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An Evaluation Study on ASP Textbook ‘Advanced Media Arabic’

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Abstract

The objectives of this paper are two folds: firstly, to highlight the systematic approach adopted in evaluating an ASP textbook and secondly, to report the status of an ASP textbook ‘Advanced Media Arabic’. For this purpose, the paper adopts analytical method, with analysing the Arabic language experts’ comments and suggestions towards the proposed criteria of the evaluation tool. The tool was initially developed by To'eima in evaluating Arabic textbooks and then extensively developed by a group of researchers and IIUM post graduate students. The paper also adopts evaluation method in assessing the ‘Advanced Media Arabic’. The discussion in this paper will have three main parts; the first is with its focus on development of evaluation tool, the second is on the methodology and the procedure of evaluation study, while the last will present the findings of this study. The paper will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the book as well as putting some technical advice and suggestions to improve the book’s quality.

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Keywords: ASP textbook; Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers; Evaluation criteria for ASP textbooks; Evaluation tool

1. Introduction: Foundations of Preparing ASP Textbook

There are four bases in the preparation of a book for the teaching of Arabic to non-Arabic speakers: educational, psychological, cultural, and linguistic [1].

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The educational basis includes several categories of principles: the pedagogical principles of public and private education which include the philosophy, objectives, exercises, tests, teaching aids, and makers of educational materials; the principles of organization of educational materials, which concern continuity and integration; the principle of educational guidelines when dealing with different aspects of the substance of education; the principles relating to clarity of the educational materials and their readability; the principles related to its contents; and the principles related to its suitability and teach ability.

Psychological basis is important in any educational process because of the facts related to the growth of the learner in terms of construction, installation, form, content, and principles related to learning theories and the role of orientation and motivation in the learning process. This basis takes into account the quality of help in the preparation of educational materials and selection, organization and material to cope with levels of growth and suitability to the learners' tendencies.

The cultural basis is the content of the book. Culture is the content of the shell language, which cannot be introduced without ideas, information and cultural knowledge. This is an essential basis in determining the materials to be presented to learners. From this perspective, the cultural aspect, cognitive, intellectual and information are important in the selection of language versions in the preparation of educational materials. Hence, we understand that culture supplements the language, while it is also one of the ultimate goals of learning a foreign language.

There are four types of culture: Arab culture, Islamic culture, local culture and global culture. The Arab culture means "group of facts and intellectual activities, artistic and academic group of contemporary peoples belonging to Arab civilization". While the Islamic culture means "beliefs, concepts and principles, values and patterns of behaviour approved by the Islamic religion represented in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah" [2]. The local culture is the culture of the country and the beliefs and concepts, principles, values and patterns of behaviour recognized by the society in which learners belong to and events about their environment. The global culture on the other hand, refer to facts and events in the global level and is the update on the age and modern communications as subjects of world culture.

The language basis is the most important element. Language has four systems: sounds system (phonetics and phonology), word forms system (morphology), structure system (syntax), and meaning system (semantics). When preparing the educational materials, we have to choose those language elements, organize and grade them in a gradual manner according to the educational levels.

Yet another basis which should be considered is the technical or technological basis because of the fact that technology has a prominent presence in the private and the weight of various fields of life including education. Therefore, it is proposed that this basis is added as the fifth basis in the preparation of contemporary educational materials. Thus, the educational needs in the globalized and information technology era are met by making educational materials in a better way to achieve effective educational goals.

Technological basis means taking into account the foundations of technology in terms of designing components of the learning materials through educational technology and organizing them systematically, providing technology elements in the selection of language content, and choosing the contents of knowledge, learners' learning experiences, exercises and activities [3].

According to the American Association for Educational and Communications and Technology (ACTFL), the meaning of educational technology is "the process of integrated composition includes individuals, methods and ideas, equipment and its systems to analyze, design, implement and evaluate solutions to problems that require education and meaningful learning" [4].

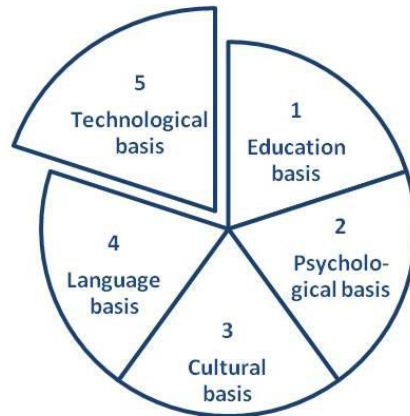


Fig. 1. The foundations for preparing Arabic for Specific Purposes textbooks

2. Towards the development of the evaluation tool for Arabic language teaching textbooks

The Standards of Rushdie To'eima in the evaluation of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers' books are considered a common tool in the field of teaching Arabic language and it is considered the most popular among researchers and evaluators, as found in many studies and research done in the Arab and Islamic countries. In Malaysia, there are more than ten Master's and PhD dissertations which have made use of Rushdie To'eima Standards.

Over time, researchers have modified these standards because they needed to be developed and improved to keep up with modern technology and information technology. One of the researchers attempted to modify these standards, and his attempt was successful and deemed academically valuable, so this present study aims to develop these standards especially as Rushdie To'eima has agreed to procedures for amendments to them, as mentioned by Muhammad Haron Husaini.

From here, we find the importance of this study is to fill the need in the evaluation of books for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers in general, taking into account the factors of time and space and the scientific revolution, globalization and technical communication information on the Internet to reach new standards based on the principles of new methodology.

Therefore, this study is based on several scientific studies and researches on common standards in the field of language teaching as indicated below:

2.1 Standards for evaluating Arabic books for non-native speakers'

(1) *Rushdie Ahmed To'eima Standards (1985): [5]*

These standards contain 50 sub-standards gathered in eight basic categories accompanied by a grading card. The tool of those standards is designed and called the books for teaching Arabic to non-native speaker's assessment tool using manual calculation method.

(2) *Muhammad Haron Husaini Score Card (2007): [6]*

This score card contains four sections with 16 aside in 122 sub-standards. The tool of those standards is designed and called estimates book card using estimate degrees of grade: excellent, very good, good, acceptable, and weak. These standards were prepared by Muhamaad Haron in his research for his doctoral dissertation on the analytical study of five books for teaching Arabic in five private institutions of higher education in Malaysia, focusing on their compatibility with the scientific basis of teaching Arabic to non-Arabic books from teachers' and authors' perspective as well as Malaysian Arabic language experts'. These standards have been modified based on

Rushdie To'eima standards mentioned above with the approval of Rushdie To'eima himself. Muhammad Harun's study is considered as a recent study that is seen as reliable for this developmental study.

2.2 Standards for evaluating English as foreign language textbooks

(1) *Skierso Checklist (1991)*: [7]

This checklist contains two parts: first, preliminary data for educational book, branching from learner backgrounds, teacher backgrounds, approach backgrounds and educational institution backgrounds. The second is the standard for evaluating the book and teacher's guide, branching out from evaluating the book under six categories in 63 sub-standards, and evaluating the teacher's guide under four items in 49 sub-standards. This list is considered one of the most complete and comprehensive standards among four other standards used and selected in the field of English language books, as Jayakaran concluded in his research for his doctoral dissertation. A test was carried out by expert teachers to ensure the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of this list.

(2) *Jayakaran Mukundan Standards (2004)*: [8]

This standard consist of three tools: the previous Skierso checklist, Common Concordance list based on a programme (tool Word Smith 3.0), and Reflective Journal for teacher's notes. These standards were designed in the researcher's doctoral thesis, which he discussed the new framework design for evaluating teaching English books by using three tools which were used earlier in the evaluating process. The researcher did some tests to ascertain the effectiveness of these tools before arriving at the results. These three tools are considered the most important tools in the process of evaluating teaching English as a second language programme.

(3) *American Council Tool for Teachers of Foreign Languages*: [9]

This tool consists of two parts in 40 sub-standards. This tool is issued as the Standards for Learning Foreign Languages [10] from the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). It is well known that this Council places much attention to the process of learning and teaching foreign languages and produces a large number of publications on this issue, including the standards for learning foreign languages which include five important bases, namely, communications, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities, or what is known in short as the 5C's. The tool used by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages in the evaluation of textbooks contains two parts: first, evaluation based on the previous five bases; and second, evaluation depending on the seven elements of the curriculum which are language system, communication strategies, cultural science, strategies of learning, content of other materials, critical thinking skill and technology. In addition, there are also other standards designed based on these five principles (the 5C's), including Cisar's study in 2000 [11] from the University of Indiana. This study has been developed in 2007 into 'World Language Standards-Based Textbook Evaluation Form' under the Education Department of the same university [12].

2.3 Standards for evaluating Malay language textbooks [13]

(1) *Ministry of Education Malaysia Standard*:

These standards contain three parts: preparation of books, preparation of a CD-ROM, and preparation of a teacher's guide. General standards are used to evaluate the textbooks used in schools under the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Authors and writers also depend on these same standards to author textbooks. These standards are divided into standards for books in primary schools and standards for books in high school and both are available on the Ministry website. The Ministry of Education has decided that all textbooks used in schools should be attached with two CDs, one for the learners and the other for the teachers. This treatment is aimed at using multimedia and communication technology during the teaching and learning processes to encourage teachers and learners to make use of information communication technology.

3. The tool for the evaluation process

The following table describes the ten (10) sections with twenty nine (29) evaluation items of standards for evaluation of ASP textbooks:

Table 1: The standards of ASP textbooks evaluation

First-Book Planning and Production:	
(1) General information.	(2) Curriculum nature.
(3) Production.	(4) Book objectives.
Second-Principles of Book Preparation:	
(5) Basis of book preparation.	(6) Language of the book.
(7) General teaching method.	
Third-Language Skills:	
(8) Listening skill.	(9) Speaking skill.
(10) Reading skill.	(11) Writing skill.
Fourth-Language Elements:	
(12) Phonetics.	(13) Vocabulary.
(14) Language structure.	
Fifth-Language Sciences:	
(15) Morphology.	(16) Syntax.
(17) Literature.	(18) Rhetoric sciences.
Sixth-Cultural Content:	
(19) Cultural Content.	
Seventh-Training and Exercises:	
(20) Language exercises.	(21) Educational activities.
(22) Tests and evaluations.	
Eighth- Learning Strategies:	
(23) Self access learning.	(24) E-learning.
(25) Educational aids.	(26) Additional readings.
Ninth- Teaching Aids:	
(27) Teacher's Guide.	(28) CD / DVD
Tenth- General Impression:	
(29) General impression.	

4. Discussion of the evaluation result for the 'Advanced Media Arabic' textbook

General Information: The author of the Advanced Media Arabic was El Mustapha Lahlali, who has experiences in teaching of Arabic media and works in the department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Leeds. This book was published in 2008 by the Edinburgh University Press Ltd, Scotland and only has one part with 292 pages.

Objectives: This book is useful to those learners who wish to learn different typologies of advanced media texts, and also suitable for learners who wish to learn translation skills from and into Arabic. This book also offers advanced media materials for those who are interested in widening their knowledge of Arabic.

Target students: Learners who have learnt intermediate media vocabularies and need more advanced texts. Special consideration was intended for teachers and advanced learner of Arabic as a foreign language.

Content of the book: 10 modules of Diplomacy, Elections, Violence and Anarchy, War and Military Action, Economy, Law and Order, Trade and Industry, Natural Disasters, "War on terrorism" and Arabic TV extracts which have almost the same structure and layout for reading, listening, writing, translation material as like list of vocabularies in every module.

Skills: It helps learners to practice basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing through the authentic media Arabic materials. The listening materials from prominent Arabic channels are presented via the University's web. The oral skill is developed through the exercise of debate and discussion. The free writing exercise and extensive translation practice aims at developing the learner's writing skill.

Basis for the book writing: A trial session was carried out by the final year students of Leeds University and the author has taken into consideration the students' essential feedback. The book uses English as the medium of instruction.

Evaluation Tool: Out of 29 evaluation items, only 22 items was implemented in this evaluation process. This is because the following: Phonetics, Vocabulary, Language Structures, Morphology, Syntax, Literature, and Rhetoric sciences are not applicable as this book only focuses on the teaching of the four basic language skills and translation.

Table 2: The evaluation results of the ASP textbooks-Advanced Media Arabic

No.	Sections	Evaluation Sub-items	Total Mark	Score	Percentage
1	General Information	13	52	42	80.8%
2	Production	21	84	76	90.5%
3	Curriculum Nature	7	28	24	85.7%
4	Book Objectives	6	24	24	100%
5	Basis for Book Preparation	8	32	30	93.8%
6	Language of the Book	6	24	24	100%
7	General Teaching Method	6	24	24	100%
8	Listening Skill	15	60	57	95%
9	Speaking Skill	13	52	46	88.5%
10	Reading Skill	12	48	44	91.7%
11	Writing Skill	11	44	32	72.7%
12	Cultural Content	14	56	39	69.6%
13	Language Exercises	7	28	28	100%
14	Educational Activities	8	32	28	87.5%
15	Assessment	6	24	14	58.3%
16	Self-Access Learning	8	32	28	87.5%
17	E-Learning	5	20	19	95%
18	Teaching Aids	8	32	32	100%
19	Additional Readings	8	32	16	50%
20	Teacher's Guide	7	28	22	78.6%
21	DVD / CD	6	24	0	0%
22	Educational Content	5	20	20	100%
	Total Score	200	800	669	83.6%

4.1 *The strength of the book:*

This book is ‘excellent’ with full score (100%) in the following aspects: (i) Book objectives, the objectives of this book are clearly stated at the introduction of the book, to teach advanced learners as the target group. (ii) Language of the book, even though the language instruction in the book is English but the texts and other materials are provided in Arabic without any language errors. (iii) Educational content, the exercise, test, reading and listening materials are prepared in a very good way with a variety of patterns. (iv) Language exercises, good and suitable language exercises are used. (v) General teaching method, the method implemented in this book takes into consideration the language level and background of learners. (vi) Teaching aids, the teaching aids used are very helpful for the learners to catch up the subject contents easily.

The book is also considered ‘very good’ in the following items, scoring of 90% and above: (i) Listening skills, the book does not really provide specific steps to distinguish between the main ideas and secondary ideas. (ii) E-learning, the book provides fewer opportunities to build the communication skills between the teacher and the learner using the technology, (iii) Basis of book preparation, the language medium of the book is English. It limits for those who have already learned the language or for native speakers. It does not to take advantage of the differences between the learners’ native languages and their target language. (iv) Reading Skill, the book gives less attention to help learners to acquire the skill through reading aloud, even though the book is intended specially for advanced learners. (v) Production, even though with less attractive cover and less images and graphics, it is meant for matured students.

The book is still good with 80% and above in the following aspects: (i) Speaking skill, the book includes less role-play games to help learners to speak, similarly it does not familiarise learners with Arabic greetings and other proper expressions in order to understand the Arab culture. (ii) Educational activities, some of the activities look like stereo-type with fewer varieties. (iii) Self-learning, not all the lessons include take home assignments. (iv) Curriculum nature, the book does not suggest specified time period of learning for each unit or lesson. (v) General information, no edition number and the contact number of publisher or author, only the website address is provided.

4.2 *The weakness of the book:*

Improvements are required in the following aspects: (i) Teacher's Guide, the book does not provide guidelines and steps as well as the length of time period for each unit. (ii) Writing Skill, the book is not designed to identify the different types of Arabic calligraphy. (iii) Cultural Content, no illustrations to differentiate between the Arab culture and Islamic culture in the book. The book also have less Arab and Islamic cultural concepts to be integrated in the text book. (iv) Assessment, fewer varieties of language exercise and assessment sets are included in all the components of the lessons in the book. (v) Additional Reading materials, less additional reading materials related to the topics provided at the end of the module. (vi) DVD or CD, the book is not accompanied with the DVD or CD which is considered necessary for more digital contents with extra access to the similar materials and topics for teachers and students. See table 2 and figure 2.

General result

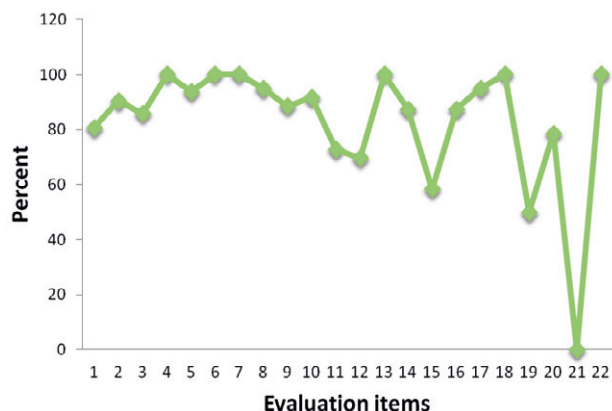


Fig. 2. The graph of evaluation results

5. Conclusion

The book ‘Advanced Media Arabic’ is considered a very good textbook with the total score of 83.6%, based on the evaluation using the latest tool of evaluation. This book is suitable and applicable for those who are interested in the field of Arabic for media purpose, because its language contents are based on authentic materials extracted from prime Arabic media. Despite learning four basic language skills from this book, translation skills can be learned at the same time. In addition, the learners also can improve both their Arabic and English.

It will be a better text book when improvements on the book have been made. Some suggestions for the improvements are to add more exercises and test items, more reading materials, more contents with Islamic culture, the teachers’ guide section, an accompanying CD/DVD in addition to the online materials, and more varied writing exercises.

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