



RESEARCH PAPER

ESP Materials Evaluation of the Psychology Students at Bahauddin Zakariya University and its Affiliated Colleges in Multan

¹Dr. Faiza Masood ²Dr. Iram Rubab*

1. Ph.D., Department of English, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to explain the process that took place to evaluate English material for the Psychology students at BZU and its affiliated colleges in Multan. This research aimed to determine the suitability of the English material for the students of this particular discipline in the academic context. To achieve this goal, one questionnaire comprised of the following 10 items (physical qualities of the text, content and subject matter, specific vocabulary, reading skills, writing skills, listening skills, speaking skills, illustrative material, supplementary material, and the availability of the material) was formulated. The participants included 40 Masters Students and 60 BS students of the Psychology Department from BZU and its affiliated colleges in Multan. The collected data were quantitatively analyzed. The findings presented a clear picture of the less suitability and effectiveness of the existing ESP material for Psychology students in the academic context. Thus, through this study, the effectiveness of the existing ESP material in the discipline of Psychology was investigated and suitable related material according to the academic needs of the Psychology students is suggested.

KEYWORDS ESP, Materials Evaluation Textbooks

Introduction

The usefulness of the existing ESP material in the discipline of Psychology at BZU and its affiliated colleges in Multan has earlier not been investigated and thus, stakeholders mentioned that in-use ESP material does not completely cope with the required needs of the Psychology students in the academic context. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the effectiveness and suitability of the existing ESP material for Psychology students in the academic context. Hence, in ESP, the material is associated with the student's specific language learning needs. Therein, ESP is considered a classroom-based, learner-centered, and materials-driven program concerned with practical outcomes (Dudley-Evans, 2001). As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) discussed that ESP must be considered as an approach, not merely a product so, ESP is designed for a specific group of people in a particular context. Therefore, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) comes under the category of teaching language for Specific Purposes (LSP) (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Despite merely facilitating the learning procedure, materials play a pivotal role in multiple ways in the learning procedure and are also considered important in any curriculum. Maximum language input and classroom practices that the students receive and are engaged in, their basis linked with textbooks and materials. Swan (cited in 1986, Robinson, 1991) presented eight reasons, why materials evaluation is underdeveloped in the context of ESP, some of the main reasons are the simplicity and uniqueness of the

ESP course, the time-consuming nature of the evaluation, and the lack of need for evaluation.

One of the most important and crucial elements of general language learning, and specifically of ESP, is to see if books and materials serve the purpose of the course. This happens through the process of materials evaluation and evaluating textbooks, which is the subject of the current research. While in the context of the Psychology Department, systematic evaluation of the English material is not usually done and students' needs and opinions about materials designed for them are ignored. This study examines whether the use of English material is suitable for Psychology students. It also describes the benefits of conducting an evaluation process.

Literature Review

In this section, the relevant literature on materials evaluation is taken into consideration.

Materials and Books

In any educational context, textbooks (material) play a pivotal role in providing learning content and helping teachers to fulfill their responsibilities. In the words of Riazi (2003, p. 52), "Materials (Textbooks) play a very important role in language education, and learning and are also considered to be the second most important element of second/foreign language education after teachers." Hutchinson and Torres (1994) mentioned that textbooks (material) are a universal element of [English] education. Millions of copies are sold each year, and numerous charity projects are being launched to create them in [different] countries ... it doesn't seem to be perfect until the corresponding textbooks are available, in the educational and learning situation (p.315). O'Neill (1982) highlighted four reasons to use a course book. First, most of the textbook material is suitable for students' needs, even if they are not specifically designed for the students. Second, it allows students to plan their future learning and also review their previous materials and lessons. Third, materials (course books) provide learners with high-quality materials at a reasonable price. Eventually, appropriate material helps teachers to adapt and modify them to match the student's needs, allowing for natural interaction as well. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) esteemed that materials play an important role in all learning situations and facilitate teachers to fulfill their responsibilities. They have given four reasons for using materials: a) as a source of language, b) to facilitate learning c) for encouragement and stimulation, and d) as a reference. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) mentioned six objectives for materials: they should (a) provide an impetus for learning, (b) facilitate in organizing teaching and learning processes, (c) integrate the nature of language and learning, (d) depicts the nature of the learning task, has (e) beneficial features in extending the foundation of teacher education, and (f) gives a model for appropriate and suitable language use. Although the materials play a significant role in the learning process, it must be considered that many scholars claim that excessive reliance on materials and books and deprivation of supplementary material can adversely affect the students (Allwright, 1981; Cunningsworth, 1995; Stern, 1992; Swales, 1980).

Materials Evaluation

Materials (textbooks) are one of the important resources used to achieve the purpose of a course based on the needs of the learners (Brown, 1995). With regard to the significance of the textbooks (materials), it is important to confirm that these textbooks meet the required and suitable criteria. In the words of Cunningsworth (1995), we need

to make sure that "wise selection is made and the carefully selected materials accurately reflect the purpose, methods, and values of the curriculum" (p. 7). One of the ways to help achieve the above goals is the evaluation process. As Nunan (1991) states:

"The selection process is greatly facilitated by using systematic materials evaluation procedures. This ensures that the materials match the needs and interests of the students and that it is consistent with the institutional ideology regarding the nature of learning and language (p.209).

Sheldon (1988) recommended multiple reasons to evaluate textbooks (materials). He states that the materials (textbook) selection is an indicator of educational decisions, including important professional, financial, and political investments. By the evaluation, teachers are familiar with the content of the available materials (textbooks) and identify their weaknesses and strengths. Another reason for the materials evaluation is recommended by Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997). They claim that evaluation can be seen as a form of professional empowerment and improvement, as well as a means of conducting action research. It can also be a part of a teacher training course that will make future teachers more sensitive about the important features which they need to locate in the textbooks (materials). Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) contemplated three kinds of material evaluation: Pre-use or predictive evaluation to review the future or potential performance of the material (textbooks), in-use assessments to examine the materials (textbooks) currently in use, and retrospective or post evaluation which helps to decide how to improve a particular textbook (material) for later use. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) determine evaluation as asking a question and following the answers. Further, they claim that the evaluation "commenced with deciding what information to collect and ends by making changes in current activity or influencing the future activity" (p.128). They classified the evaluation into two types: summative and formative. As Dudley Evans and St. John mentioned that formative evaluation includes "mini-evaluations". This type of evaluation will help to make the essential changes in the course by including both materials and books. A comprehensive (summative) evaluation comes at the end of the course or as the course is completed. This type of evaluation is used to assess the usefulness of the course and also to enhance the new versions of the course or material.

Similarly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) considered evaluation as a process of matching needs with the possible given solutions. They classified the evaluation procedure into four phases: a) criteria definition, b) subjective analysis, c) objective analysis, and d) matching. Further, they mentioned that in order to make the appropriate choice, the various stakeholders involved in the course must be considered: students, teachers, and sponsors. The following three types of materials evaluation have been distinguished by Robinson (1991): a) preliminary (before the start of the ESP course), b) summative (as the course is completed), and c) formative (during the course). She mentioned that the evaluation can be performed by both outsiders and insiders. Another difference in Robinson (1991) is between process evaluation and product evaluation. The former evaluation process deals with education and learning processes, strategies, management, and decision-making processes, and the latter evaluation process deals with student products such as exam results and essays. In addition to formative and summative evaluation, Richards (2001) proposes another type of evaluation, termed "illuminative". He describes this type of evaluation in the following way:

"It is an evaluation designed to know how various aspects of a program are working or implemented. It aims to give a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning processes that take place in the program, without necessarily trying to change the course" (p.289).

McDonough and Shaw (2003) propose a three-level model for textbook evaluation. First, an external evaluation that studies the arrangement of the material specified by the author or an editor. This includes information on front page disclosure, referral, and table of contents. This type of evaluation provides information about the target group (intended audience), skill levels, usage, material presentation and arrangement, writers' opinion regarding language and methodology, audiovisual material usage, vocabulary lists and indexes, cultural aspects, tests in the book, and exercises written in the book. Next, is the internal evaluation and which examined the following elements: a) Skill performance, b) evaluation and ordering of the materials, c) credibility or artificiality of listening materials, d) credibility or artificiality of speaking materials, e) appropriateness of tests and materials and f) the suitability of the material for multiple learning styles and the author's claims concerning self-study. The last step is an overall evaluation, which looks at factors such as ease of use, adaptability, and flexibility. So, different scholars from different countries have worked in the area of materials and textbook evaluation. Different aspects of materials evaluation in different disciplines have been studied in the past but hitherto, in the discipline of Psychology, materials evaluation has not been subject to a scientific study. Therefore, it was important to conduct a complete and sustained study on the related unexplored area, to cover the methodological and population research gap in the discipline of Psychology. In the methodological research gap, different research methods are used in order to get new insights whereas, in the population research gap, the under-researched or not sufficiently represented population is considered. So, both these research gaps pave the way for this unexplored area of research.

Material and Methods

This research is aimed to evaluate the existing ESP material regarding its usefulness for students of Psychology. In this context, the data was collected from BS and Masters' students of the Psychology Department at BZU and its affiliated colleges in Multan. Thus, this study's total number of participants were 100 Psychology students; 40 Masters' students and 60 BS students from BZU and its affiliated colleges in Multan. In order to collect data from the students of Psychology, one questionnaire related to the English material was used for the evaluation. It was based on the evaluation model of Sheldon (1988) and modified by Karimi (2006). The related questionnaire comprised of the following ten aspects: physical qualities of the text, content & subject matter, specific vocabulary, reading skills, writing skills, listening skills, speaking skills, illustrative material, supplementary material, and the availability of the material. The researcher herself gave a briefing to the research participants about the study for a few minutes, making them aware of the process they should go through. To assess the effectiveness of the ESP English material, the participants were asked to rate their opinions in the related questionnaire on the following three-point scale: Yes, No, and To some extent. Then the data was analyzed quantitatively, interpreted and presented in the form of a bar graph.

Results and Discussion

The area of investigation in the existing research was of practical concern as the questionnaire used for data collection was comprised of ten items related to the ESP material. The findings of the data are quantitatively analyzed, interpreted, and then followed by a bar graph. Findings of the first question regarding 'physical qualities' revealed that 44% BS student, and 73% Masters' students voted in favor, while 12% BS students, and 08% Masters' students chose 'no' and 56% BS students, 19% Masters' students chose 'to some extent'. Thus, it reflects that the majority of the Masters' students

voted in favor of the physical qualities of the existing ESP material while most of the BS students do not accept it.

With reference to, findings of the second question in relation to 'content and subject matter' indicated that 14% BS students, 54% Masters' students selected 'yes', 66% BS students, 32% Masters' students chose 'no', whereas 20% BS students, 14% Masters' students chose 'to some extent'. Hence, it is evident that majority of the students didn't find the content of the English materials interesting; out of whom most of the Masters' students considered content and subject matter interesting whereas the majority of the BS students do not consider it interesting in the existing ESP material.

In the third question regarding 'vocabulary', the results indicated that 17% BS students, 32% Masters' students chose the option 'yes', 72% BS students, 59% Masters' students chose 'no' while 11% BS students and 08% Masters' students chose the option 'to some extent'. Therefore, it is clear that majority of the students were not satisfied with the sufficient practice of vocabulary enhancing activities given in the English materials; out of whom BS students considered that the existing ESP material is not providing appropriate practice concerning the vocabulary while the Master's students voted in favor of it.

Regarding the findings of the fourth question concerning 'reading skills' revealed that 36% BS students, 22% Masters' students chose 'yes', 28% BS students, 64% Masters' students chose the option 'no' and 36% BS students, 14% Masters' students chose 'to some extent'. Thus, it reflects that the majority of BS students agreed that the reading skills provide the required practice while most of the Masters' students do not agree with it.

Regarding the fifth question 'writing skills' the findings revealed that 23% BS students, 38% Masters' students chose the option 'yes', 64% BS students, and 57% Masters' students chose 'no', whereas 13% BS students and 05% Masters' students chose the option 'to some extent'. The result indicates that the majority of BS students are not satisfied with the existing ESP material for providing the required writing skills practice, while Masters' students considered it satisfactory.

Concerning the sixth question in relation to 'listening skills' the result indicated that 25% BS students, 16% Masters' students chose 'yes', 57% BS students, 77% Masters' students chose 'no' while 18% BS students and 07% Masters' students chose 'to some extent'. Hence, it is obvious that most of the students are not satisfied with the listening skills practices; out of whom Masters' students are highly dissatisfied with the listening skills practice in the current ESP material, whereas BS students accept it.

The findings of the seventh question 'speaking skills' exhibited that 20% BS students, and 30% Masters' students chose the option 'yes', 60% BS students, 30% Masters' students chose the option 'no' and 20% BS students, 40% Masters' students chose the option 'to some extent'. Thus, it is evident that majority of the students are not satisfied with speaking skills practices; out of whom large number of BS students considered that the existing ESP material do not provide the required practice in speaking skills whereas Master's students considered it satisfactory.

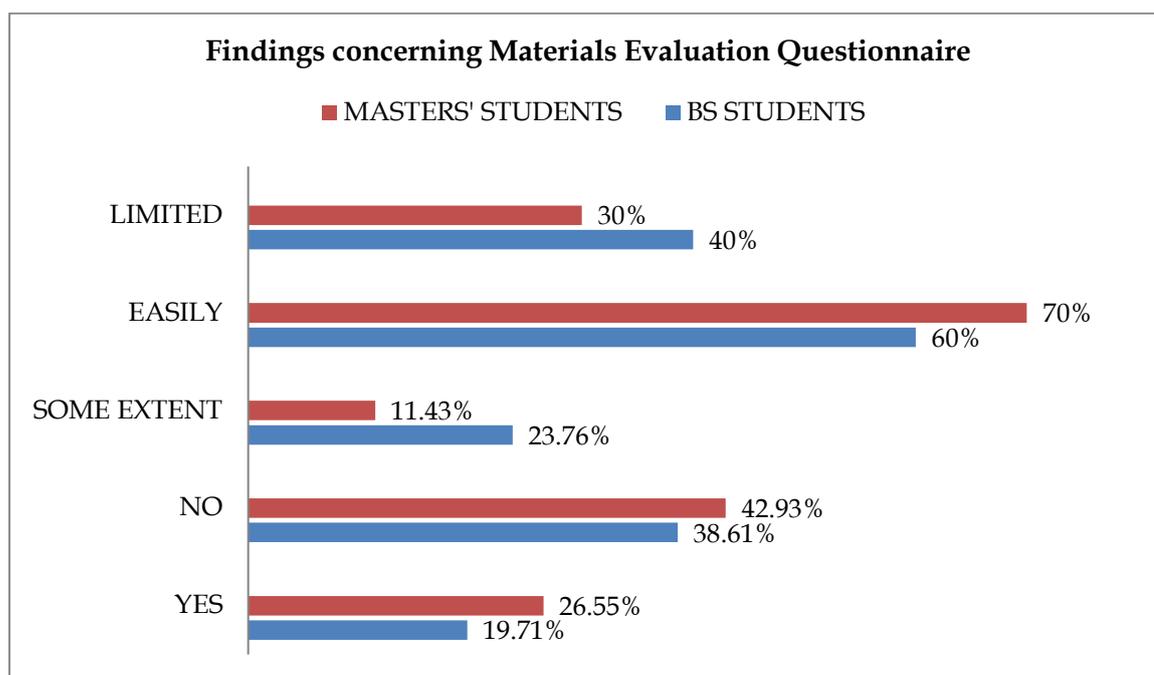
Regarding the eighth question 'illustrative material' the findings revealed that 10% BS students, 20% Masters' students chose 'yes', 40% BS students, 70% Masters' students chose 'no', while 50% BS students and 10% Masters' students chose "to some extent". It reflects that the majority of both, BS and Master's students do not consider the illustrative material in the existing ESP material helpful.

In relation to the findings of the ninth question regarding “supplementary material” indicated that 30% BS students, 10% Masters’ students voted in favor, 30% BS students, and 80% Masters’ students chose ‘no’, whereas 40% BS students and 10% Masters’ students chose ‘to some extent’. Hence, it is clear that the majority of Masters’ students do not consider the supplementary material helpful in enhancing the effectiveness of existing ESP material while BS students considered it helpful to some extent.

Findings of the last question ‘availability of the materials’ revealed that 60% BS students, and 70% Masters’ students chose the option ‘yes’, and 40% BS students, 30% Masters’ students chose the option ‘no’. Thus, it clearly reveals that the majority of both BS and Master’s students agreed that material is easily available.

Overall findings of the study revealed that the students of Psychology Department of BZU and its affiliated colleges are not satisfied with the existing ESP materials. The content, language skills, vocabulary, illustrative materials and supplementary materials are not enough to cater the students’ English language needs to cope up the situations as represented in the following bar graph 1:

The following bar graph 1 summarizes the findings of the study.



Conclusion

Based on the above-mentioned information, it seems that the existing English material used in the Psychology department does not adequately meet the needs of Psychology students. The material lacks a good range of pictures or illustrations, which can lead to boredom among students. Additionally, the material does not provide sufficient practice in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills specifically related to the field of Psychology. As a result, Psychology students' command of the English language is insufficient, hindering their ability to perform well within the academic context. The overall findings suggest that the course contents of the English syllabus for Psychology do not align with the requirements of Psychology students. In a nutshell, the current ESP material used in the Psychology department does not effectively cater to the needs of Psychology students. It lacks visual aids, fails to provide practice in relevant

language skills, and overlooks the importance of introducing simple structures and vocabulary early in the course.

It is recommended to introduce simple structures and vocabulary early on in the course. This approach will help students become familiar with the basic English language elements and prevent them from feeling overwhelmed by the introduction of complex structures, later on. Further, models of correct and appropriate field-related language use should be provided. Lastly, it needs to be focused that the contents set in the ESP material must be relevant to the learners' context and needs. Thus, flexibility and adaptability of material and textbook to context of use is highly recommended.

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