

# DO TEACHERS USE TEXTBOOKS AS THEIR CURRICULUM?

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## DESCRIPTION

Many teachers do not have helpful language standards, or a workable curriculum, thus frequently textbooks become the backbone of the course. This practice clearly does not benefit language learners, because textbooks are not focused specifically on all of the unique learners' goals, needs, or learning styles that exist in all ESL/EFL classrooms, nor do they focus on the various characteristics within a context.

In this qualitative and quantitative research study, we investigated how four populations of language teachers interacted with their textbook, curriculum and materials in relation to the quality of their teacher training experiences.

### QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES IN TERMS OF DESIGNING CURRICULA, WRITING OBJECTIVES, AND CREATING ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE TEXTBOOK?

In general, qualitative data depicted that teachers use textbooks as a "starting point" for their curricula designs.

❖ "Primarily, I assign reading prior to the class and use it [the textbook] as a springboard."

❖ "I use the textbook as a jumping-off point and as a template for the direction of the curriculum. They assist in determining the scope and sequence as well as articulation from one level to the next."

❖ "I like to use the activities provided in the books as a starting point for many lessons. I usually then add my own activities to give more detail or give the student more practice."

**Participants' responses confirmed that the majority of teachers rely on textbooks in their course curriculum, however, they believe it is important to supplement the text with additional materials.**

❖ "I analyze the text to see what is useful and supplement what is missing or what I believe would be helpful for the students."

❖ "I use it [the textbook] for structure, but I also make a lot of activities to support what is in the text. The text will give a basic idea, but I expand upon it."

**Whether or not participants believed that they had freedom to use additional materials other than the assigned textbook, they felt pressure from administrative authority and parents to cover all content and meet state standards.**

**About 9% of respondents say that they are mandated to follow a textbook almost exactly.**

❖ "We are required to cover a certain amount of material each semester. Teachers who deviate from this are deemed to be uncooperative and not team players, so the best option is to follow the prescribed number of chapters and pages each week."

❖ "[The textbooks are] required and [we are] advised against including supplementary material."

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## POPULATIONS

	English Language (all variants)	Other Languages (Spanish, French, Arabic, etc.)	Totals
English Speaking Countries (e.g., US, UK, Canada, Australia, etc.)	75 ESL	24 FFL	99
Other Language Speaking Countries (China, Mexico, etc.)	64 EFL	20 OSL	84
Totals	139	44	183

### QUESTION 2: DO THE EXPECTATIONS OF TEACHERS' RESPONSIBILITIES VARY FROM SECOND LANGUAGE TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONTEXT?

ESL and EFL educators' responses on most quantitative questions were similar, whereas FFL and OSL educators' responses tended to be alike. ESL and EFL educators indicated that they perceived more freedom from the textbook, while FFL and OSL educator's indicated significantly less curricular freedom,  $F(3, 121) = 5.46, p = .001$ , partial eta squared = .12.

❖ These comparisons show that FL and SL context do not influence teachers' view of responsibilities, however, it is teacher training which impacts teachers' sense of obligation regarding textbook and curricular modification.

❖ Context variables (e.g. materials available, ministry requirements, standardized tests) do, however, influence teachers' sense of freedom to supplement textbooks and make "informed decisions" regarding curricular modification.

## DISCUSSION

Our hypotheses were confirmed in that ESL practitioners modified their textbooks and curricula in order to meet students' needs more than any other population (EFL, FFL, OSL). EFL practitioners closely followed their ESL colleagues in terms of creating their own curriculum and supplementing the text. The FFL instructors tended to rely much more heavily on the text as their curriculum while the OSL teachers varied from the text the least, due to contextual constraints.

These findings are supported by the work of Richards, Tung and Ng (1992). They state, "Even in state school systems, where teachers with a better level of training may be employed, commercial textbooks are often the major teaching resources used" (p. 127).

Furthermore, in relation to our findings regarding the influences on textbook use and curricula design, Richards, Tung and Ng recognize the role of ministries and cultures as applying pressure on when and how textbooks are employed in the classroom. "The Ministry of Education produces test formats or guidelines, publishers produce textbooks to match the guidelines, school districts set in place procedures by which textbooks are reviewed and adopted, lists of approved textbooks are published, and teachers (or their supervisors) then select the books they will use" (1992, p. 127).

## METHODOLOGY

❖ **Sampling** was randomized by sending the electronic survey to listservs, newsletters, and professional organizations of second and foreign language educators. Also, we sent the survey to international colleagues and asked that they share the survey with their colleagues.

❖ **Time:** The survey was live for over 3 months from mid-October 2010 until mid-January 2011.

❖ **Data** was collected via the Qualtrics electronic survey software.

❖ **Data coding and analysis:**

- ❖ Qualitative data was read and coded by employing open coding and content analysis in which we looked to identify patterns in the open-ended responses.
- ❖ Quantitative data was analyzed statistically using frequency statistics and the statistical formula ANOVA, Partial Eta Squared, Tukey HSD and Dunnett C. A. Harmonic mean was used as the populations were unequal.

### QUESTION 3: WHAT INFLUENCES TEACHERS' CHOICES ON CURRICULAR INTERACTION AND TEXTBOOK USE?

Although, all four groups were similarly positive about their training program quality,  $F(3, 149) = 1.15, p = .331$ , partial eta squared = .23. However, responses on all questions related to training on textbook use revealed significant differences in groups. ESL & EFL educators had more training in comparison to FL and OSL educators, **thus teacher training influenced their curricular interaction and textbook use**. Examples:

- ❖ Training on how to adapt textbook materials,  $F(3, 121) = 5.47, p = .001$ , partial eta squared = .12.
- ❖ Training on how to analyze textbook materials,  $F(3, 121) = 6.22, p = .001$ , partial eta squared = .13.
- ❖ Training on how to modify materials to differentiate instruction,  $F(3, 120) = 3.65, p = .015$ , partial eta squared = .08.

❖ The 32% of teachers who felt that they *did not* have the freedom to use alternative textbooks or materials from what was assigned identified "district limitations" and "parental complaints" as influencing their viewpoints.

❖ Those that answered that they were free to use other materials (43%) stated that they chose to do so to better meet course and assessment objectives or to support students' needs by using alternative materials to cover aspects of the language that the assigned textbook did not cover.

❖ The remaining 25% indicated that although they would have liked to use alternative materials to cover content that the assigned textbooks lacked, they felt pressed for time to teach everything required for standardized tests.

**Responses that indicated that instructors felt they had freedom make "informed decisions" concerning curricula:**

❖ "I have enough experience in the field that I know what will be on the exam and what students will be expected to know the following semester, I focus on the things that will make them successful in the next course, even if it's not what they need to converse in real life. If I were to focus on that, I'd be turned out for being a bad instructor."

❖ In general, participants said that they felt they could decide what order to teach material, **they just needed to cover state standards.**

❖ Some said they had no choice, for lack of administrative support.

**Responses that indicated that instructors did not feel they had freedom to make "informed decisions" concerning curricula:**

❖ "The school system lays out the order for things to be taught. If I taught a language that other people in the department taught, I would not be able to [make informed decisions]. The parents would compare teachers and complain too much. The administration would probably back the parents."

❖ "The syllabus, as well as ALL assessment tools (writing, tests, and quizzes), is created by the department. If I deviated from what the department chose in these aspects, my students would not do well on assessments."

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