters*", the respondents' views were sharply divided. A great majority of them i.e. 54.54% (DA) and 13.64% (SDA) believed that the chapters hardly sustained students' interests, while other 31.82% were

affirmative. Interestingly all the respondents were in favor of the item 18, *"The use of language iscorrect (grammar, structure, spelling)"*. Regarding to this item 54.54% and 45.46% were strongly agreed and agreed respectively. The opinions of the respondents were again strongly divided while answering the item 19, *"The book is written at an appropriate comprehensionlevel"*. There were 4.54% (SA) and 31.82% (A) respondents, who indicated positive feelings, but 27.27% (DA) and 36.36% (SDA) had negative opinion.

**Exercises**

Exercises in a textbook intend to test students' knowledge, understandings and applications after the ends of each chapter. Through this portion of the questionnaire (Items 20-22), efforts have been made to identify the appropriateness of the exercises in the text. The following table 2 outlines the information gathered for this section.

**Table: 2**

**Exercises in the Book**

| Items | Exercises | SA | A | DA | SDA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | The book provides mechanical and meaningful exercises | 00 | 41 | 27.27 | 31.82 |
| 21 | The book provides communicative exercises that enable learners to carry out their communicative tasks in real-life situations | 00 | 39 | 41 | 20.18 |
| 22 | The book provides periodical revisions for diagnostic purposes | 00 | 22.73 | 41 | 36.36 |

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the exercises in the textbook. In response to the item 20, *"The book provides mechanical and meaningful exercises"*, 31.82% (SDA) and 27.27% (DA) indicated that the book did not provide meaningful exercises, while another 41% (A) were in favor of it. In a similar way, item 21, *"the book provides communicative exercises that enable learners to carry out their communicative tasks in real-life situations"*, also received highly negative opinions i.e. 41% disagreed and 20.18% strongly disagreed, but only 39% agreed on it. In answer to the item 22, *"The book provides periodical revisions for diagnostic purposes"*, a great number of respondents failed to believe that it includes periodical revisions for diagnostic purposes. There were only 22.73% respondents agreed, while 41% and 36.36% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

**CONCLUSION**

The study reveals that the textbook *Interactions 1* by Cheryl Pavlik and Margaret Keenan Segal, has some significant features in certain aspects, and shortcomings in others. It also indicates that there were some average characteristics in the book.

**Strengths:**

The book was organized in a meaningful way. Besides print, format, and size, it was considered to be in harmony with the aims and objectives of the syllabus and the chapters were arranged logically.

The prescribed book included the required depth of the subject matter.

**Weaknesses:**

An analysis of the findings and their interpretations clearly indicates that there were many shortcomings in the book.

The chapters did not provide clear and comprehensive summaries.

It failed to facilitate the acquisition of specific competencies.

Chapters were not designed on the basis of students' previous knowledge.

Exercises were not prepared to develop the students' communicative competencies and no periodical revisions were provided for diagnostic purposes.

According to one of the participants "the existing writing text lacks enough writing practice and the level of the textbook is too high for the students".

Therefore, it can be concluded that the book has more shortcomings than the strengths. It needs some modification, addition, subtraction, hence a total revision.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After identifying various strengths and weaknesses from the study, some recommendations are offered in this section.

Firstly, selection of a suitable textbook is always a challenging job. It needs meticulous planning and time. So, the syllabus designers and other administrative bodies should not make haste in choosing a textbook from the commercial market.

Secondly, while writing or selecting a textbook, the writers or syllabus designers should always keep in mind that it meets the learners' wants and needs. Besides, the contents should include more cultural, motivational and real life activities to fascinate the learners.

Finally, the language of a textbook should be suitable to the level of the students. Ambiguous or difficult language in a textbook may become hurdle in language learning classroom.

There are many other recommendations can be made, but it should be remembered that textbook is simply a tool in the hands of a teacher and it cannot create magic until or unless the teachers use it properly in the classroom. To conclude with Brown (1993: 83) "…it is, in principle, not possible to find materials which would interest everyone. It follows that the emphasis should be moved from attempting to provide intrinsically interesting materials, which we have just claimed is generally impossible, to *doing interesting things* with materials ... these materials should be chosen, not so much on the basis of their own interest, but for what they can be used to do."

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*Patterns of Parallelism as Trope of Meaning in Osundare's Poetry*

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**Patterns of Parallelism as Trope of Meaning in Osundare's Poetry**

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**Abstract**

*Creative words arrangements and their meaning possibilities animate Osundare as a poet. One of the ways in which this is established is the obtrusive deployment of the stylistic device of parallelism found in his poetry. There is an effect of grace and impact of meaning to be felt in Osundare's poetry as licensed by the poet's construction of parallelism. This device only enjoys a passing mention in Osundare criticisms and this has tended to undermine an important dimension of meaning in his literary corpus. In this paper I provide a stylistic analysis of the device as a style-marker in Osundare's poetry, focusing on its patterns and exploring how meaning is encoded and delivered[14].*

Key Words: Parallelism, Meaning, Patterns, Stylistic Analysis.

**Introduction**

Niyi Osundare is about the most prolific poet in written modern African poetry and his emergence is often tied to what is described as "new generation African poets" or "new African poetry" (Ojaide et al 2002) in which a "re-evaluation of folklore and oral tradition" are appropriated with "an unmistakable degree of audience-consciousness" (Osundare 2002:6) informing poetic practice. With over eleven poetry books and highest honors in Africa and around the world (BBC Arts award, ANA/Cadbury Poetry prize, Noma African Award and Commonwealth Prize for Poetry) as a performing poet, Osundare is unarguably "the people's poet" as he is often fondly called. No doubt the influence of oral genre pervades Osundare's poetic oeuvre (Okunowo 2010) and in most cases the poet tries to use traditional cultural speech and the language of the poet's speech community (Yoruba) in a stylistic manner that transposes Yoruba semiotics into English expression. In this respect the poet says this

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[14]This paper is an abstract from the writer's doctoral research (2010).