APPLIED CRITERIA IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NARIÑO'S LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT WHEN SELECTING TEXTBOOKS 1980 – 2008

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Abstract

A textbook can be useful different purposes for teachers: as a core supply, as a basis of supplemental material, as an inspiration for classroom activities, even as the curriculum itself. The purpose of the following paper was to analyse the University of Nariño's Language Department's situation when facing students' textbook selection.

A study through time was carried out starting in the decade of the eighties up to the present time in order to know the background and the factors which in anyway have influenced this feature. The study was performed taking into account the University of Nariño's Language Department's English teachers' opinions about this topic. They were asked through interviews about the existence of any kind of organized process for selecting students' textbooks, the applied criteria when doing this selection, who has had the responsibility of deciding it and how have it changed through time.

The results showed that there hasn't been any organized process when selecting textbook's in the University of Nariño although the applied criteria have suffered some changes across the time. It is important to highlight that not all the teachers have taken part on textbook selection and that the most important factor to do this selection has been the economic factor.

Resumen

Los profesores pueden usar un texto para diferentes propósitos: como un suministro principal, como una base para material suplementario, como una inspiración para actividades de aula, incluso como el currículo o plan de estudios en sí mismo.

El objetivo del siguiente trabajo fue analizar la situación del Departamento de Idiomas de la Universidad Nariño frente a la selección de los textos para los estudiantes.

Se realizó un estudio a través del tiempo, comenzando en la década de los años ochenta hasta hoy días con el fin de conocer los factores que han influido este proceso. El estudio fue realizado teniendo en cuenta las opiniones de los profesores de Inglés del Departamento de Idiomas de la Universidad Nariño acerca de este asunto. Se les preguntó por medio de entrevistas sobre la existencia de alguna clase de proceso organizado para seleccionar los textos, quien ha tenido la responsabilidad seleccionar los textos, los criterios aplicados para llevar acabo esta selección, y como ha cambiado durante el tiempo.

Los resultados mostraron que aunque los criterios aplicados hayan sufrido algunos cambios a través del tiempo, no ha habido ningún proceso organizado seleccionando los textos para los estudiantes en la Universidad de Nariño.

Es importante destacar que no todos los profesores participaron en la selección de textos y que el factor más importante para hacer esta selección ha sido el factor económico.

Introduction

When talking about teaching and learning, we are not only talking about teachers and students, but also materials and any other resource that might be helpful in order to achieve the goal of an adequate and complete educational process. Through time it has seen in universities, academies, schools and many educational contexts, how useful books, videos, discs, DVDs are, not only as a source of valuable information but also, as a tool for teachers when supporting their classes. Up to this point it is important to highlight that an adequate use of additional material does not mean that the educational mission of a teacher has finished and that a teacher can be replaced just by a book, as it unfortunately can be seen in many contexts in which the teacher has become the additional "element" inside the class. Nowadays, regarding language learning, several alternatives make their appearance. It can be found that, even depending on the skill that wants to emphasize, there is an "adequate" tool for each one, but this adequateness is nothing if there is not a good use of that source. As language teacher forming institutions, Universities have the responsibility of making careful decisions when selecting the best option regarding material, because students need to be well prepared in English but, according to real contexts, and that means, social, economic, or political ones.

Luckily, it is not very difficult to find language learning material, the big deal is, how to select it, what makes them different to each other, and why. This should be a cyclical process in which material must be constantly evaluated in terms of methodology, pedagogical aspects, results, impact on teachers and students and every single aspect that involves the educational process otherwise, besides a helpful tool, materials will never be able to help students the way they should.

CHAPTER 1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Description

Despite the fact that textbooks are milestones in EFL classes, there has been surprisingly little investigation done in terms of how and why textbooks are selected by institutions. The reason for this may lie in the fact that in the age of communicative teaching, experts who advise on the use of textbooks may seem out of step with current language teaching methodology.

Analyzing how great an emphasis is placed on the use of authentic materials, teachers frequently do not have the time, or the administrative support, to collect and adapt textbooks for their classes. Therefore, it is disappointing that researchers have not provided more guidance to enable teachers and administrators to make wiser decisions regarding textbook selection.

As a language teachers forming institution, the University of Nariño has the responsibility not only to prepare its students in languages, but also to give them the best resources in order to achieve this process in the most complete way.

Problem statement

¿How have the applied criteria when selecting students' textbooks in the University of Nariño's Language Department changed during the Period 1980 – 2008?

Objectives

General

Describe the way the applied criteria in the University of Nariño's Language Department have changed when selecting students' textbooks in the period 1980 – 2008.

Specific

Find out whether the University of Nariño's Language Department has carried out any organized process for selecting students' textbooks.

Describe in which way teachers from the University of Nariño's Language Department have participated in textbook selection.

Describe whether these applied criteria have changed through time.

Significance

Regarding that textbook selection plays such an important role in the language learning process, it is necessary to understand how the University of Nariño's Language Department has faced this feature. To clearly understand it, a study through time was a useful tool in order to get valuable information about the way in which textbooks in the University of Nariño's Language Department have been selected, what elements have affected this selection, and whether this important feature has changed through time.

A wise decision when selecting a textbook is determinant for developing a complete teaching learning process because not only teachers, but also students are directly affected by any factor inside this feature.

Delimitation

The applied criteria when selecting students' textbooks and how has this feature changed through time in the University of Nariño's Language Department was analyzed. For this purpose, some of the Department's English teachers were asked whether they knew the way in which textbooks were selected, what criteria had been applied and if in anyway they have had any kind of participation or opinion.

There were interviewed six English teachers; two women aged 35 – 60 and four men aged 35 – 55.

The interviews took place in the University of Nariño.

Conceptual

Textbook. A manual of instruction or a standard book in any branch of study. They are produced according to the demand of educational institutions. Although most textbooks are only published in printed format, many are now available as online electronic –books, e-books and increasingly in scanned format in p2p networks.

Process. All the necessary steps that should be followed in order to achieve a goal.

Criteria. The standards, measures, or expectations used in making an evaluation and/or verification. They are the standards on which a judgment or decision may be based.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

Although criteria application is not a static process, there were not found big changes because as a public institution, the University of Nariño has been affected principally by the economic factor that has restricted textbook selection.

Some of the English teachers' opinions weren't taken into account when selecting textbooks (part-time teachers). According to the department, only the teachers who directly belong to the area have the responsibility when participating in any process which affects in anyway that area.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Use of Materials in language learning

In Language instruction it is possible to talk about five important components; students, teachers, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation. Why are materials important in language instruction? What do materials do in language instruction? Can we teach English without a textbook?

Allwright (1990) argues that materials should teach students to learn, that they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction and learning, and that they should give teachers starting points for what they do. From Allwright's point of view, textbooks are too inflexible to be used directly as instructional material. O'Neill (1990), in contrast, argues that materials may be suitable for students' needs, even if they are not designed specifically for them, textbooks make it possible for students to review and prepare their lessons, textbooks are efficient in terms of time and money, and textbooks can and should allow for adaptation and improvisation.

Allwright (1990) emphasizes that materials control learning and teaching. O'Neill (1990) emphasizes that, they help learning and teaching. It is true that in many cases teachers and students rely heavily on textbooks, and textbooks determine the components and methods of learning, that is, they control the content, methods, and procedures of learning. Students learn what is presented in the textbook, and the way the textbook presents material is the way students learn it. The educational philosophy of the textbook will influence the class and the learning process. Therefore, in many cases, materials are the center of instruction and one of the most important influences on what goes on in the classroom.

Theoretically, experienced teachers can teach English without a textbook. However, it is not easy to do it all the time, though they may do it sometimes. Many teachers do not have enough time to prepare supplementary materials, so they just follow the textbook. Textbooks therefore take on a very important role in language classes, and it is important to select a good one.

<div align="center">The Role of Materials in Relation to Other Elements</div>

Since the end of 1970s, there has been a movement to make learners rather than teachers the center of language learning. According to this approach to teaching, learners are more important than teachers, materials, curriculum, methods, or evaluation. As a matter of fact, curriculum, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation should all be designed for learners and their needs. It is the teacher's responsibility to check whether all of the elements of the learning process are working well for learners and to adapt them if they are not.

In other words, learners should be the center of instruction and learning. The curriculum is a statement of the goals of learning, the methods of learning, etc. The role of teachers is to help learners to learn. Teachers have to follow the curriculum and provide, make, or select materials. They may adapt, supplement, and elaborate on those materials and also monitor the progress and needs of the students and finally evaluate students.

Though students should be the center of instruction, in many cases, teachers and students rely on materials, and the materials become the center of instruction. Since many teachers are busy and do not have the time or inclination to prepare extra materials, textbooks and other commercially produced materials are very important in language instruction. Therefore, it is important for teachers to know how to select the best material for instruction, how to make supplementary materials for the class, and how to adapt materials.

Textbooks

According to Kitao (1999), textbooks are a key component in most language programs. In some situations they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. They may provide the basis for the content of the lessons, the balance of skills taught and the kinds of language practice the students take part in. in other situations, the textbook may serve primarily to supplement the teacher's instruction. For learners, the textbook may provide the major source of contact they have with the language apart from input provided by teachers. In the case of inexperienced teachers, textbooks may also serve as a form of teacher training – they provide ideas on how to plan and teach lessons as well as formats that teachers can use. Much of the language teaching that occurs throughout the world today could not take place without the extensive use of commercial textbooks. Learning how to use and adapt textbooks is therefore an important part of a teacher's professional knowledge.

Why Teachers Use Textbooks

Aside from the fact that they are often required by program administrators, why do teachers use textbooks and how have they become the central focus of so many classrooms? Sheldon (1988) identified three main reasons he believes as the most important ones. Firstly, developing their own classroom materials might be a difficult and arduous process for some teachers. Secondly, teachers have limited time in which to develop new materials due to the nature of their profession. Thirdly, external pressures restrict many teachers. Each of these is an accurate analysis of the strains teachers feel thus; using a textbook is one of the most efficient and readily available ways in which to relieve some of these pressures. They lessen preparation time, provide ready-made activities, and provide

concrete samples of classroom progress through which external stakeholders can be satisfied.

However, there are other less positive reasons for textbook use. Often rather than selecting textbooks that fulfill the goals of the curriculum, "an approved textbook may easily become the curriculum in the classroom" Laime (1999). Any time a program or classroom allows this to occur it is unfortunate because the learners' needs are subjugated in favor of the limited possibilities of the text.

<div align="center">How Teachers Use Textbooks</div>

Inside the classroom, we all know that there is a complete autonomy when using any kind of materials by the teacher. Unfortunately, as it has been said before, some teachers have let the textbook become their curriculum, or even their milestone when teaching.

Some experts advocate a variety of methods for how teachers should use textbooks. Many authors believe textbooks are only a starting point from which teachers are stimulated and provoked to create lessons for their classes. When teachers really understand and learn to see textbooks not as their only option, but as a guide that can be supported specially, by their own knowledge, we may find a real and adequate use of a textbook as a supporting guide inside the language classroom.

Allwright (1990) views texts as "resource books for ideas and activities" rather than as "instructional material" (Kitao 1999). This perspective is supported by Cunningsworth (1984) as he believes that published material provides the initial framework which must be adapted by each individual teacher to match the needs of their students. These viewpoints may represent the ideal model of how texts can simply improve the teachers' effectiveness; they probably do not reflect actual classroom practices.

Skierso (1991) concedes that "most teachers tend to follow the text's sequence, methodology, pacing and vocabulary to the letter". This situation occurs for a variety of reasons: ease of organization of lessons, to provide stability for students or by the will of program administrators to assure that comparable instruction is being presented across courses. Besides institutions have particular curricula, the tendency when using textbooks pre-designed syllabuses, is to lay all teaching and learning responsibility on those texts, but forgetting for whom they were designed. While few experts would advocate such adherence to any text, O'Neill (1977) believes that textbooks may meet students' needs although they were not specifically designed for any particular group of students and therefore benefit both the instructor and the learner.

<div align="center">Advantages and disadvantages when using textbooks</div>

Regarding textbook use it is possible to describe in which way textbooks may be helpful when teaching languages.

1. They provide structure and a syllabus for a program.

2. They help standardize instruction.

3. They maintain quality.

4. They provide a variety of learning resources.

5. They are efficient.

6. They can provide effective language models and input.

7. They can train teachers.

8. They are visually appealing.

However, there are also potential negative effects that can be found as well.

1. They may contain inauthentic language.

2. They may distort content.

3. They may not reflect student's needs.

4. They may reduce teachers' natural skills.

5. They may be too expensive.

Evaluating Textbooks

Selecting a course textbook is a daunting, sometimes overwhelming prospect for both; program administrators and teachers. Nevertheless, it is a prospect that must be respected as it has significant impact on the ability of students to meet their language learning objectives, and affects both; the process of how they learn and the outcomes. Sheldon (1988) asserts that "the selection of a textbook signals an executive educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial and even political investment". Such pressures are compounded by the total volume of ESL texts that are published every year, forcing decision-makers to sort through a seemingly endless assortment of choices, attempting to find those that best match their program or students. Individuals at all levels of a program, from policy makers and administrators to teachers and students, rely heavily on textbooks to achieve prescribed goals and objectives. Therefore, it is vital that all involved consider the importance of their decisions and strive to effectively match textbooks with the identified needs of students.

Methods of Textbook Evaluation

Although many teachers may feel the most effective method by which to evaluate textbooks is to examine the language objectives contained in them, experts have provided a range of approaches that can be used. Most often, an evaluation of the content of the text is advocated, but under this broad topic, what to include in this analysis is the big deal.

Hartley (1994) sees three content areas that must be addressed and advises assessors to ask the following questions. Firstly, does the book meet their teaching objectives? Secondly, is there sufficient depth and extent of material? And lastly, will it need to be supplemented? This final question raises concerns because as previously mentioned, many experts discourage teachers from utilizing texts to a great degree in the classroom, for them, Hartley's question would not even be a consideration. However, when faced with a curriculum and a required text, teachers need to be aware of how to judge the distance that exists between the two and how to bridge it.

Therefore, Hartley's question has significant practical concerns because if teachers are spending substantial amounts of time preparing supplementary material, what purpose is the text serving for them? As well, it is irresponsible to force financially constrained students to purchase textbooks that will not be used for their maximum benefit.

<div align="center">Textbook Evaluation Schemes</div>

If one accepts the value of textbooks in ELT then it must be with the qualification that they are of an acceptable level of quality, usefulness, and appropriateness for the context and people with whom they are being used. While the literature on the subject of textbook evaluation is not particularly extensive, various writers have suggested ways of helping teachers to be more sophisticated in their evaluative approach, by presenting evaluation 'checklists' based on general criteria that can be used by both; teachers and students in many different situations. Although Sheldon (1988) suggests that no general list of criteria can ever be applied to all teaching and learning contexts without considerable modification, most of these standardized evaluation checklists contain similar components that can be used as helpful starting points for ELT practitioners in a wide variety of situations.

Writing a Checklist

The checklist is as short and simple as possible to encourage its use – in practice it is much less likely that a long and complicated checklist would be used. A scoring table is included so a comparison can more easily be made between textbooks, this way, institutions will be able to evaluate more than one book at a time, and it will be easier to compare scores than long lists of comments. It is also much quicker to assign a score than to write comments and this too will save time for institutions, increasing the likelihood of the checklist being of real practical use. Of course these checklists should be modified according to every single factor and learners or institutional needs in order to have a really useful tool, otherwise, if checklists are not constantly updated, their application will be useless.

Using a Checklist

Objective parameters of the table are a crucial part of the evaluation process as they are the only way to ensure that the final score for a textbook corresponds as closely as possible to the particular needs of the learners who will use the book. Selectors first have to decide what parameters to use. The objectivity of this process can be increased by using as many and as experienced evaluators as possible, and by taking sufficient time to reach a decision; for example, a decision on parameters made in one day by only one evaluator (a person with less than one year TEFL experience) would be too subjective. Ideally four or more experienced teachers should take at least two meetings to reach a decision. Clearly they will have to discuss and decide what parameters will be appropriate for that particular institution.

It is essential that a consensus among as many teachers as possible is reached on what parameters are used, in order to increase the objectivity of the choice to an acceptable

degree. Subjectivity can never be removed from the process, however, no matter how textbooks are chosen; it is important to understand that checklists can be, at least as objective as any other method of choosing.

Checklist items and parameters set by users can be adapted or improved to suit local situations, either before use or after a period of use. Parameters on scores can be altered; checklist items can be altered, deleted or added; textbooks can be evaluated by other means, and results compared with those of this checklist; and textbooks can be piloted in class and the result compared with those predicted by an evaluation using this checklist.

Sample Checklist for Textbook Evaluation

4. Excellent 3.Good 2.Adequate 1.Weak 0.Totally lacking	
The Textbook	Evaluation of the fit
Subject matter	1. Does the subject matter cover a variety of topics appropriate to the interests of the learners for whom the textbook is intended (urban or rural environment; child or adult learners; male and/or female students)? 2. Is the ordering of materials done by topics or themes that are arranged in a logical fashion? 3. Is the content graded according to the needs of the students or the requirements of the existing syllabus (if there is one)? 4. Is the material accurate and up-to-date?	4 3 2 1 0
Vocabulary & Structures	1. Does the vocabulary load (i.e., the number of new words introduced every lesson) seem to be reasonable for the students of that level? 2. Are the vocabulary items controlled to ensure systematic gradation from simple to complex items? 3. Is the new vocabulary repeated in subsequent lessons for reinforcement? 4. Does the sentence length seem reasonable for the students of that level? 5. Is the number of grammatical points as well as their sequence appropriate?	4 3 2 1 0

Note: In the table above, "Subject matter" and "Vocabulary & Structures" are row labels in the first column; the numbered questions are in the middle column; "4 3 2 1 0" appears in the "Evaluation of the fit" column.

	6. Do the structures gradually increase in complexity to suit the growing reading ability of the students? 7. Does the writer use current everyday language, and sentence structures that follow normal word order? 8. Do the sentences and paragraphs follow one another in a logical sequence? 9. Are linguistic items introduced in meaningful situations to facilitate understanding and ensure assimilation and consolidation?	
Exercises	1. Do the exercises develop comprehension and test knowledge of main ideas, details, and sequence of ideas? 2. Do the exercises involve vocabulary and structures which build up the learner's repertoire? 3. Do the exercises provide practice in different types of written work (sentence completion, spelling and dictation, guided composition)? 4. Does the book provide a pattern of review within lessons and cumulatively test new material? 5. Do the exercises promote meaningful communication by referring to realistic activities and situations?	4 3 2 1 0
Illustrations	1. Do illustrations create a favorable atmosphere for practice in reading and spelling by depicting realism and action? 2. Are the illustrations clear, simple, and free of unnecessary details that may confuse the learner? 3. Are the illustrations printed close enough to the text and directly related to the content to help the learner understand the printed text?	4 3 2 1 0
Physical make-up	1. Is the cover of the book durable enough to withstand wear? 2. Is the text attractive (i.e., cover, page appearance, binding)? 3. Does the size of the book seem convenient for the students to handle? 4. Is the type size appropriate for the intended learners?	4 3 2 1 0

Taken from: Daoud A. and Celce – Murcia M. (1979). *Selecting and evaluating a textbook.* Newbury House publishers.

Considerations When Evaluating Language Learners' Textbooks

As it can be seen in Bastidas' analysis (2002), supported by Celce – Murcia and Daoud (1979) and other authors, some questions arise as guidelines when starting a textbook selection process:

Does the material match learner objectives?

Krashen and Terrell (1983) make the point that the first step before selecting any kind of material is defining the goals of the course. It is not the same to teach at all levels.

Is the material learner-centered?

Material should empower students and put them in control of their own learning. Littlewood (1981) makes the criticism that classrooms have become focus of anxiety and inhibitions thanks to the unfairness between students and teachers. Students are seen as boxes that teachers fill with their irrefutable knowledge.

Does the material facilitate interactive learning?

Students often learn as much from each other as they do from the teacher. Material should make it easy to divide the class into groups or pairs, to have conversations or role-plays, and to allow the students to interact with each other.

The tasks should enable learners to employ necessary strategies in developing speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills that will be necessary for them to deal with real life situations. Linguistic competence is not enough to cope with academic life, thus, students must learn the study skills that will be helpful in their academic lives.

Is the material socio-culturally appropriate?

Culture is an important feature to be taken into account. Whether additional materials have cultural messages, teachers must be aware of them in order to guide learners. There is a

vital relationship between culture and language. Communication may break down if cultural limitations are not taken into account. Moreover, the textbook topics and contents should be relevant to the culture of the students.

It is important to avoid potentially offensive images. Any "jokes" which rely on racial stereotypes for their "humor" are to be avoided.

Is the material gender-sensitive?

Material where women are consistently portrayed as subordinate should be rejected. As language teachers, it is crucial to highlight that, women and men have the same opportunities thus, when learning languages, textbooks in anyway represent real life, especially for young learners.

Is the material up-to-date?

Old material can still be useful; however, much progress has been made in language teaching in recent years.

Are vocabulary and comprehensible input levels well-graded?

Suitable material for advanced students will be beyond beginners' comprehension. Suitable material for beginners will lack challenge for advanced students. It is essential that material matches the abilities of the student.

Is the material interesting and visually attractive?

Students usually react more favorably to bright, colorful, interesting, well-illustrated material. A good textbook, should have a very good balance between its content and its appearance, in order to wake students' interests, and of course to bring happiness to the process.

Is the material relevant to real life?

Lack of authenticity is a very big feature to deal with. Some topics are very difficult to contextualize thus, textbooks' situations are unreal and useless, this way, students facing a real use of English, will feel helpless and may lose self-confidence.

The tasks should represent characteristics that are authentic to the society in which the target language is used, thus preparing the learner for real life situations. Authenticity should encourage learners to use the language in real life situations through in-class tasks and projects, film analysis, interaction via internet-email, etc

Is the material easy to use?

Material must be strong, well-organized and well-indexed. Different components such as books, tapes, videos, must be easy to use in conjunction with each other. Some materials are easier than others to photocopy. If there are different books (e.g. teacher's edition, student's text, workbook) it must be clear how they relate to each other.

Is there variety in the tasks?

The tasks should be flexible and appeal to different learning styles and strategies, and should not favor one type of learner over another. They must be appropriate for different learning situations and learners' needs.

Are the objectives clearly stated for each task?

Clearly stated objectives should be easily accessible as they cannot be realized if the teachers and learners are not aware of them. When students know why and what they are learning it makes activities and tasks more purposeful and meaningful.

Of course, these considerations do not work the same for all contexts, and it is important to highlight that evaluating them constantly is as good as evaluate the textbook itself.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Design

Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern this behavior. It relies on reasons behind various aspects of behavior, it investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, and when. Therefore, the need is for smaller but focused samples rather than large random samples. Qualitative research categorizes data into patterns as the primary basis for organizing and reporting results, usually it typically relies on four methods for gathering information:

1. Participation in the setting.

2. Direct observation.

3. In depth interviews.

4. Analysis of documents and materials.

The present research has a qualitative character; its main idea was to make a careful description of the situation in University of Nariño's Language Department when selecting learners' textbooks. In this case, when using deep interviews, we had the opportunity to get first hand information directly from those ones, who are in charge of that responsibility.

Type

Research in history involves developing an understanding of the past through the examination and interpretation of evidence. Evidence may exist in the form of texts, physical remains of historic sites, recorded data, pictures, maps, and so on. The researcher's job is to find evidence, analyze its content and biases, corroborate it with other evidence, and to use this evidence to develop an interpretation of any past event that may have some importance for the present and, how have things changed through time.

Interviews took us through different periods of time and allowed us to understand in a very detailed way the path that the University has followed in its educational mission regarding textbook selection not as a mechanical process, but as an essential part of that mission.

Population and Setting.

The first-hand sources for this study were the University of Nariño's Language Department English teachers. They were asked about their personal experience when facing textbook selection. There were interviewed five English teachers; two women aged 35 – 60 and four men aged 35 – 55.

All the interviews took place in the University of Nariño (VIPRI). Teachers allowed us to interview them in their spare time between classes; other ones did it after finishing their classes.

Data Collection Technique

Through personal interviews (See appendix1), teachers were asked about how the University of Nariño's Language Department has faced this important feature in the teaching and learning process.

Interviews provide very different data from observations: they allow the evaluation team to capture the perspectives of project participants, staff, and others associated with the project. The use of interviews as a data collection method begins with the assumption that the participants' perspectives are meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit, and that their perspectives affect the success of the project. An interview, rather than a paper and pencil survey, is selected when interpersonal contact is important and when opportunities for follow-up of interesting comments are desired.

With qualitative research interviews you try to understand something from the subjects' point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experiences. Interviews allow people to convey to others a situation from their own perspective and in their own words. Research interviews are based on the conversations of everyday life. They are conversations with structure and purpose that are defined and controlled by the researcher. Although the research interview may not lead to objective information, it captures many of the subjects' views on something.

Instruments

For getting clear and reliable information, it was used a tape recorder thus, every single detail in teachers' speech could be part of the analysis. So this is a qualitative analysis, detailed-first-hand information helped directly to clearly understand how this textbook selection had been carried out.

Procedure

The interview was divided into two. In its first part, the main idea was to get information about the existence or not of a textbook selection process, or the way in which textbook selection has been carried out in the University of Nariño's Language Department. In order to get it, the first task was to ask for teachers' permission. They were told about the purpose of the research, the way we wanted to get the information and its confidential character. After that, a schedule was established in order not to interrupt teachers' classes.

In its next part, and because of the information obtained in the previous stage, the questions were focused on a more careful description of textbook selection in different periods, but emphasizing on the applied criteria. Teachers that were in charge of the *listening and speaking* subject were asked about it, and the way they participated, if they did it. Now with

that information it was easier to understand and to identify the way the Department has faced this feature.

Data Analysis

The object of data analysis in qualitative research was to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that showed the participants' view of the world.

In order to analyze the information firstly a careful listening through all the interviews took place, some comments or notions about what to do with different parts of data were made; the primary patterns in the data topics were identified, code, and categorized. Then, based on the outcome of coding and categorize what interviewees have said, the information was structured and presented in a narrative way. Once this information was obtained, it was analyzed to find out whether an organized textbook selection process existed or not in the University of Nariño's Language Department and then, how has textbook selection been carried out.

The important features were to find out the main criteria elements that have affected textbook selection through time, and whether they have changed and how.

Thanks to the interviews it was also possible to determine in which way teachers have participated in this textbook selection.

Ethical Issues

The information was obtained from first-hand sources, the University of Nariño's Language Department English teachers. The interviews were carried out and recorded under their permission and they have a strict confidential character. This information is used only for academic purposes, and the identity of the participants will never be affected in anyway.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Background

When the Modern Languages Department was created in 1966, teachers started working with some copies of materials brought by the chief of the Department from Bogotá, which was the place where he had just finished his studies in languages. The material belonged to "American English", and was designed for being used in laboratory sessions, but the chief adapted it as teachers' class material. Students that worked with this material argued that it was mostly graphic, it did not contain any word in English, and it was illustrated with some pictures and drawings which represented English words and some sentences that the teacher pronounced and the students repeated in order to memorize them. Teachers that applied this material in the classroom received it directly from the chief of the department and, a sort of program to be developed during the semester was included as well. Later, editorial houses started sending their representing agents with book samples for teaching English as a foreign language.

When textbooks started being included for English teaching in the University of Nariño's Modern Languages Department, teachers started to find out the potential advantages of working with those texts. They started using them thanks to the recommendations given by the agents form the editorial houses and also for the promise of receiving free textbooks samples.

Although free copies were one of the main elements taken into account when selecting English textbooks, availability of these textbooks in the local bookstores was also taken into account. That was a limitation due to the lack of compromise from the bookstores thus;

the Department started bringing the books by its own in order to sell them directly to the students.

Buying the book was mandatory thus; the price became another important feature to be considered. It had to be accessible for all students thus; it had to be the cheapest one regarding that many students belonged to a low social class, as can be seen in public universities. It is possible to say that none of these criteria belonged to the academic order but, to the socioeconomic one, and as a result, textbooks were mainly chosen because of their price and not for their content. (Hidalgo 2007)

<div align="center">Textbook Selection Process</div>

In terms of organized processes, it is not possible to say that the University of Nariño's Language Department has had one. Since its beginning, it has been seen that external factors have had a considerable influence on textbook selection inside the Department besides the academic ones.

Starting in the eighties, there were only some meetings with the department teachers and a representation from the editorial houses, who was the one in charge of textbook samples description as it was described by some teachers:

> (Teacher Nº 2) "…at the beginning it was very commercial, the people from the editorial came to the university and recommended a textbook for the students…"
>
> (Teacher Nº 1) "…we had almost the same type of books, these books were issued by the editorials, they came here to present those books but, there weren't any precise criteria for choosing a book..."

It is important to take into account that the University of Nariño's Language Department used to make a deeper evaluation only after using the textbook:

> (Teacher Nº 1) "…we decided it after using it because from the beginning it was really hard to decide if the book would be good or not…"

By those days, editorial houses sent free samples to the department thus, that became a very good reason for selecting a specific textbook.

Besides some grammatical features that the Department tried to take into account, there were not real and organized criteria when selecting textbooks, as it can be seen in Hidalgo's research (2007).

Later, when checklists made their appearance through textbooks produced by authors who were working on the language field, Department's teachers started using academic criteria to select textbooks.

After, in the nineties, a checklist based on Celce-Murcia's (1979) made its appearance as a possible solution in terms of an adequate textbook evaluation. Thanks to this handout, meetings started to be more organized and textbook evaluation as well:

> (Teacher Nº 2) "…starting in the eighties, eighty five, ninety, teachers started applying a handout, it was based on Celce-Murcia's teaching of language book, and this handout made an analysis of every textbook, in the grammatical aspect, the communicative aspect, in the skills, so we decided to form groups of teachers and every group had to analyse one book and based on those analysis and the results of them, the department decided on a book".

A very important feature arises here, so we can find that this selection process started becoming a team work's decision, in someway teachers worked as a department more than isolated opinions or one-sided decisions.

In 1998 the University of Nariño's Language Department started an accreditation process which demanded more from the Department itself thus, meetings for textbook evaluation became an important feature not only for selecting a textbook, but also to make a deeper analysis in methodology and pedagogy. Now students' needs and also additional material that came with the book (cassettes, videos, and teachers' books) became another important characteristic to be considered.

> (Teacher Nº 4) "...we try to change our textbooks regularly, we try that our textbooks have a period of time in which we use them and then, we change them because we think that our students need it. We get together in a meeting with all the teachers and then we decide if it is time to change the textbook. We ask the editorial houses to send some books so we can look at them and we analyse them together in a meeting with the teachers...and also we see if the book has any additional materials for example if it has the workbook, if it has the video, if it has CD, if it has DVD, additional materials..."

Nowadays facing new governmental decisions, which the University of Nariño's Language Department does not agree with, textbook evaluation has slightly been updated:

> (Teacher Nº 5) "...actually the standards are something new they came out a few years ago but usually standards are taken into account for schools or high schools so we are at university we do not have any specific standards in the same way that high schools do. We are now taking into account the Common European Framework although we do not agree with it."

Editorial houses are still sending new and updated samples to the department in order to offer a wide variety of textbooks. At the beginning most of those samples were not specific

material for universities so; students had to learn with the same textbooks that were used in high school because that was the most common one which was a clear indicator of availability. One of the reasons that directly influenced this selection has been the economic factor because specific material is sometimes out of the budget of students.

<div align="center">Teachers and textbook selection</div>

From its beginning, the University of Nariño's Language Department has considered the opinion of those teachers who belong directly to it. Part-time teachers have never had any participation in this process, they have to receive and accept the already made decision:

> (Teacher Nº 1) "…we had a meeting all the teachers of the department as we received the books from the editorials and we just saw them and try to decide which book was good or which book seemed to be good for our students and that's all, we had come to an agreement for finding which book to use".
>
> (Teacher Nº 5) "All of the teachers from the English area…they have to meet and decide on the book…just full-time teachers…"
>
> (Teacher Nº 6) "…to be honest I have never participated in the book selection process here, in the language department I've participated in the language center…"

Here we can establish a parallel between what is happening now and what happened before. In the past, textbooks offered some kind of pre-designed program which teachers just followed. Nowadays part-time teachers have to face these pre-selected textbooks, sometimes without the adequate preparation for a change, which becomes a feature that can be easily seen in the lack of motivation of some teachers before those textbooks.

As meetings continued not only listening and speaking teachers participated, but also reading and writing ones, because a big amount of issued textbooks belonged to that area Hidalgo (2007).

So the Languages Department was divided into areas, work division appeared as a good decision for increasing effectiveness of this selection process, because working directly with the involved teachers centralized any decision in the main aspects of every area, always looking for its improvement, its quality and for the benefit of learners.

> (Teacher Nº3) "…in our department we have two different areas; one which is foreign languages, English and French and the other one which is linguistics so, depending on what textbook we've decided to change, the area gets together…"

Although things seem to be better when getting closer to the present, the applied criteria has always had the most important role in this textbook selection but, those criteria have been principally affected by the regional and institutional context, which has logically influenced textbook selection.

<center>Applied Criteria When Selecting Students' Textbooks</center>

Price

Besides many different academic features that have a considerable influence on textbook selection it was found that in the University of Nariño's Language Department this feature is quite different but, not because of a lack of preparation or interest.

As a public institution, the university has to face the economic factor as the common element that has influenced textbook selection.

(Teacher Nº 1) "…we considered for example the grammatical aspects, variety of exercises that the book may contain and also the availability and also the price of the book. Those were the most relevant aspects to consider for selecting a book".

(Teacher Nº 6) "… normally what you look at first of all is the pedagogical principles of the book, then you have to see certain logistical sides of things, will the book or will the publisher be able to send the book regularly to the institution, how much does it cost, how you have to pay; credit, cash…"

(Teacher Nº 2) "…at the beginning it was very commercial, the people from the editorial came to the university and recommended a textbook for the students so the teachers mainly decided based on the availability of the book in the editorials and if they were going to give us the book, I mean, for free. The teachers expected the editorials to send the book for the teachers. Another point they considered was the price. It was supposed to be very cheap so students could buy it"

(Teacher Nº4) "…we also take into account the price. Unfortunately it is a very high factor because our students usually do not have enough money to buy textbooks so; we try to keep the textbooks in the lowest range of price without missing the academic part …"

Availability

As it was already described by Hidalgo (2007), from its early years, availability of the textbook arose as an important characteristic to be considered, because English textbooks have not been an accessible material for students. Hidalgo (2007) exposed that, this could be caused mainly by the geographical situation of Nariño which in anyway isolated us from the rest of the country, mainly during the first half of the XIX century.

(Teacher Nº 4) "…we take into account the availability of the textbooks, if the editorial house is going to be able to provide the books all the time and not just for one semester…"

(Teacher Nº 6) "… normally what you look at first of all is the pedagogical principles of the book, then you have to see certain logistical sides of things, will the book or will the publisher be able to send the book regularly to the institution…"

Curriculum

As time passed by, textbooks increased their importance as they were used to guide the program itself because they provided a pre-designed syllabus just to be followed:

(Teacher Nº 2) "…the book was important, not the curriculum because the book was the one that told the teacher what to teach in the class so, in the past it was like that the teacher had a book, analyzed the book and took all of the topics in the book and passed them to the curriculum or to the program…now it is the opposite because in 1998 with the process of accreditation the teacher have to meet and decide on the minimal topics that should be covered in every subject matter so it was the opposite we decided on the topics students needed and then we tried to get the book that could cover those needs of the students."

Thanks to this accreditation process, curriculum started being as important as the book itself because one of the politics of the actual Languages Department is to complement every aspect into its curriculum, including textbooks:

 (Teacher Nº 4) "… The curriculum I think is the most important thing that we take into account because, how you organize the classes, as you know, we have two classes that are divided into the abilities, the two abilities, we have *reading and*

writing and *listening and speaking* so our curriculum is based on the integration of all our subjects we try that, the communicative classes are not the only area where English is learnt but, we also have reading and writing, we also have psychology, we also have second language acquisition, we also have TESOL and sociolinguistics and some of these subjects are also taught in English so, for us the curriculum is very important, we try to find textbooks that somehow integrate the other subjects, although we choose one book for listening and speaking and another for reading and writing we try to see that they complement each other in some way."

Book Content

Besides these factors, academic content of the book has always had a part in textbook selection process. Unfortunately, it has not been as important as it should be, but thanks to some authors that started working on textbook selection such as;

Celce-Murcia, the University of Nariño's Linguistic and Languages Department has changed its focus regarding academic features.

(Teacher Nº 5) "For us a book is a good one if it has the possibility to offer the students a variety of activities, if it combines content area with language content, if it has communicative approach which is the one which is now in the department. We also decided to use two books because it was not enough to have a book for communication we also needed a book for reading and writing, we separated the skills so we have speaking and listening it was necessary for the students to have a book and for reading and writing another one, so in the reading and writing book what we observed is that the reading part must be updated, that they present topics

that are motivating for students and in the writing part they provide different writing

forms"

(Teacher Nº 4) "… obviously we take into account the academic part we look at the

book, usually we have like a chart to compare. We look that the books are within,

that the topics are within and that they are interesting for students we try to see if

there is an approach that the book has, you know if it is task-based or

communicative. We prefer these types of textbooks over the grammatical, the

textbooks that are too grammatical we do not take them into account…"

Almost all the interviewed teachers talked about many different academic aspects that they

personally have considered when selecting textbooks but, as it can be perfectly seen, the

economic factor has been the one that has made a real difference in this process.

The other common factor was the complete absence of the part time teachers. Some of

these teachers have been in charge of the listening and speaking subject and for them it has

been difficult to deal with textbooks without being taken into account for their selection.

The University of Nariño's Language Department has tried to start an organized process

when selecting textbooks, but due to additional factors it has been quite complicated.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

Graves (2000:175-176): "To understand how a textbook is an instrument or a tool, we can compare it to a musical instrument, a piano, for example. The piano provides you with the means for producing music, but it cannot produce music on its own. The music is produced only when you play it. Playing well requires practice and familiarity with the piece. The more skilled you are, the more beautiful the music. Just as a piano does not play music, a textbook does not teach language. Perhaps as teachers we are called on to be not only musicians, but also piano tuners, composers, and conductors."

Textbooks are a key component in most language programs (Kitao, 1999) due to the increasing importance of textbooks into the EFL classroom and the researches carried out by some authors like Nunan (1988), Hartley (1994), and others. Nowadays there is more information in terms of textbook selection, criteria, and the access to all this data is not complicated anymore. Thanks to this information, the University of Nariño's language Department has the key to open several doors to its students for preparing them in the most adequate way not only as English experts but also, as complete teachers.

Regarding University of Nariño's responsibility, textbook selection has become more than a single feature to be eventually faced. Nowadays, the way textbooks are selected will be considerably reflected in the teaching-learning process.

Textbook selection is a process that has to be in constant evaluation. That means, every aspect within must be under constant observation in order to make it a real and useful process. Regarding it, it is considerably complex the way the Department has faced textbook selection. There have been a sort of handouts through time but, the Department has not cared for a further analysis of those handouts in order to update them to the

regional, political, educational and institutional context. It was in early nineties when the first handouts appeared to facilitate the way textbooks were chosen. Based on this, the Department started considering academic reasons to select a textbook. Regrettably it was not possible to find a copy of the handouts made by the Department. The last one, we were told was created only for that required meeting but it was not kept any copy.

Whether the University of Nariño's Language Department wants to have a real textbook selection process, the first step must be to be concerned about the way textbooks are selected, the handouts we were told the Department used, should be kept in order to meet for evaluating not only textbooks, but also to improve the way handouts are made and used.

One of the best ways to start a textbook selection process could be considering Krashen and Terrell (1983), defining the goals of the course is essential when starting a process. Whether there is not clarity about the goals to be reached, no matter how good could a textbook be, it will never be the adequate tool for an English course.

Teachers should be the first ones to check whether all the elements of the teaching- learning process are working well for learners and for them too, if not, to correct, to adapt or to change them when things go wrong. Through interviews, English teachers had the opportunity of expressing them in relation to this feature.

It was particularly interesting to find how the Department has segregated part-time teachers from making decisions about the materials they are supposed to use for working. Up to now they have never been called to the meetings in which the textbook selection takes part.

This segregation is a factor that has had influence in textbook selection. Nowadays we are facing a situation as it was lived in the early days of the Department, when teachers had to receive the already chosen material, including a program but, without expressing any

opinion before it. As students, we have seen many times the way this lack of participation has been reflected by some teachers inside the classroom. Some teachers have shown a clear lack of motivation and preparation when facing textbooks. In those cases textbooks have become the central focus of the class. As it was exposed by Allwright (1990), materials tend to control learning and teaching.

Teachers' segregation is the restrictive factor that has never been taken into account. If an English teacher arrives at the Department one perfect way to motivate him is to listen, and to take the teacher into account, and textbook selection is a good opportunity to know new ideas, and tendencies when working with textbooks, this way, the University of Nariño's Languages Department would work as one.

There are several aspects that have to be taken into account when selecting a textbook. Not just the content of the book itself, nowadays, external pressures tend to restrict teachers and institutions. The selection of a textbook is seen as an executive educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial and even political investment (Sheldon 1988). Unfortunately, the University of Nariño, as many other public institutions, has to deal with the economic factor as the one that has always limited its potential and their students' as well. As it was found in Hidalgo's (2007) work, at the beginning of the Department, one of the reasons for choosing determined textbooks was the simple promise of receiving free samples. Money appeared as the factor that has always affected public institutions not only in Nariño, but also in all the country. Regarding it, the way the Department is now facing textbook selection in relation to the economic factor must be continued and improved by looking at all different available alternatives that can be found.

If the budget assigned by the government to public education is not enough for guarantying a complete access to education thus, it is almost impossible to depend on the government to give the students the best available resources in order to improve the teaching-learning process. Up to the present, the university has had to face this challenge without missing quality in the academic part and also keeping its textbooks in the lowest range of price. Increasing the number of possibilities and, keeping these possibilities into a delimited variety of prices, would be helpful to the Department in order to analyze a considerable number of items, from a good amount of samples thus, the Department would be more likely to select a good book through more complete criteria.

Regarding criteria, and the way they have changed trough time, there were not found any determined and precise criteria. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of organization inside the department. It was seen that at the very beginning of the Language Department, it was the people from the editorial who in certain way selected the book for the university by offering some free samples, so there were not any precise criteria beyond the best offer. As time passed, there was used a handout based on some authors' works (Celce-Murcia's: 1979) but, the Department has not cared about a further analysis of them.

Nowadays it was found that the University of Nariño has thought about curriculum and textbooks. One of its main purposes has been to create a holistic curriculum, in which every single aspect that may influence the teaching-learning process could be integrated.

The role of textbooks inside that curriculum and, regarding the approach worked by the Department (communicative), is to connect skills, content, and approach within, thus the textbook may become really supportive in the educational mission of the Department.

Textbook selection process is something that must be respected as it has a significant impact on the ability of students to meet the language and accomplishing courses' objectives, and affects both; the process of learning and the outcomes, consequently, it is important for teachers to know how to select the best material for instruction, how to make supplementary materials for the class, and how to adapt materials always regarding their learners.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW FORMAT

DESCRIPTION OF THE CRITERIA THAT HAVE BEEN APPLIED IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NARIÑO'S LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT DURING THE PERIOD 1980 – 2008

- According to your personal teaching experience, was there any organized process when selecting textbooks for learners in the University of Nariño's Language Department?

   o If there was:

      § Can you describe it?

      § What where the main elements taken into account in that process?

      § Did the Language Department's English teachers have any participation on that process?

   o If there wasn't:

      § Do you know how did the department select textbooks?

      § Do you know who was / were in charge of it?

      § Did the Language Department's English teacher have any kind of participation in that selection?