

# **Exploring Education studies lecturers' experiences of the use of the prescribed textbook in a South African University.**

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## **Focus /aim : How to develop / improve teaching & learning material?**

### **Background and Introduction to the study**

- Previously, a course / resource pack was used in lectures and in tutorial groups.
- A prescribed textbook was introduced for the first time this year and the tutorials were stopped.
- The majority of the education studies lecturers are intermittent contract staff members and only two permanent staff members are involved in the module teaching.

**The purpose** of this paper is to explore Education studies lecturers' experiences of the use of the prescribed textbook in a South African University in order to reflect on their experiences.

- There is a vast debate on the use of textbooks in higher education against the use of materials (see, for example, Kitao & Kitao, 2008).

### **Research methodology**

- The study is qualitative in nature. Data were generated using FGD and semi - structured individual Interviews. Purposeful and convenient samplings were used to select ten (10) most accessible lecturers. Furthermore, document analysis was also conducted to check the content of the textbook as well as the course outline if they were in line with the University Handbook and the Learning outcomes to be covered. Data were analyzed using emerging themes. Before report compilation, data were taken back to the research participants for them to refute or confirm the findings. Ethical considerations were observed as permission to conduct this study was received from the University and from the research participants and pseudonyms were used to compile report. Using grounded theory five themes for discussion emerged.

## Literature Review

- Kitao and Kitao (2013) of Doshisha University (Kyoto, Japan) on Selecting and Developing Teaching/Learning Materials argue that we cannot teach language without a textbook. On the other hand, Allwright (1990) argues that materials should teach students to learn, that they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction/learning, and that they should give teachers rationales 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, **that textbooks make it possible for students to review and prepare their lessons that textbooks are efficient in terms of time and money, and that textbooks can and should allow for adaptation and improvisation.**
- In the context of my work environment at a SA University, and due to the large numbers of students and other students do not stay on campus and therefore cannot access internet off campus, I therefore stick to the use of textbooks and of course supplement these with other materials such as online lectures, articles, videos, Moodle, hand outs and work sheets and the list is endless. This enables me to set tasks from textbooks which become more convenient. However, now I should create worksheets / tasks / activities based on the textbooks and not follow the textbook as it is. I should also refer students to extra sources like articles.
- Allwright emphasizes that materials control learning and teaching. O'Neill 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 (Kitao and Kitao, 2013). 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. I do not have enough time to make supplementary material, so it is easy to follow a textbook because I lecture a number of modules and I also coordinate another modules plus I have a lot of other things to do such as research, publications, community involvement which is required by my KPA's, therefore I rely on textbooks. Textbook therefore plays a vital role in my Education classes as well as in my professional studies classes. However, the textbook is not without criticisms, now I will have to force myself and be involved in selecting the textbook which I deem useful for my lectures and for my students.
- My approach to teaching is that learners should be the centre of learning and therefore, “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 see whether all of the elements of the learning process are working well for learners and to adapt them if they are not” (Kitao and Kitao, 2013, p. 2).
- In other words, learners should be the centre 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 choose materials. They may adapt, supplement, and elaborate on those materials and also monitor the progress and needs of the students and finally evaluate students (Kitao and Kitao, 2013). Based on the above argument, I therefore choose material which is suitable for the needs of my students from time to time and in varying contexts e.g. for the undergraduates and for the post graduate teaching.
- Materials include **textbooks**, video and audio tapes, computer software, and visual aids. They influence the content and the procedures of learning. The choice of deductive vs inductive learning, the role of memorization, the use of creativity and problem solving, production vs. reception, and the order in which materials are presented are all influenced by the materials. Technology, such as OHP, slides, video and audio tape recorders, video cameras, and computers, supports instruction/learning. Evaluations (tests, etc.) can be used to assign grades, check learning, give feedback to students, and improve instruction by giving feedback to the teacher (Kitao and Kitao, 2013).

- Though students should be the centre of instruction, in many cases, teachers and students rely on materials, and the materials become the centre 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 & module teaching.** Therefore, it is important for teachers to know how to choose the best material for instruction, how to make supplementary materials for the class, and how to adapt materials (Kitao and Kitao, 2013).
- Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) argue that materials have a hidden curriculum that includes attitudes toward knowledge, attitudes toward teaching and learning, attitudes toward the role and relationship of the teacher and student, and values and attitudes related to gender, society, etc.
- Materials have an underlying instructional philosophy, approach, method, and content, including both linguistic and cultural information. **That is, choices made in writing textbooks are based on beliefs that the writers have about what language is and how it should be taught. For example, History textbooks embody the author's perspectives on knowledge to be passed on to students.** Writers may use a certain approach, for example, the aural-oral approach, and they choose certain activities and select the linguistic and cultural information to be included.
- Clarke (1989) argues that communicative methodology is important and that communicative methodology is based on authenticity, realism, context, and a focus on the learner. However, he argues that what constitutes these characteristics is not clearly defined, and that there are many aspects to each. He questions the extent to which these are reflected in textbooks that are intended to be communicative.
- Kitao and Kitao (2013) state that in addition to publishers, one can get material for teaching from the internet. They advise that we can search for materials when we have free time, and store them for our future classes. Furthermore, according to Kitano and Kitano TV and radio are good sources. They provide a variety of materials. The information is current and the language is natural, but the content has to be chosen carefully. Newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and other types of printed material are very useful. Teachers can take photos; make video tapes or record audio tapes. If they make plans before they go overseas for example, they may be able to make good video or audio programs. Even in your home country, you can browse the World Wide Web and search for useful materials for classes. There are lots of sources of materials and photos on www. Textbook is not the only resource.

## FINDINGS

### Language & content

- Lecturers' experiences: In a study of Education studies prescribed textbook published in SA in 2014, **the textbooks were reviewed and problems were found with both the language and content.**

### Language

- Language problem: Textbooks should have correct, natural, recent, and standard English. Since students' vocabulary is limited, **the vocabulary in textbooks should be controlled or the textbooks should provide information to help students understand vocabulary that they may not be familiar with.** For lower-level students, grammar should also be controlled. The textbooks use narratives and essays. It would be useful to have a variety of literary forms (for example, newspaper articles, poetry, or letters, visuals, ), so that students can learn to deal with different forms.

### Information on Culture

- The cultural information included in Ed studies textbooks should be correct and recent. It should not be biased and should reflect background cultures of all people. It should include visual aids etc., to help students understand cultural information.

### From Learners' Viewpoints

- Ed studies textbooks should be useful, meaningful and interesting for students. While no single subject will be of interest to all students, materials should be chosen based, in part, on what students, in general, are likely to find interesting and motivating.
- **Difficulty:** As a general rule, materials should be slightly higher in their level of difficulty than the students' current level of English proficiency. (Exceptions are usually made for extensive reading and extensive listening materials, which should be easy enough for students to process without much difficulty.) Materials at a slightly higher level of difficulty than the students' current level of English proficiency allow them to learn new grammatical structures and vocabulary.

- **Instructional issues.:** Ed studies textbooks should have clear instructional procedure and methods, that is, the teacher and students should be able to understand what is expected in each lesson and for each chapter and activity.
- **Textbooks should have support for learning.** This can take the form of vocabulary lists, exercises which cover or expand on the content, visual aids, etc. For example, Traditionally, language teaching materials in Japan are made up mostly of text, with few, if any, visual aids. However, with the development of technology, photos, visual materials and audio materials have become very important components of language teaching materials, and they are becoming easier to obtain. Teachers need to learn how to find them, and how to best exploit these characteristics.
- Materials are getting more complicated, and instructional philosophy, approach, methods, and techniques are getting more important. Teachers need to be able to evaluate materials involving photos, videos, and computers now.

**Lecturers argue that on the History of Education section:**

- Indegenous educ. is missing. Chapter 1 – SA context was not fully explored; Before Fr & Russia got independence we want to know what happened – we want to know what happened before colonisation, we want the authors to go back further in Chapter 2 – International trends in educational historiography; When you look at Tanzania, why not Lesotho? Look at Local, National & International history.
- One participant said:
- “It is histography and not history of education. It is pure history”
- Another participant stated that:

- “Chapters should be arranged chronologically, e.g. For the Indigenous people: How education took place what were the modes of learning? Pre-colonial or traditional education is 1 and 1/2 page i.e. p. 7 – 8 only. Then follows education during colonisation, then follows education during independence.”
- Another participant said:
- “There should be scenarios and case study that involve learners. Add something to involve learners. “

### **On Part 3: Sociology of Education**

- Participants stated that they did not supplement the book in their teaching. Content is insufficient / thin for a 16 credit module and was difficult to understand.
- Participants argued that the problem was the way things were structured and not with the authors. They recommended that more chapters should be added on this section.

- No teachers' guides and no activities for learners.
- One participant indicated that: "Information on Socialisation is equal to zero". She recommended that a chapter on Socialisation and socialisation theories be added.
- Another participant stated that: "What informs the thinking and approach to the content must be clear for the lecturers to think along those lines when teaching and giving out activities"
- One participant said :Learners say: "Mam go and find these authors so we can speak to them"
- Participants came to a realisation that the problem is that the book is also used by other institutions then it can't cater for all our needs. They also indicated that Comparative education on Section / Part 2 is very problematic.
- Participants concurred on that : " the book should be in line with the course outline which we do not have".

### **On the Philosophy of Education**

- Participants concurred on a number of issues raised on the History of education as well as on the Sociology of education.
- They argued that the book is based on Wits Curriculum and Course outline and their curriculum and course outline was neglected.
- We need to have a course outline and a course pack to supplement the book.
- One participant stated that:

- “ We need to begin with the curriculum itself and expand from there. This is what we want our students to know. Don’t start with Philosophy then come to Curriculum”.
- Most participants had a concern about the lack of activities in the prescribed book. They also argued that the terminology is beyond that of students. Language used is very complex. There are no activities, scenarios, case studies.
- They further stated that we need to incorporate the previous course outline which was used when we were using course packs.
- Participants recommended that the Instructors’ Manual could be useful as their frame of reference.
- A guideline in terms of how do they / have to teach the module is necessary.

## **Conclusion & Recommendation**

- The study reveals that lecturers and students face a myriad of challenges relating to the use of the compulsory textbook in this institution. The paper argues that this has a negative effect on teaching and learning and recommends that the use of compulsory textbook should be revisited.
- The study recommends teachers' guides to be provided to the lecturers, induction of lecturers, consultations with various stakeholders before the textbook is prescribed, and the piloting of the textbook is recommended.