

# Research Methodology Review: The Use of Textbook Analysis, Questionnaires and Interviews to Evaluate EFL Textbook Implementation.

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In April 2006, Kinki University Technical College implemented three new textbooks with the aim of increasing the communicative competence of the students. The researcher compared the effectiveness of the new textbooks by using three approaches: firstly, a textbook analysis based on the Littlejohn Approach; secondly, a questionnaire completed by teachers who used the textbooks; and thirdly, semi-structured interviews with four practitioners who used both one of the new and one of the traditional textbooks. This paper reviews these three methodological approaches.

**Key words:** EFL, textbook, questionnaire, semi-structured interview, research methodology.

## *Background to Textbook Implementation*

New textbooks were implemented for four main reasons: (1) the irrelevance of university English entrance tests; (2) the rural location of the college; (3) top-down communicative goals; and (4) the implementation of the TOEIC Bridge Test.

The English university entrance test is irrelevant for most students in Japanese technical colleges (from now on I will use the word *Kosen*). *Kosen* students can study for five years and then decide to find employment or transfer into the third year of a university course. Both of these post-graduation routes are fundamentally based on Japanese interviews rather than English tests.

Kinki University Technical College is a rural *Kosen*. There are not many opportunities for the students to use English in the local area. Therefore, the learners can question the relevance of studying English without an entrance test.

There are top-down communicative goals from the Ministry of Education, JABEE and the College management. The Ministry of Education published an action plan to “cultivate Japanese with English abilities” that aims for young Japanese to “acquire communication skills in English” (MEXT, 2002, 2003). In April 2008, the college was granted JABEE international accreditation. JABEE focuses mainly on the engineering courses, but it contains five central goals including the aim to develop learners’ ability at communicative practical English. Most importantly, posted in all the classrooms, is the explicit goal to develop learners’ communicative competence.

In 2005, it was decided to introduce the TOEIC and TOEIC Bridge IP Tests to create a communicative standard for the students and help them to gain a qualification that is respected in many large Japanese engineering companies. To help students to prepare for these tests, it was decided that new textbooks would be desirable.

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### ***Implementation***

The first phase of implementation took place in the 2005-6 academic year. The TOEIC and TOEIC Bridge Tests were piloted. Approximately twenty students volunteered for each test. TOEIC Bridge results covered a wide range of scores which indicated suitability in our college as a standard placement test. However, TOEIC results were very low, which indicated that this test would be more suitably offered on a voluntary basis.

It was decided that we would not implement TOEIC Bridge Test cramming materials, but we would prepare the students using textbooks that contain communicative situations and functions. The most important emphasis would be on receptive skills (listening and reading) rather than productive skills (writing and speaking), because Bridge and other important types of assessment such as the *Eiken* Test and the university *Senta Shiken* entrance exam are multiple choice.

Textbook samples were ordered from the Longman and Oxford publishers. Following the receipt of the samples, there were two English teacher meetings for selecting the textbooks. This enabled all the practitioners to have a stake in the change (Markee, 1997; McGrath, 2002).

During the 2006-7 academic year, the new textbooks were implemented. *Vivid*, the traditional textbook recommended by the Ministry of Education, was continued for the First Grade classes. *On the Go* and *On the Move* were introduced for the Second and Third Grades. *New Cutting Edge Elementary* was implemented for the Fourth Grade. The TOEIC

Bridge Test was used for the June and December mid-semester exams.

In April 2008, *New Cutting Edge Elementary* was replaced by *English Connections: Study & Holiday 1*.

### ***Textbook Description***

***Vivid***. This book lists many communicative goals in the introduction to the teacher's pack; however the emphasis is mainly on teacher-led reading and grammar study. Each chapter contains extensive reading followed by exercises.

***On the Go/Move***. These two textbooks, published by Longman, are targeted at the East Asian EFL market. They follow fictional East Asian characters who are travelling, working or studying in countries where they need to use English. Each chapter follows a basic format: pictures that can be discussed in English, a fixed dialogue containing blanks and alternative vocabulary, a listening exercise, a loosely structured speaking task, a reading text and a section for creative language production.

***New Cutting Edge***. This textbook, also published by Longman, has no specific target group of learners. However, its main sales are in Europe (King, 2008, personal communication) and the book explicitly targets goals from the *Common European Framework* ("New cutting edge elementary: CEF benchmarks," n.d.). Each chapter has a large range of small activities that surround two core grammatical and lexical focuses.

### ***Research focus***

Changes can often face high resistance from the people who implement them leading to a distortion from the original aims of the innovation (Rogers, 2003). In the case of education, there are various stakeholders such as the principal, students and parents, but the practitioners are the key variable for successful implementation (Fullan, 1993, 2007; Graves, 1996; Markee, 1997; O'Donnell, 2005). Therefore, my research focuses on the textbooks and the teachers' reactions to them. This paper briefly describes my research methodology and an evaluation of my approach.

### ***Research methodology***

Three main research methods were employed, (1) questionnaires, (2) textbook analysis and (3) semi-structured interviews.

***Questionnaires.*** The questionnaires were submitted to the teachers to gain a quick perspective from them after one year of usage. The questions were formed based on pilot interviews with two practitioners. Seven teachers completed questionnaires regarding *On the Go* and *On the Move*; six responded to the *New Cutting Edge* questionnaire. The questionnaires were not anonymous, which means that there is a risk that respondents can provide non-controversial answers, but I chose this method to allow me to use follow-up interviews if necessary.

Each questionnaire had four main sections. Firstly, respondents needed to indicate their perceived usage by showing percentages for various exercises that

appear in the textbooks. Secondly, they demonstrated the degree to which they found the new books favourable in comparison to the previous textbooks by using a five-point Likert-type scale. Thirdly, there was an open-response section for teachers to show the problems they faced from the new books and whether they could overcome them. Finally, there were two questions to gauge the degree of favourable attitudes towards communication and entrance tests as the main targets of tuition. This final section was provided with a five-point Likert-type scale of attitudes.

***Textbook analysis.*** The textbook analysis was conducted using a framework suggested by Littlejohn (1998). This method of analysis differs from textbook evaluation frameworks that are more context-dependent (for example: Breen & Candlin, 1987; Ellis, 1998; Masuhara, 1998; McGrath, 2002; Rubdy, 2003; Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson, 2003). It is useful, because it is a systematic analysis of what is actually contained in the textbook.

The Littlejohn framework has three levels of analysis. The first level analyses *what is there?* This level investigates the most concrete elements of the textbook such as the statements of description, the physical aspects and the main steps in the instructional sections. Level 2 asks *what is required of users?* For this second level, the analyst subdivides a chapter of the book into tasks and then analyses: What is the learner expected to do? With whom? With what content? Who determines these activities? Level 3 is the most abstract, but it builds upon the first two levels. This third level asks *what is implied?*

For this level, the analyst deduces the aims, principles of selection and sequence; the teacher and learner roles; and the demands on the learners.

*Semi-structured interviews.* Four participants were chosen who teach both the first and second grades. This enabled a comparison of how each teacher perceived *Vivid* and *On the Go*. Each teacher was observed during four classes of 45 minutes for each grade. The observations took place in May and June 2008 and each teacher was observed for an extended block of time to allow me to immerse myself in the data. Each observation was video-recorded for later transcription and detailed analysis, but during the classes, I used a tricolour pen in my research diary to separate neutral observations, analysis and questions for the interviews.

The interviews were therefore semi-structured and a Grounded Theory approach loosely based on Corbin and Strauss (2008) was employed. The interviews were based on themes from three main areas. Firstly, background reading and the textbook analysis formed a foundation of themes for me to follow. Secondly, questions that arose during the observations were asked in the interviews that followed. Thirdly, I used a rough transcription approach. No notes were taken during the interviews. Instead, I used a digital voice recorder and roughly transcribed the interviews later in the day. This method differs from detailed transcription. The aim with rough transcription is to just catch the essence of what is said, so that questions can be asked in follow-up interviews. This allows more time for analysis and

reflection despite the time constraint caused by several interviews and observations.

### *Research Methods Analysis*

The questionnaire was useful to gain a quick snapshot of teachers' opinions after one year of textbook usage. However, the textbook analysis and the semi-structured interviews were more reliable.

Detailed textbook analysis can be regarded as too time-consuming for teachers to do due to the usual time pressures created by teaching and other administrative duties. However, it is time well spent, because teachers must use the new textbooks for at least a year after selection. A badly chosen textbook can lead to further problems and lost time as teachers struggle to prepare and adapt. The Littlejohn (1998) approach that I employed enabled me to "see" underlying principles in the books, such as the expectations regarding the roles of the learners and the teacher.

The textbook analysis increased my awareness of what to expect in the classroom, but the observations and interviews enabled a far greater understanding of what teachers expect from textbooks. The interviews also showed how they teach and why they teach in a certain way. Teachers are influenced by various factors, but their own core beliefs and adapting to the students generally tended to be stronger factors than the textbook content.

### *Conclusion*

To summarise, no one method alone can be used to understand the complexities of the classroom. The

questionnaire was the most simplistic way of gathering information, but it did not reveal much in depth about the textbooks or the teachers' beliefs. The textbook analysis was a useful tool to understand the underlying values of the materials, but interviews and observations, although time-consuming, reveal the most insightful, context-sensitive information.

The data analysis is not yet complete. The next stage will be to analyse the video data. A further source of information will be the students. Together, the various forms of data collection and analysis will provide a rich picture of the English education culture at Kinki University Technical College.

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