

# Evaluation of Two ESP Textbooks

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## Abstract

This paper evaluated two ESP textbooks using the evaluation of McDonough and Shaw (2003) based on external and internal evaluation. The first textbook is *Business Objectives (1996)* by Vicki Hollett, and the second textbook is *Business Studies, Second Edition (2002)* by Alain Anderton. To avoid repetition, I will use BO and BS, respectively, to abbreviate the names of these books.

The paper briefly discusses the external evaluation and then concludes with the results of a detailed evaluation of one chapter from each textbook for a course that I am teaching. The course is for business major students who wish to apply for jobs at The Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC), which requires a strong command of English.

The evaluation indicated that both books would be appropriate if we merge them together and add some additional materials, as a textbook that can accommodate the needs of all learners does not exist.

**Keywords:** ESP, Materials evaluation, Textbook evaluation, Teaching, Business, Internal & external evaluation

## 1. Why Evaluation?

On a daily basis, we as teachers evaluate the materials that we teach, but this type of evaluation is not sufficient. If our purpose is to maximise learning, then we must conduct systematic evaluations (Brown 1995, Ellis 1997, Richards 2001).

In my situation, I have a range of textbooks from which to choose, but the selection process can be time-consuming and expensive (McDonough & Shaw 2001; Karimi 2006). Evaluation is a 'matching process; matching needs to available solutions' (Hutchinson and Waters 1987 cited in Sheldon 1988: 237). This statement is true in my situation, as I am striving to satisfy the needs of my learners. I am attempting to find the book that contains solutions to all or most of my learners' deficiencies. As this course is related to the careers of individuals, the materials must be selected carefully (Hutchinson et al. 1987, 1994). As Sheldon states, '[t]he selection of a particular core volume signals an executive educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial and even political investment... the definition and application of systematic criteria for assessing course books are 'vital'' (1988: 237). The careers of learners depend on this course because the company (STC) will choose only a few of the best students to improve the expertise of its staff and subsequently improve their profits. The evaluation process should be carefully conducted to assure optimal results (Allwright 1981; McGrath 2002).

The McDonough and Shaw (2003) evaluation model saves us a significant amount of time and effort. These authors suggest two stages: external and internal evaluation. In the first stage, a teacher can scan a book, obtain a general idea regarding the materials and then decide whether the materials conform to his expectations. If the text satisfies his requirements, then he can progress to the next stage, which consists of an in-depth analysis of the materials. I have chosen this model because it is the most appropriate, time-saving, economical and applicable method of evaluation for my situation. In simple terms, I call this model a 'universal model' that can be useful in nearly any context. According to Sheldon (1987), Dudley and Evans cited an instance in which some Egyptian teachers used questionnaires, interviews and seminars as means of evaluation. These methods can be effective if they are well managed, but the authors also cited some drawbacks of these techniques, such as embarrassing situations for teachers in interviews and some types of speech disorders in seminars.

## 2. The Intended Audience and Context

As mentioned previously, the audience is a group of students majoring in business who have not yet completed their BA degrees. These students want to apply for summer jobs at STC. They have completed most of their business courses in Arabic. The students have a solid background in business; however, they still perform at the lower intermediate level in English. I used the negotiated syllabus to assure optimal outcomes. The needs of these students

include knowledge of business terminology, planning, marketing, reporting and socialising because of their likely future work with native English speakers. The course will occur at King Faisal University (where I am employed) for four weeks, 20 hours per week. The students are highly motivated and enthusiastic with regard to these jobs. This enthusiasm could lead to strong learning outcomes, although the English level of KFU students is generally poor (Al Fraidan 2011).

### 3. The External Evaluation

After performing a brief yet accurate scan of the blurbs, contents, and introduction, I can confidently state that the claims of each book (Cunningsworth 1984 in McDonough & Shaw 2003) are true. The claims in the blurbs by the two authors are exemplified throughout the book.

BO does not contain an introduction. The blurb and the book speak for themselves. Each unit explicitly states the objective(s) and task(s) from the beginning. A large portion is devoted to skill work and language exercises. To account for the additional materials, I must adopt certain assumptions. The book is part of a package that includes a teacher's book, audio cassettes, progress tests and a workbook. I do not have these materials, but I would assume that they are available. Thus, I credit BS for supplying these supporting materials. In my context, I am focusing on the core material rather than the supplementary materials.

In contrast, BS provides a brief introduction. Each unit is organised into two or four pages that concentrate on making business decisions by providing data questions and case studies. Making decisions is the 'keyword' in this book.

Both books cover a range of vocabulary and terminology. The use of visuals is appropriate to the context in both books, but I favour BO's visuals more than those of BS, which are sometimes distracting. Both books employ comics, which students are likely to find entertaining.

One main and obvious difference between the two books is the specificity of BS. This book is addressed to a specialised audience, whereas BO is intended for general audience who is interested in learning the basic concepts of business.

### 4. The Internal Evaluation

After I examined the basic surface structure of the two books, I proceeded to conducting a deeper analysis in terms of several criteria. I have read Chapter 11 from each book and examined several exercises from different chapters.

I do not favour detailed checklists because they tend to distract evaluators and can frequently lead to frustration because no course book is perfect. Cunningsworth (1995), as cited in McDonough and Shaw (2003), warns against the use of detailed checklists otherwise one could get astray. Although my evaluation is based on the criteria of McDonough and Shaw (2003), I categorised these criteria into different headings and merged some criteria with others.

#### 4.1 The Language

##### a. The presentation

This criterion corresponds to the following questions. What skills are covered? How are the language and exercises presented? How much space are they given? BO has a special focus on listening in addition to some speaking (pronunciation) exercises. This inclusion can be justified by the carefully constructed syllabus on which this book is based, as claimed in the blurb. Because the listening materials are available, I cannot evaluate them. Some units have writing exercises, and a few units have reading exercises. Each section contains a grammar section that covers some basic structures, such as the *present perfect* and *wh-questions*.

There are fifteen units that are divided into four implicit parts. The main topic is presented first in the form of listening/speaking activities followed by some exercises pertaining to grammatical components combined with vocabulary, and each part concludes with one or more skill activities. The characteristic of the book with which I am most pleased is the integration of the language in the exercises, all of which contribute to the objectives of the unit. For example, in unit 11 (*Planning*), we observe that all of the exercises assist students in learning how to use the language in planning. Most of the exercises are communicative, but there are some mechanical drills that I do not favour. We can determine that these learner-based exercises require little involvement of the teacher.

In contrast, BS focuses on reading with some writing activities. The clear purpose of this book is to provide students with as much information as possible. The 64 units are interspersed under eight main units. Each main unit concerns a specific notion of business that is detailed in several sub-units. In BO, the unit begins with the objectives in the form of a friendly question. The objectives are titled *making decisions*, as this term conveys one of the priority goals of the book. The objectives are embedded in a passage with some small articles and exercises interspersed.

Communicative exercises are primarily in the form of role play with some comprehension exercises. These exercises can be used as communicative exercises by, for instance, converting them into a discussion activity. The teacher involvement here should consist of explaining the unit and serving as a facilitator during the activities.

In my opinion, simulation, if applicable (or at least role-play activities), should be an integral part of ESP courses.

#### b. Sequence

It is not sufficient to examine only the presentation of the language; it is also important to investigate how the materials are ordered.

In BO, the units are graded in a linear mode beginning with 'greeting' and ending with 'tackling problems'. BS is a comprehensive business book that covers almost all business topics, as stated in the introduction. The units are cross-referenced. To fully grasp the meaning within a single unit, one may need to review or preview other units.

#### 4.2 Reading Type

It is important to consider the type of reading. This consideration could greatly affect the adaptation of the materials for learners. In terms of adapting material, a teacher could like a book despite the unsuitability of the reading type for the needs, levels or styles of his or her students (Sheldon 1988).

BO uses straightforward language but becomes increasingly difficult as learners progress towards more advanced units. On the contrary, BS contains more sophisticated and knowledge-based passages and texts because of its abundance of texts and articles that are adapted from various resources. Nearly every unit discusses business in the UK.

#### 4.3 Authenticity

Authentic material is the one of the primary demands of my learners. They seek authentic materials for two reasons. First, the students have not been exposed to such materials during their study of English in schools. Second, such a feature will certainly assist them in achieving success in the course and in their careers.

As previously stated, listening materials for BO are not available. By examining the listening transcript at the end of the book, we can determine that the materials are not authentic. The remainder of the exercises appear to be written for the sake of the book. The book could contain some authentic exercises, as I have not fully examined every exercise.

Unlike BO, BS uses numerous authentic materials. For example, in this book, we find a large number of articles from different resources, such as newspapers.

I would also suggest considering whether the tasks in both books correspond to those that learners are likely to encounter outside of the classroom and whether these texts assist them in communicating. Fortunately, both books achieve these aims.

#### 4.4 Appropriateness

I will use this term to refer to whether materials are appropriate for learners in terms of difficulty, style and expectations. As we used a negotiated syllabus and as a result of time restrictions, the learners are likely to use a self-study strategy.

I expect the materials in this course to provide students with new situations and enable them to think or ask questions about new information. Thus, we must carefully examine some units in both books. BS provides students with opportunities for self-study, as the book is comprehensive and coherent. Students can practise the exercises, which are clear and require no guidance. They can find almost all of the information that they need in addition to the *key terms* section for the terminology that is used in the unit. Students can monitor their learning progress with the *checklist* section, which contains several questions that are designed to test their comprehension. BO provides a similar environment. As previously mentioned, the package contains an answer key for the exercises, a full transcript of the listening materials and progress tests to ensure that students can maintain their progress. However, I doubt that the abilities of lower intermediate non-native speakers are sufficient to cope with this book on their own; such students may require the assistance of a teacher.

For my course, both books provide new contexts, culture and information to my students. As per their request, I must find materials that would at least enable them to survive in their jobs for a short period. This request leads us to an additional concern regarding the suitability of materials: the teacher/learner mismatch. I can illustrate this problem by describing two possibilities. First, my students may find BO to be appealing, as it is easy and well organised. However, I find that BS has the most valuable information that can fulfil their expectations. The students may claim that BO is suitable for their level, as the book is addressed to lower intermediate-level learners and can

thus fill most of the gaps in their language skills. Furthermore, some teachers might refuse to teach BS, as the text is specialised and requires some background and experience in business. This mismatch must be compromised. The final determination is governed by the experience of a teacher, the objective of a course and the needs of learners.

#### 4.5 Culture

I would rather consider this criterion part of the internal evaluation, as it is important to students. Thus, I must ensure appropriateness for my students. Because of some restrictions that are imposed by the Ministry of Culture and Media, certain books whose contents primarily contradict the Islamic and Saudi culture are banned or forbidden from being taught. Visuals of wine, for example, are not accepted, nor are articles or topics that teach other religions. If allowed by the Ministry, such materials can be used anywhere, except in schools. This factor exerts a significant amount of pressure on teachers. Sheldon notes that 'publishers sometimes neglect matters of cultural appropriateness; they fail to recognise the likely restrictions operative in most teaching situations' (1988: 239).

Both books contain some visuals of wine. However, because I am the authority in this situation, I will approve the use of the book that I will ultimately choose because I teach university students who know the real purpose of writing such books and know that these visuals are only illustrations. These images are not intended to teach or offend students. Moreover, this course is included under the private section rather than the public section that the Ministry controls. Furthermore, by basing our course on a negotiated syllabus, we can exclude material that is deemed offensive. In my view, any offensiveness will be minimal.

One final criterion that is crucial to many sponsors, programme designers and evaluators is the overall cost. I did not mention this factor simply because the learners are self-funded; thus, money is not a concern to them because they are sponsoring themselves. King Faisal University is merely hosting this course.

### 5. Overall Evaluation

McDonough and Shaw (2003) provide a final step, whose importance is similar to that of the other steps. In this step, a teacher finalises his or her analysis and then chooses the book that suits the course objectives and the needs of his or her students. However, my decision will be presented later in the paper. This step addresses the following questions:

#### *Can the materials be used as core or supplementary?*

Both books can be used as core material and can be adapted to my syllabus with different outcomes. That is, the use of one of these books would yield results that differ from the results obtained from using the other book. It could possibly lead to failure as well.

#### *Can the materials be generalised? Will they be useful for all learners?*

Because my learners are homogeneous, I assume that they would benefit from both books.

#### *Can materials be modified to suit your purposes?*

Both books need some type of modification. For example, I cannot cover 64 units in 4 weeks, and BO is not sufficiently informative to learners. Additions and extractions must be made, especially in some reading passages and exercises, to suit the culture of the learners.

#### *Are the materials flexible in sequence and grading?*

BO appears to be more flexible than BS, as the units in the latter book are interrelated.

### 6. Decision

First, we must agree with the following comment by Sheldon: 'the same course book, when judged by the same criteria, could be "successful" in one context, but not in another' (1988: 245). In my context, I would use *Business Studies* as core material with some modifications, but I would use only some exercises (especially the listening exercises) from *Business Objectives* for assignments or homework. The reason for my decision lies in my desire to add more language skill practice to the course rather than limiting the students to only one skill.

Using a combination of both books, I assume that my learners would not be disappointed and that our objectives can be fulfilled. I liked both books, but I cannot hide my preference for *Business Studies*. By examining its language, authenticity and appropriateness, I find that *Business Studies* is preferable to *Business Objectives*. Furthermore, BS contains a great deal of interactivity and provides students with many opportunities for simulation and role play.

### 7. Conclusion

I have analysed two books, *Business Objectives* and *Business Studies*, in two main stages: external and internal evaluations. The external evaluation consisted of a brief scan to determine whether the blurbs and claims of the authors match the content of the books. In the internal evaluation, the two books were judged by different criteria:

language; authenticity; appropriateness; and other factors, such as usability generalisability, adaptability and flexibility.

In ESP, a teacher always aims to fulfil the needs of learners, and textbooks that accommodate all of these needs and objectives are rare. Therefore, a teacher may use supplementary materials to support your core textbook. One problem with evaluation is the subjective nature of checklist design and its subsequent effect on textbook selection; Littlejohn (1998), as cited in McGrath (2002), argues that designing checklists may result in limitations that are linked to what 'desirable materials should look like' (p. 46).

Finally, I cannot claim that this work constitutes a conclusive evaluation, as an empirical evaluation should follow this study. As always, when making decisions, 'two heads are better than one' (McGrath 2002: 52).

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