REVISTA KRONOS

Pilot testing of three English texts at the National University of Education

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ABSTRACT   This study aimed to compare three English textbooks to demonstrate their advantages and disadvantages in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and determine the best option to use. The three English textbooks used were Touchstone, English File, and Headway. The participants were 187 students from the National University of Education (UNAE) in Ecuador. This was a quasi experimental study where quantitative and qualitative data were collected. A pre-test and post-test were administered to the students at the beginning and end of the study. In addition, a survey was conducted with the students and a checklist was given to the teachers to collect quantitative data. A survey with open-ended questions was used to gather qualitative data from the teachers. The results suggested that English File was the best option for our context because the students learned better and increased their English proficiency compared to the other two textbooks. Furthermore, the teachers agreed that the English File is more useful because it offers a variety of resources that reduce teachers' planning time..

KEY WORDS   Textbook, evaluation, EFL, university

Pilotaje de tres textos de inglés en la Universidad Nacional de Educación

RESUMEN   Este estudio tuvo como objetivo comparar tres libros de texto de inglés para demostrar sus ventajas y desventajas en un contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) y determinar la mejor opción a utilizar. Los tres libros de texto de inglés utilizados fueron Touchstone, English File y Headway. Los participantes fueron 187 estudiantes de la Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE) en Ecuador. Este fue un estudio cuasi experimental donde se recopilaron datos cuantitativos y cualitativos. Se aplicó una prueba previa y una prueba posterior a los estudiantes al inicio y al final del estudio. Además, se aplicó una encuesta a los estudiantes y una lista de verificación a los profesores para recopilar datos cuantitativos. Se utilizó una encuesta a los profesores con preguntas abiertas para recopilar los datos cualitativos. Los resultados sugirieron que English File fue la mejor opción para nuestro contexto porque los estudiantes aprendieron mejor y aumentaron sus conocimientos de inglés en comparación con los otros dos libros de texto. Además, los profesores estuvieron de acuerdo en que English File es más útil porque tiene una variedad de recursos que reducen el tiempo de planificación de los profesores.

PALABRAS CLAVE   Libro de texto, evaluación, EFL, universidad.

INTRODUCTION

Selecting the right tools for an English lesson is a significant part of teaching English. One of the most used tools in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is the textbook. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), no teaching environment is complete without a relevant textbook, and both teachers and students tend to acknowledge its usefulness, especially if it is presented as a package, namely, it is accompanied by multimedia and online resources.

Since 2016 the Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE) has been teaching English in its Language Center using the Touchstone series. However, not all teachers at the University were satisfied with the Touchstone course book so they decided to consider other options for a textbook to use to teach English in their classes. Choosing a book that matches the teachers and students' needs was fundamental for the University.

Selecting a textbook is a complex task and over the past decades a number of methods have been created for their evaluation. Many rubrics have been in circulation, but the way Chambers (1997) lists down some of the pedagogical factors that need to be considered still seems to be valid: «suitability for the age group, cultural appropriateness, methodology, level quality, number and type of exercises, skills, teacher's book, variety, pace, personal involvement, and problem solving» (pp. 29-30).

Three textbooks were chosen for the evaluation process of this study: Touchstone, American English File, and American Headway (see the References section for the editions used). In Ecuador, university students need to reach a B1 level of English in order to graduate (with the exception of those who train to become English teachers, who need to reach a B2 level); this is stated by the Reglamento de Régimen Académico (2019) (Ecuadorian Academic Regulation) and in the Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior (2014) (LOES - the Law on Higher Education). Therefore, the aim of the present research project was to establish which of the three suggested textbooks would fulfill the requirements of creating the best conditions for our university students to successfully achieve the prescribed level.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The effective evaluation of teaching materials is of paramount importance for EFL teachers (McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2013). The term 'evaluation' is best understood as defined by Tomlinson (2003): «Materials evaluation is a procedure that involves measuring the value (or potential value) of a set of learning materials» (p. 15).

Richards and Renandya (2002) summarize the advantages and disadvantages of the use of textbooks. Some advantages are: they provide structure and a syllabus for the program, help standardize instruction, maintain quality, and provide a variety of learning resources. Furthermore, they are efficient, can provide effective language models and input, can train teachers, and they are visually appealing. However, there are also some disadvantages, for example, they may contain inauthentic language, may not meet students' needs, they can deskill teachers, and are usually expensive (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

The evaluation process usually takes place in two stages. The first is an 'impressionistic overview', while the second is an in-depth evaluation. In McDonough and Shaw's interpretation (2003), an external evaluation is based on the overall organization of the course book as well as the statements that the author makes about it. An internal evaluation involves a deeper analysis of the units and requires the evaluator to reflect on aspects like the presentation of skills, sequencing and the appropriateness of the texts included. Course book assessment can be a subjective activity, therefore, Tomlinson (2003) stresses

that this element can be reduced by using a principled and systematic process which applies a criterion-referenced evaluation.

EVALUATIVE CHECKLISTS

Course book evaluation has been going on for decades now; see especially Mukundan and Ahour's work (2010), which contains a review of textbook evaluation checklists for nearly four decades (1970–2008). Cunningsworth (1995) and McDonough and Shaw (2003) have created checklists which are based on the understanding that course books should match learners' needs and help them learn how to use the language effectively.

Mukundan, Hajimohammadi and Nimehchisalem (2011) provide an exhaustive overview of how an English language textbook evaluation checklist can be created. They start out by defining the terms to be applied as follows: pre-use or predictive evaluation, which «helps teachers in selecting the most appropriate textbook for a given language classroom»; in-use evaluation, which «aids the teacher to explore the weaknesses or strengths of the textbook while it is being used»; and finally, «post-use, or retrospective evaluation, which helps the teacher reflect on the quality of the textbook after it has been used in a particular learning-teaching situation» (p. 21).

Mukundan *et al.* (2011) suggest the following criteria: 'general attributes' and 'learning-teaching content' with the first category divided into five sub-categories: Relation to syllabus and curriculum, Methodology, Suitability to learners, Physical and utilitarian attributes, and Supplementary materials. The second category has the following subdivisions: General (task quality, cultural sensitivity, linguistic and situational realism), Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation, and Exercises.

The authors emphasize that an ideal checklist needs to be economical as they remind us of Cunningsworth's warning: «it is important to limit the number of criteria used, and the number of questions asked to manageable proportions; otherwise, we risk being swamped in a sea of detail» (1995, p. 5).

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH STUDIES

Gutiérrez Bermúdez (2014) carried out an exercise in course book evaluation by looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the course book *New English File*: *Elementary* used in Colombia. He emphasizes that teachers should develop their own evaluation criteria instead of relying on checklists that might have been created for contexts that are different from theirs (p. 103). He suggests a structured qualitative evaluation arranged under five headings: book design, curricular and material design, task design, usability and versatility. Each of these criteria is formulated as a question with brief instructions for the evaluators and a rather detailed description of the considerations that should be considered. The result is exactly the type of assessment that Mukundan *et al.* (2011) have warned against: a rather unwieldy and verbose qualitative description resulting in the verdict that the book in question «has a very solid and verifiable curricular foundation» (p. 109).

In the Vietnamese context, Tu, Trang and Phuong (2013) carried out an in-use evaluation of *American English File*, which is also one of the course books that was evaluated by the Ecuadorian English teachers who wrote the present paper. The empirical study involved asking 14 teachers and 103 students to answer the statements of two checklists (one for the teachers and another one for the students). The authors used a Likert-type five-point scale to measure attributes like the match of the course book to the specifications of the syllabus, the learning-teaching content, the appropriateness of the tasks and

the development of various learning styles. Overall, both the teachers and the students of Ho Chi Minh City University were satisfied with the course book, with the exception of the development of writing skills, which is, apparently, somewhat neglected.

Shahmohammadi (2018) employed an eclectic checklist to evaluate the textbook series called *Prospect*, which is used in junior high schools in Iran. The course book was written by a team of six Iranian authors: Moghaddam, Khodaparastan, Kheirabadi, Sarab, Foruzndeh and Ghorbani. While *Prospect* was overall deemed better than the series used before, the 34 EFL teachers gave low marks on many of the 38 items included in the checklist, such as the authenticity of the materials, the recycling of the vocabulary and the presentation of pronunciation. A high proportion of the respondents were dissatisfied with the tasks and activities presented in the course book claiming that they do not sufficiently motivate and challenge learners.

Lisna (2016) carried out a retrospective (post-use) evaluation of the course book *Speakout Intermediate* by creating two questionnaires for four teachers and 21 students, thereby carrying out a 'micro-analysis' based on a fairly small sample of adult learners in Ukraine. The one for the teachers comprised 30 criteria split into five categories, while the one for the students was less specific and contained only 15 criteria. Both the teachers' and the students' evaluations reflected a high level of satisfaction (no results below 70% agreement). Nevertheless, there was mixed feedback regarding the virtual workbook, and the criteria related to using the learnt language in real life situations also received a relatively low score.

Another retrospective evaluation of an ELT course book, *Fifty-Fifty Book One* (Wilson & Barnard, 2007) was carried out by Jones (2009), who assessed its effectiveness and appropriacy for a conversation course at a South Korean university. The conversation program, which is run by native speaker instructors, focused on speaking and listening skills. Jones adopted McDonough and Shaw's framework (2003) but eliminated several criteria that she considered irrelevant. Her main findings are as follows:

- The topics have an appeal to a wide range of learners.
- The material is tailored to the needs of Asian students aspiring to learn American English.
- The dialogues and tasks are culturally Western, owing to a 'Western' focus, they need some adaptation for Asian students.
- The listening scripts are semi-authentic, and mimic possible real-world interactions.
- Active student interaction is encouraged.

The textbook evaluation criteria applied by the researchers for the present study are based on an adapted version of McDonough and Shaw's (2003) criteria, which is aimed at exploring and explaining the weaknesses and strengths of each textbook and selecting the best option for the university.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The research population of the current study involved all pre-service teachers (who, by default, take English classes) from the Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE) in Ecuador. The sample consisted of 187 students from the different majors, such as early childhood education, elementary education, special education, intercultural bilingual education,

science education, arts and humanities pedagogy, and national and foreign language pedagogy. The students were attending their first level of English classes with four hours of English every week for 16 weeks. All the participants were Spanish native speakers and the students from this semester were going to use the textbooks for the first time, which we hoped would provide a fresh perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of each textbook.

After selecting the sample, the three textbooks were examined to decide which grammatical structures and vocabulary were going to be taught during the semester so that all first-level students learned the same grammar and vocabulary. Also, collaborative lesson planning was used to make sure that the conditions in each classroom were similar.

As for the team working on the evaluation, it included 3 English teacher researchers who designed the research and taught using the 3 textbooks. The textbooks that were used during this research were Touchstone 1 (TS), American English File Starter (EF), American Headway Starter (HS). Teacher researcher 2 (T2) and teacher researcher 3 (T3) used all three textbooks; however, teacher researcher 1 (T1) only used English File and Headway.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

The research project adopted a quasi-experimental method approach to accomplish a comparative study of the three English textbooks. Data gathering was carried out by administering a pre-test, a post-test, and a survey to the students, as well as a textbook checklist (for quantitative data) and a survey (for qualitative data) for the teachers.

Students took a pre-test and post-test which was an adapted version of the Macmillan Straightforward beginner and elementary placement test (Kerr, Jones, Clandfield, Norris, & Scrivener, 2012). The test consisted of thirty multiple-choice questions. The first twenty-five were grammar questions and the final five were vocabulary questions. Students gave both tests in person, in a hard-copy format. The pre-test was taken at the beginning of the semester and aimed to identify the students' English level. The post-test was used to measure students' learning at the end of the semester. Applying a pre-test and a post-test not only allowed teachers to gauge how much students increased their knowledge and understanding of the English language but also to compare students' progress in the classes that were using the three textbooks.

As mentioned above, data collection also included two surveys and a checklist. Firstly, at the end of the semester, an online survey was administered to the students by google forms. Students were asked to provide their answers on a scale of four options (1 = standard, 2 = good, 3 = very good, and 4 = excellent). The survey was given to the students in their native language (Spanish) so that they could have a better understanding of the questions. It consisted of three parts with four questions in each. The first part focused on the content and vocabulary of the textbook. The second part of the survey referred to the exercises and the physical aspect of the textbook. The last part of the survey asked students for their opinion about the virtual platform of the textbook that they were using. The questions of our survey were based on McDonough and Shaw's (2003) criteria.

A textbook checklist, which was adapted from Mukundan *et al.* (2011) was administered to the teacher researchers. This checklist asked for the evaluation of general attributes, methodology, suitability for learners, physical and utilitarian attributes, efficient layout of supplementary materials, and the learning-teaching content. All the teacher researchers filled in the checklist for each of the textbooks they used during the treatment.

Additionally, a survey was filled out by the teacher researchers. The survey consisted of six open questions about the different English textbooks they were using. These ques-

tions were also based on Mukundan *et al.*'s (2011) checklist. This survey was applied to gather the teacher researchers' more in-depth points of view.

RESULTS

A total of N = 187 students participated in the tests and were divided as follows: Touchstone 45, English File 73 and Headway 69. Table 1 shows the pretest and posttest ratings of the different texts: Touchstone, English File and Headway. It also shows that there was a 5.71 improvement in the students that used Touchstone, 6.68 improvement with English File, and a 5.85 improvement with Headway. Although the differences in the test results are minimal, students using the English File course book seem to have achieved a marginally better score.

Table 1 presents relevant results for the pretest analysis, as it shows that the 3 groups are very similar when comparing their mean and median values. However, a better mode value in the pretest rating is displayed in the Touchstone group, with a rating of 13, compared to the other 2 groups with ratings of 9 and 10. The standard deviation values suggest that the pretest scores are more clustered around the mean in the 3 groups. Additionally, the pretest rank values are high in the English file and Touchstone groups, with very low scores of 2 and 4, respectively.

On the other hand, this chart presents aspects of the posttest that suggest improvement in all groups. The similarity of improvement is on par in the 3 groups, highlighting the groups that used Headway and Touchstone by the mode value in the posttest with a rating of 21 equally, and much lower for the English file group with a posttest rating of 18. The standard deviation values have decreased in the groups, denoting a clustering closer to the mean compared to the pretest, which was more slightly dispersed, reflecting the intervention of each of the texts used by the teachers. Overall, it can be said that the 3 groups have improved their English skills, since when analyzing the range of minimum and maximum scores compared to the pretest and posttest, they have raised their ratings.

In the next section, we will review the online survey filled out by the students. Table 1 and 2 touch upon the topics presented in the three textbooks, and Table 4 presents questions related to the virtual platform of each textbook.

Let us first look at how students evaluated the topics and content of the textbooks.

The data shown in table 2 demonstrate that students' level of interest in the topics presented in each textbook is similar for English File and Touchstone. However, English File's content seems to be the most relevant to students' needs and it also appears to present the most adequate amount of vocabulary. Furthermore, when we look at both the Very Good and Excellent scores, the textbook that contains the easiest topics to understand is English File.

Table 3 illustrates students' perspective on the exercises, activities, and presentation of the textbooks.

As the results of this table show, Touchstone appears to have the right amount of variety of exercises in line with the topics learned. Students can practice exercises that have clear instructions and require no guidance. It needs to be pointed out that English File has grammar exercises that are followed by vocabulary and pronunciation activities and every unit ends with a communicative activity where students apply the content of the whole unit. The students believe that Headway provides the right amount of practice. Finally, English File has the highest level of acceptance regarding the presentation of the textbook because it has some videos with appropriate content to improve English proficiency.

Table 4 presents the data on the virtual platform and multimedia resources of each textbook.

Table 1. Pre- and post-test results

	Pretest Headway	Post test Headway	Pretest English file	Post test English file	Pretest Touchstone	Post test Touchstone
Valid	N = 69	N = 69	N = 73	N = 73	N = 45	N = 45
Mean	13,90	19,75	13,40	20,08	13,33	19,04
Median	13,00	21,00	13,00	20,00	13,00	19,00
Mode	9,00a	21,00	10,00	18,00	13,00	21,00
Std. Deviation	4,11	4,31	4,38	3,45	5,34	4,03
Range	18,00	18,00	25,00	14,00	21,00	16,00
Minimum	7,00	11,00	2,00	13,00	4,00	10,00
Maximum	25,00	29,00	27,00	27,00	25,00	26,00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.
Source: Data gathered by the authors

Table 2. Content and topics

CATEGORIES	STANDARD	GOOD	VERY GOOD	EXCELLENT
1. Level of interest				
2. Level of relevance				
3. Level of comprehension				

Table 3. Practice and presentation

CATEGORIES	TS	EF	HW	TS	EF	HW	TS	EF	HW	TS	EF	HW
	STANDARD (%)			GOOD (%)			VERY GOOD (%)			EXCELLENT (%)		
5. Variety of exercises				10	6	9	31	37	33	59	57	58
6. Helpful activities				7	4	4	38	65	51	61	31	44
7. Sufficient practice	3	2	0	3	4	2	41	45	51	52	49	47
8. Textbook presentation	7	0	0	10	4	0	24	29	40	59	67	60

Source: Data gathered by the authors

Table 4. Virtual platform and multimedia resources

CATEGORIES	TS	EF	HW	TS	EF	HW	TS	EF	HW	TS	EF	HW
	STANDARD (%)			GOOD (%)			VERY GOOD (%)			EXCELLENT (%)		
9. Relevance of videos in the textbook	3	0	2	10	8	16	21	37	44	55	49	36
10. Ease of use of the virtual platform	3	10	9	17	10	13	415	31	51	38	49	27
11. Level of practice on the virtual platform	0	4	4	14	10	9	48	27	47	38	59	40
12. Level of interactive exercises	0	1	0	14	15	7	38	38	7	48	46	40

Source: Data gathered by the authors

The results show that Touchstone has the most relevant videos. However, English File is perceived as the most useful platform where students could learn doing a variety of exercises to improve their English. Also, students viewed the virtual platform of English File as the one with the most appropriate level of practice, whereas Touchstone provided students with the largest number of interactive exercises.

TEACHERS' SURVEY

After the instruction process, the teacher researchers filled in a survey questionnaire containing a series of open-ended questions comparing the three books. The questions were adapted from McDonough and Shaw (2003) and aimed at collecting the teachers' impressions and evaluations of the textbooks. The layout of the survey helped the teacher researchers organize their reflections methodically.

English File and Touchstone were considered easy to use by all teachers, as they contain clear objectives and many different types of activities that are well-linked. The teachers had more difficulty using Headway as the objectives were not that clear and it was more difficult to understand the activities. The main characteristics evaluated in the survey are listed below. For easy reference, the books' names are abbreviated: English File (EF), Headway (HW) and Touchstone (TS).

EASE OF USE AND PLANNING LESSONS, ACTIVITIES, AND UNIT OBJECTIVE CLARITY

Teacher researchers 1 and 2 agreed that all three textbooks are easy to follow. Teacher researcher 3 stated that HW was somewhat harder to handle since the contents were not well-connected with the grammar points, and some topics were difficult to explain.

All teacher researchers believed EF presents many carefully designed activities that are easy to understand both for teachers and students. However, the vocabulary and grammar activities are inconveniently located at the end of the textbook.

Concerning unit objectives, teacher-researchers 2 and 3 found HW's objectives not as clear as those of the other two textbooks, while teacher researcher 1 thought that the unit objectives were very clear in all three textbooks.

PLATFORM USE (USER-FRIENDLY/DIFFICULT/NON-EXISTENT)

Students worked with the virtual platforms that EF and HW provided, whereas teachers decided not to work with the TS platform because of its price and, therefore, students only worked with the student's book. The virtual platforms presented several inconveniences: some students' grades did not register properly in the teachers' grade books, and another issue was that students often forgot their passwords, making it difficult to send them the activities as homework.

EXTRA PREPARATION NEEDED TO DELIVER LESSONS

All teacher researchers said that EF contains enough materials to deliver the lessons. What is more, it provides extra materials that are useful for tutorials. As opposed to this, when using the HW textbook, the teacher researchers were required to find complementary materials to

explain grammar and provide extra practice. As for the Touchstone textbook, they agreed that looking for additional material proved time-consuming. This became necessary because they had to find different resources to reinforce the grammar presented.

BOOK ORGANIZATION (PICTURE, GRAMMAR PRESENTATION, SKILLS, TOPICS SEQUENCE)

As teacher researcher 1 worked only with EF and HW, she did not comment on TS in the remaining part of the survey.

All teacher researchers agreed on EF being a textbook that progresses gradually and presents grammar in chunks in an easy way to teach beginners. Teacher researchers 2 and 3 thought that HW's main drawback is the way grammar is presented since it is integrated into the book without any explicit explanation or practice, leading to the opinion that its contents are not well-organized.

Considering skills, teacher researchers 2 and 3 stated that although HW is communication-oriented, its tests are grammar-based, which constitutes a contradiction. They also agreed that the TS textbook is presented in a well-organized fashion. However, one clear disadvantage is its lack of meaningful listening activities.

The teacher researchers stated that they prefer real images, over cartoons, as used in HW and TS.

DO THE TOPICS ALIGN WITH STUDENTS' INTERESTS AND CONTEXT?

All teacher-researchers considered the topics contained in EF and HW suitable for beginners; most of them are interesting and contextualize English culture. TS also has some engaging topics, however, some of them are not relevant for students, because several topics are probably more appropriate for mature learners.

ACCESS TO THE BOOK'S EVALUATIONS, TESTS, AND QUIZZES

Teacher researchers mentioned that EF has a wide range of evaluation tools available on the Assessment CD, and these are easy to download and edit. They also agreed on how they judged HW's evaluation resources, which are not as vast as EF's resources and nor are they editable. TS provides fewer evaluation resources than the other two textbooks, and the Test Crafter is not user-friendly.

DISCUSSION

The pre-test and post-test comparative statistics show that students' initial proficiency scores were congruent in the three groups with slight variation between them, this means that the groups' starting bases were similar. Furthermore, they were evidenced subtle differences between data of the three books, the use of English File helped students to make a marginally greater progress in test performance, EF obtained the highest mean of the three and the lowest range of variance and standard deviation; however, we cannot claim that these results in themselves are conclusive evidence to declare that English File is more effective because of several limitations that will be discussed later on.

The results of the students' survey showed that all three textbooks were generally well-received. Nevertheless, the English File textbook had the most positive responses overall, on the grounds that it has the most relevant topics presented in the most appealing manner. As for the linkages between grammar, vocabulary and exercises, the variety of exercises and how interactive and interesting the exercises are, the students' responses showed that there was little difference between the three books. Even though the students' opinions are important, since their views are crucial in deciding which textbook would be most suited to their needs, the students did not have the opportunity to examine and use all three textbooks. This means that they could not compare the books, since they were only exposed to the textbook that was assigned to their particular group.

According to the findings of the checklist, the features encountered in English File stand out over the other textbooks. These results overlap with the students' choice. We consider that in the teaching-learning process it is important that, as suggested by McDonough and Shaw (2003), both students and teachers agree on the textbook that fits their needs and interests.

Results from the teachers' survey showed an agreement that English File provided the largest amount of appropriate material, meaning that it was easier and quicker for teachers to plan classes. At the other end of the scale, Touchstone does not provide enough communicative activities to use in the class and its topics were deemed more suitable for mature learners. It needs to be pointed out, though, that, as mentioned earlier, students were not given either Touchstone's workbook or its platform, consequently they did not have the experience of working with the complete Touchstone material. In terms of content, English File received the most positive responses. The teachers liked the fact that the grammar was taught in small, manageable chunks and the students were given lots of practice. English File applies a solid scaffolding process which has proven beneficial to the students.

From all these findings, it is clear that all three textbooks have their advantages and disadvantages, and there is no perfect option. However, overall, the students' online survey, the teachers' checklists, and their survey, showed that English File would be the most suitable textbook at UNAE. A more recent consideration in favor of EF is that it is also compatible with the current context of online learning because its lessons have enough material that can be adapted to remote lessons. Considering the wide range of resources that English File provides for students and teachers to contribute to their English instruction and learning, teachers from UNAE's Language Center decided to change the actual textbook (namely, Touchstone) to English File.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study had to deal with some drawbacks and limitations. Firstly, the pre-test and post-test applied were multiple choice and therefore the students' results were subject to an element of luck, although the chance factor would have applied to all learners and could have distorted the results in equal measure. Secondly, several other factors such as teachers' effectiveness and learners' individual characteristics, for example, motivation and learning styles can also affect students' achievements and progress. Furthermore, most students involved in the study were first-semester students that had studied at public high schools where either no course books or only low-quality textbooks provided by the government were used. This means that, for the majority of the students, this was their first experience using an English textbook from a world-renowned publisher (Oxford or Cambridge). These factors limited the students' ability to evaluate any of the three textbooks in a sophisticated manner.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language at university level in Ecuador is not an easy task, students from different ethnic and language backgrounds come together in the first year of university and working with that wide range of cultures and backgrounds make the experience challenging. However, standardizing the instruction with the help of high-quality English textbooks is a possible solution to cope with this challenge. Testing the three textbooks gave teacher researchers the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practices and how textbook contents fulfill learners' needs and interests.

The teacher-researchers' experiences during the carrying out of this study was rewarding and satisfactory since they had the opportunity to analyze several textbooks and, therefore, they functioned not just as practitioners but also as curriculum designers.

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