



The Significance of Course Books in ELT Classrooms: A Critical Perspective from the Libyan Context

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أهمية الكتب الدراسية في فصول تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: منظور نقدي من السياق الليبي

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of using course books in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms, with specific reference to the Libyan context. It aims to investigate the extent to which course books reinforce effective language learning, classify their advantages and limitations, and recommend criteria for their adaptation. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the study draws on critical analysis of applicable literature and reflective classroom observations. The findings imply that while course books remain a central instructional resource in ELT, their effectiveness largely depends on teachers' capability to adapt and supplement them according to learners' needs and contextual factors. The study concludes that course books continue to play an essential role in ELT, provided they are used flexibly and critically.

Keywords: course books, ELT, material adaptation, Libyan context.

المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة أهمية استخدام الكتب الدراسية في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT)، مع الإشارة بشكل خاص إلى السياق الليبي. وتهدف إلى تقصي مدى إسهام الكتب الدراسية في تعزيز تعلم اللغة بصورة فعالة، وتصنيف مزاياها وحدودها، واقتراح معايير لتكييفها وتطويرها. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي النوعي، مستندة إلى تحليل نقدي للأدبيات ذات الصلة وملاحظات صقيّة تأملية. وتشير النتائج إلى أنه على الرغم من أن الكتب الدراسية لا تزال تمثل مورداً تعليمياً محورياً في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، فإن فاعليتها تعتمد بدرجة كبيرة على قدرة المعلمين على تكييفها وتدعيمها بما يتوافق مع حاجات المتعلمين والعوامل السياقية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الكتب الدراسية ما تزال تؤدي دوراً أساسياً في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، شريطة استخدامها بمرونة وبمنظرة نقدية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتب الدراسية، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT)، تكييف المواد التعليمية، السياق الليبي.

Introduction:

The world of English language teaching has been changing rapidly in the last few decades. It seems to be a vital issue in the world nowadays. These changes tend to be important to consolidate the ties between the societies of creating and adapting new methods and techniques. Besides, the methods in language teaching are considered to be essential, as it reflects on language output; at the same time, the issue of using the course book in the language learning programme is likely to be a significant element. Furthermore, the use of course books in ELT is more popular than before and millions of ready-made course books have been produced and sold to different countries around the world.

In addition, in some situations, course books provide the source for a large amount of language input that the students are obtaining and also for the practice of language that occurs in the classroom. Moreover, the production of course books has flourished as a result of the demand curve on course books which is growing in many language institutions, mainly in countries where English taught as a foreign language. Conversely, despite this widespread use, there is a growing need to seek alternative ways of adapting course books or using supplementary materials as a result of developments in teaching materials and advances in technology.

This situation raises critical questions concerning the extent to which course books continue to be effective and contextually appropriate. Accordingly, this study suggests a critical examination of the role and pedagogical significance of course books in ELT classrooms, with particular reference to the Libyan educational context.

Research Problem

Despite the extensive reliance on course books in ELT classrooms, scholarly debate continues regarding the effectiveness of coursebooks, their cultural suitability, and their ability to meet learners' needs, particularly in contexts such as Libya where teachers frequently depend heavily on prescribed materials.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following questions

1. To what extent do course books contribute to supporting effective ELT practices?
2. What are the main advantages and limitations of using course books in the Libyan ELT context?
3. What criteria should guide teachers in adapting course books to enhance language learning?

Objectives of the Study

- 1-Examine the pedagogical importance of course books in ELT classrooms, particularly in the Libyan context;
- 2-Classify the advantages and limitations connected to course book use.
- 3-Explore teachers' reliance on course books in contexts with limited resources and training.
- 4-Recommend practical criteria for adapting course books to better meet learners' needs.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it contributes to ongoing discussions on the role of course books in ELT, especially in under-researched contexts such as Libya. It offers practical insights for teachers who rely heavily on course books and emphasizes the importance of critical and flexible material use. The findings may also benefit curriculum designers, teacher trainers, and educational policymakers by highlighting the need for professional development and context-sensitive material adaptation.

Literature Review

The role of the course book in the language learning programme, Richard & Schmidt define a textbook as "a book (usually as part of a series of books) that contains all the materials necessary for a particular type of language learner at a particular level (e.g. intermediate level adults). Such a book is typically based on an integrated or multi-skills syllabus i.e. one that contains sections on grammar functions, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading and writing". (2002, p. 129).

A textbook can be cited as a published book, particularly designed and planned to assist language learners to enhance their linguistic and communicative capabilities. **Sheldon** (1987) believes that textbooks are principally used as a supporting teaching tool. The student's book is usually provided with various other materials, such as teacher's book, workbook or even extra multimodal texts, to be a particular reference as a course book package. **Cunningsworth** (1995) declares that textbooks are designed to give a good cohesion to the language process by providing instructions and guidelines which can offer good opportunities for better learning. Support and explicit language-based activities are clearly aimed at presenting classroom communication practice for learners and promoting effectual and rapid language learning.

Furthermore, the wide increase in using the textbook in various ELT contexts needs further clarification. It continues to have a crucial role in the English language programme. According to **Torres** and **Hutchinson** (1992), the significance of textbooks in the ELT classroom is very broad and it is considered to have an almost worldwide element in the ELT classroom amongst an increasingly different range of teaching materials. Recent years have given a renewed discussion about the desirability of using the textbooks in facilitating the learning and teaching process. **Byrd** (2001) and **Cunningsworth** (1984) suggest that a huge number of professional teachers integrate the use of textbooks for every day teaching purposes; however, some researchers object to using published materials at some stages of their occupation. Although the significance of using the textbook in the ELT classrooms has been justified by a number of scholars, views and opinions have discussed whether the textbook can actually assist or impede the learning and teaching process. The following section will talk about the advantages and disadvantages of using the course book.

- **Advantages and Limitations of Course Books**

Using course books in the ELT classroom can be an arguable issue and has both positive and negative implications, according to their usage. **Kayapinar** (2009) claims that using the course

books may have good consequences for teachers and learners because the ready - made curriculum comprises carefully designed and well balanced alternatives of language that can be naturally pursued by teachers and learners.

In other words, in the Libyan context many teachers probably use the course books in the ELT classroom as a consequence of providing a great number of activities that can be valuable and uncomplicated to prepare. Moreover, **Ur** (1996) argues that teachers can find the teaching process easier by following the course book; however, the significant point is that teachers need to use the course book critically by producing their own plan. He considered that the over- use of course books can affect teachers negatively; they might become boring because they continually pursue the same progression and the type of activities that is presented in each unit. Students possibly find the target language as routine and less well promoted and this may affect students' progress negatively and decrease the opportunities of acquiring the target language. Many language teachers find the course book as a supportive way in producing perfect language since their first language is not English so a kind of difficulty may encounter in developing their own syllabus.

In fact, this problem faces many English teachers in my context who are not fully confident about the knowledge they provide. Consequently, using course books tends to be a guarantee for those teachers who do not have sufficient knowledge.

According to **Tomlinson** (2003), course books can provide effectual models of language and input, particularly for non - native teachers, where English is not their mother tongue and they are incapable of producing an accurate model of language. Furthermore, course books can train and guide teachers with insufficient experience or teachers who have rather low confidence to convey the lessons in a communicative way.

In many Libyan institutions, teachers do not have enough knowledge and background to adapt materials and use the communicative activities in the classroom; this could be a result of lack of training courses which have an elaborate role in raising teachers' ability to use different methods and techniques with students. Therefore, those teachers are relying on using the course book most of the time.

According to **Richards**, "If teachers have limited teaching experience, a textbook, together with teacher's manual, can serve as a medium of initial teacher training". (2001, p. 1). **Cunningsworth** (1984) assumes that teachers should bear in mind that course books will serve teachers well, if appropriately selected and utilised. In other words, teachers have to use the course books actively and avoid being passive teachers in allowing the course books to set the objectives. **Harmer** supports this idea by stating that "Even teachers who are enthusiastic course book users, however, need to see them as proposals for action rather than instructions for action." (2007: 153).

Besides, course books can provide a variety of different resources that have a fundamental role in facilitating the learning process. According to **Richards**, "textbooks are often accompanied

by workbooks, CDs and cassettes, videos, CD ROMs and comprehensive teaching guides, providing a rich and varied resource for teachers and learners". (2001, p.1).

A large number of Libyan teachers with heavy schedules tend to rely more on the course book, as opposed to other teachers with a light schedule. Those teachers believe that they do not have sufficient time to prepare and adapt activities. **Woodward** (2001) believes that the ready-made course book is one of the main facilities that has a great role in saving teachers' time, which can supply teachers with directions and guides that contribute to saving teachers wondering about what and how to teach and which materials should be used. In correlation to this, course books can provide well structured and designed lessons, which can be beneficial for both teachers and learners. Nevertheless, some inexperienced teachers are unfamiliar with using the course book, so they may encounter some difficulties in coping with it, since it is highly structured and the role of the teacher will be decreased. According to **Torres and Hutchinson**, "... textbooks impose a structure on the interaction of the lesson and should be seen, not as an undesirable constraint, but rather as a potentially beneficial phenomenon, which teachers and learners will welcome". (1992, p. 391). However, **Ur** (1996) argues that the structure of the course book may reduce creativity and imagination in both teaching and learning processes. In other words, teachers who rely only on course books and follow the same sequence of activities will reduce the opportunities to use their imagination to create or adapt different tasks and activities.

Connected with this idea, some teachers also consider that the activities that are structured in the course book seem to be superior to their own ideas. The situation in Libya is that many teachers who over-use the course book and pursue the same sequence of activities that are provided in the course book make their learners feel de-motivated and frustrated to meet their needs in acquiring the language, since teachers are following the same **routine** of providing the activities in the course book. **Tomlinson** (2010) argues that learning the target language should be interactive and should not be restricted to the structure imposed by the course book.

Furthermore, the course book includes diverse topics on the fundamental productive and receptive skills of language learning. However, the majority of course books are written with too much concentration on some skills of language than others. According to **Graves** "there may be too focus on one or more aspects of language and not enough focus on others, or it may not include everything you want to include". (2001, p. 174). It reflects that many course books that are usually used in my context in Libya are 'Cutting Edge' and 'Face to face'; to some extent, these books do not cover all aspects of language that are needed in the learning process.

A good example of that is a huge number of Libyan learners disregarding using punctuation marks in their writing, it seems because of the lack of writing tasks in many course books. **Johnston** supports this idea; he demonstrates that writing tasks can be comprised in the introduction of the teachers' book of "First Certificate Masterclass" but cannot be reflected in writing tasks in students' books. (1994, p. 352). In relation to this, he suggested that most writing tasks seem to be found in learners' work books as personal work they can do and practise at home.

According to **Johnston** "I was generally disappointed with the extent to which process writing is being reflected in these EFL course books. Of the seven books reviewed, only *Intermediate Matters* came out well, incorporating many of the features that I would like to see in course books". (1994, p. 353). In addition, the majority of course books that are written for international

markets may not have a strong correlation with students' needs and consequently they usually do not reflect learners' interests, needs and attitudes towards the English language. **Richard** affirms that "since textbooks are often written for global markets, they often do not reflect the interests and needs of students and hence may require adaption". (2001.p.2). From my personal experience in teaching in the language centre, I have noticed that the majority of English language learners are not interested in some topics that are presented in many course books, particularly cultural topics. According to **Fareh** (2010), many course books are in general culturally inappropriate and this may alienate students and initiate them to increase unenthusiastic attitudes towards learning this foreign language. Another significant point is that the matter of money has a strong correlation with the use of course books in some poor countries. In other words, the cost of course books can be an obstacle for many language institutions and at the same time for many L2 learners. The growth of technology in some countries has supplied alternatives to the use of course books. For example, the laptops can store masses of books in a short memory disk. Therefore, it assumes that there is an increasing tendency for the use of course books to be redundant. **Richards** argues that "despite the impact of new technologies, textbooks will doubtless continue to play an important role in language teaching and provide a useful resource for both teachers and learners". (2001, p. 6)

The situation in Libya is that the majority of students in different levels prefer to buy and rely merely on the course book; they assume that it is the main way of providing the full information of language learning and the most important point is that these course books are gratis for all students, starting from the primary stage and going up to the secondary level. However, to some extent, it seems that the course books are relatively well supported by the government and learners pay just a small amount of money. This is the case for Libyan students in private schools and local centres of learning the language, which are providing English courses for students, such as the courses that are available in the language centre where I teach now.

Eventually, there is no ideal course book in itself, merely teachers who can make the course book work. In other words, teachers can adapt or supplement it in ways that can be suitable for students and the teaching context.

According to **Richards** (2001), both benefits and limitations of the use of course books should be considered and, if the course books that are being utilised in a course are criticised for having some negative results, corrective actions should to be taken, for instance, by adapting or supplementing materials that can be beneficial for both teachers and learners. However, there are some important points that should be considered when adapting the course book, which will be discussed in the following section.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach based on critical analysis of relevant literature and reflective classroom observations drawn from the researcher's teaching experience in Libyan ELT institutions. No quantitative data were collected; instead, the study

focuses on creating theoretical perspectives and contextual insights to address the research questions.

Findings

The findings indicate that course books continue to be a central component of ELT classrooms in Libya. Teachers depend heavily on them because of constraints related to time, training, and resources. Course books provide structure, linguistic input, and guidance for both teachers and learners; however, over-reliance on them may limit learner interaction and creativity. The findings also recommend that teachers who adapt and supplement course books are more successful in meeting learners' needs and enhancing motivation.

Discussion

The analysis indicates that course books remain a central component of ELT classrooms, particularly in contexts where teachers face constraints related to time, training, and resources. However, their effectiveness is closely linked to teachers' ability to adapt and supplement materials. Over-reliance on course books may limit learner engagement and creativity, while thoughtful adaptation can enhance relevance and motivation.

- ***Criteria that should be considered when adapting the course book***

The following is a list of essential key points to take into consideration when adapting the course book or supplement materials. These can be utilised as a suggestion to be developed and adapted to various classroom situations.

Learner-Centredness

Learner centred is an approach in language learning and teaching; it denotes that the teacher puts the needs of the students at the centre of what they perform in the classroom, rather than the student being made just to fit what the teacher needs that has been decided beforehand. According to **Carter** (1993), there is a vast amount of literature on learner centred approaches. But it seems that there is a small amount of material in language teaching and learning that is truly learner-centred in the sense that its goals are the improvement of students' consciousness of the learning process. **Tomlinson** (2003) argues that the materials should put the students at the core of learning process and keep them as the major input suppliers; consequently, teachers and materials should represent the facilitators of language and give a mere stimulus, encouraging a start for language exposure. Materials have to be written in order to facilitate adaption, which should be left primarily in students' hands.

- **Flexibility and choice**

The materials that are chosen for students should be flexible in the sense that they can provide them with the likelihood of choosing diverse activities and tasks and consequently of adapting those materials to their own preferred needs in language learning. The situation in most Libyan institutions is that the learners are not exposed to different types of activities and approaches through the learning process. In other words, when the teachers attempt to adapt or supplement materials, those materials merely focus on one activity, mainly by using one approach. In this

case, learners will not be exposed to different ways of learning which may give them negative attitudes towards the target language. According to **Tomlinson**"... the majority of learners, sadly, are not used to this type of approach; they should also be exposed to a variety of different activities and approaches, so that they themselves become more flexible, having experienced different ways of learning" (2003, p.75).

On the other hand, Tomlinson (2003), declares that materials should provide choice for students but should also allow students to develop a range of skills and techniques by supporting them to be exposed to select for experience a broad variety of tasks; thus, they might become autonomous learners.

- **Modifying content**

When teachers adapt materials, the content should be modified to suit students from different factors. In other words, the content, places, locations and examples need to be localised, depending on students' ages, religions and cultures. An example of my experience in teaching is that, when I prepared some activities for my Elementary class, I noticed that the content would certainly be difficult for my students. It was about types of music and names of actors around the world. Because of students' knowledge about the West about these topics, I adapted materials related to their ages, cultures and religions. By the end of the class the consequences were impressive, because the students interacted brilliantly with the local content. **Richards** supports this idea, "content may need to be changed because it does not suit the target learners, perhaps because of factors related to the learners', age, gender, social class, occupation, religion or cultural background". (2001, p. 4).

- **Universality**

When teachers adapt materials, they have to take into consideration that these materials should be based on commonly appealing themes that are culturally provoking in terms of choosing specific cultural topics. The situation in Libya is that, when teachers attempt to adapt materials, they prefer to select topics merely related to their local culture. Students will have a lack of knowledge to discuss and share different opinions with other students.

Tomlinson (2003) agrees that the topics that are selected to present to learners should be culturally universal; however, at the same time, these topics are presented in the sense that can be presented in all cultures. In other words, these topics can be based on feelings, relationships and life experiences. So, these can be shown in all cultures but it seems that they can be looked at from diverse views, in order to enable students to discuss different topics and become more aware of cultural distinctions and similarities.

Conclusion

To conclude, a significant issue about the use of course books in the ELT has been argued in this essay. There are many advantages regarding the use of course books. The ready- made course books that are designed by experts of English are a strong support for students, as they provide course books with a variety of different resources that have a fundamental role in facilitating the

learning process. Furthermore, the course books are not only useful for students but also for teachers, since they can train and guide teachers with insufficient experience or teachers who have rather low confidence to convey the lessons in a communicative way.

However, there are those who are against the use of course books. Some scholars argue that many course books are in general culturally inappropriate and this may alienate students and initiate them, increasing unenthusiastic attitudes towards learning this foreign language. As well, teachers who rely only on course books and follow the same sequence of activities will reduce the opportunities to use their imagination to create or adapt different tasks and activities. Furthermore, the issue regarding the use of course books is not easy to solve. However, many specialists in this field attempt to provide alternative solutions for this problem by adapting or adjusting the course book and some significant criteria have been discussed in the case of adapting the course book. The study concludes that course books remain essential in ELT, particularly in contexts such as Libya, provided they are used flexibly and supplemented to meet learners' needs. *The study recommends providing teachers with continuous professional development in materials adaptation and communicative teaching approaches, particularly in EFL contexts such as Libya.*

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Compliance with ethical standards

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