An evaluation of the reading texts in The English text book for the 3rd year of secondary education

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تقييم نصوص القراءة في كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية للسنة الثالثة ثانوي

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Abstract

Reading text is considered an important material for the development of the learners' reading competence. Texts are selected according to a number of criteria that guarantee their suitability for the learning process. This study aims at evaluating 3ASLPh reading texts in terms of interest, readability, appropriateness, authenticity, layout, and visuals. It also seeks to identify the areas of weakness and find out to what extent the reading texts conform to these criteria through a descriptive and analytical method based on the researcher's experience as a teacher of English and the data collected through a questionnaire. The results show that not all the texts respond to the chosen criteria and that they need modifications and improvements to meet the learners' needs and the teaching objectives.

Keywords: evaluation, reading text, criteria, 3ASLPh, reading.

ملخص

يعتبر نص القراءة مادة هامة لتطوير مهارات القراءة لدى المتعلمين. يتم اختيار النصوص وفق معايير هامة تضمن مناسبتها لعملية التعلم. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقييم نصوص كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية الموجهة إلى السنة الثالثة ثانوي شعبة آداب وفلسفة وفق معيار الأهمية و المقروئية و المناسبة ووفق معيار الصدق و تصميم النص و المرئيات المساعدة كالصور و الجداول والرسوم البيانية. يهدف البحث أيضا إلى الكشف عن مواطن الضعف في هذه النصوص و مدى استجابتها للمعايير المختارة من خلال المنهجين الوصفي والكمي التحليلي معتمدين على المعلومات المحصل عليها عن طريق استبيان وزع على مجموعة من أساتذة التعليم الثانوي.

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و قد أظهرت النتائج عدم استجابة جميع النصوص للمعايير المختارة و بالتالي الحاجة إلى التعديل و التحسين لتلبية احتياجات المتعلم والأهداف التعليمية المسطرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقييم، نصوص القراءة، معايير، السنة 3آ ف، القراءة

1.Introduction:

Reading text is an important material in the implementation of learning/ teaching English language as a foreign language in the Algerian secondary schools. Texts are available in the textbook introduced by the Ministry of Education and published by The National Authority of School Publications. Text books in their turn are the main resources in reading and a major instructional instrument in all grades (Bryce, 2013,P.101), they are considered as a compulsory material for teachers who are supposed to teach specific themes divided on a number of didactic units prescribed in the syllabus.

Since the country's independence, the Algerian state has made important efforts to improve the educational system and the national curriculum, and a specific interest has been devoted to the English language. Learning English today is like a gate that helps society to integrate into modernity harmoniously, it allows everyone to get access to science, technology and the universal culture (Programme D'Anglais, 2006, P. 3); The aim of teaching English in Algeria involves not only the acquisition of language and communication skills, but also cross- curriculum skills of methodological/ technological, cultural and social skills; such as, the development of a critical skill and analytical mind, the attachment to our national values, the respect of the universal values, which are in fact based on the respect of oneself and

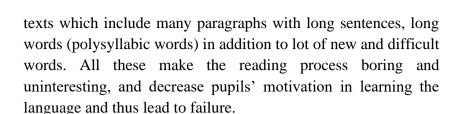others, tolerance and openness to the world (Programme D'Anglais, 2006, P. 3).

English is taught as a second foreign language in Algeria after French. Teaching English covers seven years, four in the middle school and three in the secondary school. In the third/ last year of the secondary education, a specific syllabus is set to consolidate, deepen and develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes previously acquired in order to prepare pupils for the Baccalaureate examination.

Teaching/ learning English according to the National Curriculum of 2006 (still practiced) is based on the competency-based approach which means the pedagogy of the integration of learning. This pedagogy suggests a time of discovery, observation, application and control by means of making learning English more practical for the learner in a way that helps him/ her in his/ her family, school and later in his/ her adult life as a citizen. In other words, the competency-based curriculum proposes situations of learning and situations of integration which concentrate on the learner and enhance his initiative and creativity, they have to make him use his various strategies of learning and reinvest his/ her acquired knowledge in situations related to his/ her daily life.

At the end of the third year, pupils are supposed to master three competences (Programme D'Anglais, 2006, P.7): oral interaction, text interpretation, production of pieces of writing. The second competence is related to the comprehension and interpretation of oral and written texts so as to get information, answer questions, justify answers…

2. Research statement:

As a teacher of English in the secondary education, the researcher noticed that pupils frequently face difficulties in reading long

texts which include many paragraphs with long sentences, long words (polysyllabic words) in addition to lot of new and difficult words. All these make the reading process boring and uninteresting, and decrease pupils' motivation in learning the language and thus lead to failure.

The researcher decided to make an evaluation of the reading texts directed to the pupils of 3AS (Literature and Philosophy) in order to know whether or not they respond to some important criteria such as, readability, appropriateness and effectiveness, that is whether they are built/ chosen to meet pupils' interest, suit their level and serve as a main learning material from both sides, form (text layout, visuals) and content (authenticity, variety of topics, related vocabulary). The researcher also wants to identify the reading texts' areas of weakness and whether or not they serve to achieve the didactic objectives set in the curriculum of 2006 and thus, to suggest improvements.

3. Research questions:

In order to achieve the purposes of the research and to arrive to important results, the researcher discusses the following questions:

1. Which criteria are required for the evaluation of the reading texts?
2. Do the reading texts in the 3ASLPH textbook respond to all the suggested criteria?
3. What are the weak points of the reading texts of 3ASLPh according to the chosen criteria?

4. Literature review:

4.1. Criteria for evaluating reading texts:

Reading comprehension is an important skill in learning languages, it reflects the relationship between the learner and the text. Reading in general is an interaction between the reader and the writer by means of the text. Sandra Silberstein (1977) states in Brown (2001, p.300): "skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge in the world", which means that the reader's previously acquired knowledge and familiarity with the topic of the text are important factors in the comprehension of texts and the determination of the level of readability. When reading texts, the reader has to derive the meaning intended by the writer; the text doesn't by itself carry meaning, the reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, experience and culture (schemata) to the printed world (Brown, 2001, p. 299).

In classroom environment, reading provides pupils with linguistic knowledge, culture, values, good manners, humor and even pleasure; McDonough and Shaw consider reading as one of the most important language skill particularly in case where students have to read English materials for their own specialist subject (2013, p. 110). Pupils develop their reading competence through text book which provides a number of different text types and genre.

Reading texts are not put at random, they are rather chosen according to important criteria. In the following section, the researcher will discuss five criteria which are considered crucial in choosing and evaluating texts.

4.1.1. Interest:

Interest is an important element in selecting reading texts, it is a source of motivation, it encourages students to read more. Richard Day states that when the topic of a passage is not of interest to students, their motivation to read is substantially lessened (1994,p 2). Interest also makes learners work hard to understand what they read (Savage and Mooney, 1979, P. 31).

Reading texts must include suitable contents which are related to students' interests, that is, they deal with situations or ideas which students receive as meaningful and important for them (Heatherington, 1985,p. 42). Reading texts should treat new and various topics to increase students' motivation, they should be near to their real life, their age, religion and culture.

4.1.2. Cultural background knowledge:

This criterion affects closely the reading process, it raises students' motivation and helps readers in general to construct meaning and understand the text through the exploitation of their prior knowledge. The reader brings his knowledge about the world to the printed word; he compares the new knowledge to the concepts shared in his memories (Brown, 2001, P.299).

4.1.3. Suitability and readability:

The selection of the reading texts depends on their suitability to pupils' level, Melvin and Stout consider that the level of the students will influence the selection of material (1987, P.50), if the text goes beyond the students level, they will lose interest in reading.

Nuttall (1996) considers suitability of content the material that students will find interesting, enjoyable, challenging and

appropriate for their goals in learning English (in Brown 2001, p.314). The text can also be exploited to develop students' reading competence and help the teacher to accomplish the objectives of the lesson; texts in this sense must be suitable for students in terms of lexical and structural difficulty which will challenge students without overwhelming them (Brown, 2001, p.314), that is, reading is matched to understanding. The level of ease or difficulty with which texts can be comprehended by learners is referred to as readability.

4.1.4. Authenticity:

An authentic text is the one which is not written for pedagogical purposes (Berardo, 2006,p. 62), but for a real life communicative purpose. It exposes readers to appropriate language use, culture, vocabulary and style in various real life contexts; as a result, students are more interested in reading. Newspaper articles or reports, an extract from a novel (literature) presented in their original layout and accompanying visuals are more motivating than artificial texts although they sometimes need to be simplified and standardized to suit the students level especially beginners.

4.1.5. Text layout:

The form in which the reading text appears is very important, because it is the first thing students are confronted with, so texts should be well- organized and well-presented, they should be divided into paragraphs to help students to understand the text sub topics. Moreover, texts should be written in a suitable font size, with colors and enough spaces between lines and paragraphs. An attractive looking article is more likely to grab the reader's attention rather than a page full of types (Berardo, 2006, p.63).

Pictures, diagrams, tables and photos help put the text into context and thus can be better understood.

5. Research methodology:

The researcher used descriptive and quantitative research methods so as to reach an objective evaluation of the reading texts in the English textbook of 3ASLPh. The method is based on the analysis of the findings obtained from a questionnaire which was designed according to the chosen criteria and distributed to twelve English teachers, who have an experience between 11 and 22 years. The teachers answered questions about the texts themes, topics (cultural and religious values, historical issues, national values, and real life issues), vocabulary, suitability to pupils' levels, background knowledge and the learning objectives set in the 3AS education curriculum of 2006. In addition, the questionnaire dealt with questions about texts accompanying visuals (pictures, photos, tables, graphs, charts...); in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness. It also included questions about texts layout (standardized or authentic, font size, space between paragraphs, lines.). The aim of the questionnaire is to collect data about the reading texts of 3ASLPh and find out the teacher's view about the reading texts and for reliability. The areas of weaknesses are discussed through the researcher's description of the selected reading texts which were based on her experience in teaching third year pupils.

In order to maximize the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to an experienced English teacher to see if it meets the purposes it is designed for. Her comments were taken into consideration.

5.1. Sample of the study:

The sample consists of 12 teachers; 4 male teachers and 8 female teachers. They work in four secondary schools in Medea:

- 4 teachers from Zerrouk Boucherit Secondary School
- 3 teachers from Khadidja Ben Rouissi Secondary School
- 3 teachers from Ahmed Oroua Secondary School
- 2 teacher from Zerouak Abd El Karim Secondary School

5.2. Description of the 3ASLPh syllabus (texts directed to reading):

The 3AS text book includes six units dealing with different themes. The third-year literary streams (Literature and Philosophy) have to study four units, each unit is divided into four sequences, two of which are about the listening skill and two others deal with the reading one. The reading texts are presented in the following table:

Table 1: Reading texts for 3ASLPh

Unit	Topics	sequence	Texts
1 **Exploring the past**	Ancient civilizations	Read and consider	Algeria at the crossroads of civilizations
		Reading and writing	Ancient Egyptian civilization
2 **Ill-Gotten Gains never prosper**	Ethics in business: Fighting Fraud and corruption	Read and consider	Imitating property is a theft
		Reading and writing	Social auditing

3 **Schools: Different and alike**	Education in the world: comparing educational systems	Read and consider	Education in Britain
		Reading and writing	Education in USA
6 **We are a family**	Feelings, Emotions, Humor and Related topics	Read and consider	feelings
		Reading and writing	The unicorn in the garden

5.3. Data analysis:

The quantitative analysis in this research uses frequencies and percentages to show the findings through the collected data which were quantitatively analyzed to see to what extent the reading texts of 3ASLPh respond to the selected criteria.

The findings are illustrated in five tables. The results are ranked according to their frequency and percentage.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of reading texts interest and background knowledge.

Rank	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
1	Enrich LLs' knowledge about various topics.	12	100%
5	Provide various text types and genres	2	16.66%
4	Discuss topics related to LLs' real life.	3	25%

2	They include values and good manners.	10	83.33%
3	They reinforce national values and raise LLs' awareness about their country.	6	50%
	Total	33	54.99%

The examination of the scored percentages and frequencies of the reading texts criterion of interest shows that the item "enriching LLs knowledge about various topics" got the highest score of 100% with a frequency of 12; this means that the reading texts for third year 3AS Literature and philosophy tackle different topics in various fields (history, business, the educational system in other countries, social themes like family relationships and expressing feelings).

The next item "providing values and good manners" got a very high percentage (83.33%) with a frequency of 10, that is, nearly all the texts are chosen to teach pupils important values and good manners.

Concerning "reinforcing national values and raising LLs' awareness about their country", the item got 50%, which means not all the reading texts are about national issues and values. In addition, the criterion "dealing with topics related to LLs' real life" got a small percentage (25%), it means that only a few texts are related to the Algerian context and LLs' real life issues.

The last item concerns "providing various text types and genres" which got 16.66% with a frequency of 2. A description of the 3ASLPh reading texts reveals that only 2/8 texts are narrative and all the remaining texts i.e 6/8 are expository. The

other text types (descriptive, argumentative, and conversational) are absent.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of the reading texts suitability and readability

Rank	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
1	The texts are in accordance with LLs' age range.	8	66.66%
3	They are suitable for LLs level.	6	50%
4	Provide suitable number of new words	4	33.33%
1	Employ too many abstract words.	8	66.66%
6	The new words are highlighted or explained.	00	00%
	Total	26	43.33%

Concerning the criteria of suitability and readability, the results in table (3) shows that "using too many abstract words" got the highest percentage of 66.66% with a frequency of 6, the same percentage was obtained about the criterion of "suitability with LLS age"; it means that the majority of texts contents are suitable for learners' age range. Moreover the item of "suitability with LLS' level" got 50%, which means that not all the reading texts are in accordance with LLs' level.

As regards the point of "highlighting and explaining the new words", the results show that no texts has the new words highlighted or explained with a percentage of 00%.

Table 4:Frequency and percentage of the reading texts authenticity and visuals

Rank	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
1	The reading texts are authentic	12	100%
2	They are accompanied with suitable visuals	9	75%
3	The visuals help understand the texts	8	66.66%
4	They are attractive / colorful	7	58.33%
	Total	36	74.99%

In relation to "reading texts authenticity", the results show that this criterion got the percentage of 100%, this means that all the reading texts are extracted from their sources which are as follows:

Table 5: The sources of 3ASLPh Reading texts

Reading texts	Source
Algeria at the crossroads of civilizations	Africana: The Encyclopedia of African and African American
Ancient Egyptian civilization	Victor Skipp, Out of the Ancient World, Penguin, P61.
Imitating property is a theft	The Economist, May 17th, 2003
Social auditing	Bill Mascull, Business Vocabulary in English, P90
Education in Britain	Guide to British and American Culture

Education in USA	D.S Stevenson, American Life and Institutions, USIA
feelings	The Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, P192
The unicorn in the garden	James Thurber, Fables of our Time

The next criteria which is "the use of suitable visuals", "helping the LLs to understand the text" and the item "visuals are attractive and colorful" got the following scores: 75%, 66.66% and 58.33%. Text visuals vary between drawings, authentic photos and graphs; they help to understand the topic of the texts.

Table 5: Frequency and percentage of the reading texts layout

Rank	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
5	The reading texts are written in a suitable font size.	4	33.33%
3	There are sufficient margins on the four sides of the texts.	10	83.33%
4	There are sufficient spaces between text paragraphs and lines.	5	41.66%
1	Text paragraphs are indented.	12	100%
1	The texts are standardized.	12	100%
	Total	43	71.66%

Table 5 shows the results of text layout which reveals that " text paragraphs are indented" and " the texts are standardized" got a full percentage 100%, it means that the texts are all

standardized, they are all written in the same shape, font size, spaces.. Next, "there are sufficient margins in all sides" item got a high percentage with the frequency of 10. There are sufficient spaces between paragraphs and got 41.66% followed by the item of "having a suitable font size" which has a small percentage, which equals 33.33%.

5.4. Results of ranking the reading texts in terms of suitability:

Table 6: The most suitable texts for 3ASLPh LLs

Rank	Units	Texts	frec	perc
1	1	1-Algeria at the crossroads of civilizations	10	83.33%
4		2-The Egyptian civilization	6	50%
7	2	3-Imitating property is a theft	3	25%
8		4-Social auditing	0	00%
3	3	5-Education in Britain	7	58.33%
5		6-education in USA	5	41.66%
6	6	7-Feeligs	4	33.33%
2		8-The Unicorn in the Garden	9	75%
Total			44	45.83%

The results shown in table (6) reveal that text (1) is the most suitable reading texts for 3ASLPh learners (with a percentage of 83.33%) in terms of content which is about a national issue (history). It is followed by text (8) which got a percentage of 75% with a frequency of 9; the requested teachers stated that this text

is suitable in terms of its type; it is a fable which entertains and teaches the LLs a moral lesson.

Text (5-2-6) are less suitable, they got the following results: 58.33%, 50% and 41.66%. These texts do not represent the learners' culture and national context.

Text (7) and (3) got a low percentage (33.33% and 25%), and text (4) is the least suitable text for learners; teachers confirm that this text deals with a business issue which is not suitable for the LLs' age.

5.6. The weak points of 3ASLPh reading texts:

Relying on the first and the second part of the questionnaire, and the researcher's experience, she found out the following weaknesses:

1. All the reading texts are long and contain more than four long paragraphs.
2. Only one text deals with the LLs' country (Algeria at the crossroads of civilizations), and no other text is related to the Algerian culture or reality.
3. The majority of texts does not reinforce national values and does not raise the LLs' feelings of nationalism.
4. All the reading texts are accompanied with the transcription of the new and long words but do not explain them.

6. Discussion:

The reading texts are evaluated according to the chosen criteria which are comprehensive, because they include the important aspects of the reading skill.

The results reveal that the item "bringing new information and knowledge about various topics brings the highest scores with a percentage of 100%, this shows that texts of the four units inform LLs about different topics and enrich their knowledge (history, economy, education and social relationships). The item "teaching values and good manners have a high score (83.33%) concerning text suitability. This shows that the reading texts are chosen to serve not only the language teaching but also the objective of teaching LLs good manners.

However, not all the texts "reinforce national values and raise the LLs' awareness about their country" since this item got 50% of the scored results. The results also show that the reading texts do not provide all texts types and genres and thus do not give them the opportunity to discover all the text types and genre and learn about their characteristics.

Moreover, the results reveal that almost all the texts are in accordance with LLs' age range; this criterion got a percentage of 66.66%. Only the two texts of unit 2 got a low percentage (25% and 00%), they are considered unsuitable in terms of content, vocabulary and even topics which are not interesting for them at this age.

Concerning vocabulary, the results show that the texts employ too many new and abstract words with a percentage of 66.66%, they are not highlighted or explained (00%), this decreases the texts readability.

The criterion of texts authenticity got a percentage of 100%, which shows that all the reading texts are authentic, there are articles, newspaper reports, a short story (Fable) taken from their sources. Not all the visuals used with the texts are suitable (75%

are suitable). Visuals help the LLs understand better the texts (66.66%), it means they are meaningful and has a direct relation with the texts.

As regards the text layout, the criteria "indentation" got 100%, which shows that all the texts paragraphs are indented enabling the LLs to identify each paragraph in the text. Furthermore, all the texts are standardized (100%), which means they all have the same form, size and color. As a consequence, these texts make their readers bored and lose motivation for reading (Berardo, 2006) and (Nunan1992).

7. Conclusion:

The research was an attempt to evaluate 3ASLPh reading texts in terms of form and content and according to some selected criteria; such as, interest, background knowledge, authenticity, layout and accompanying visuals. It was based on the data collected through a questionnaire which was distributed on twelve teachers in the secondary education.

An overall analysis of the findings and texts description indicated that texts vary in terms of topics and the information they provide to the learners. Almost all of them involve values and good manners as well. It can be said that these texts serve as a learning material for the learners and help them to discover the universal culture. But, on the other hand, only one text is related to the Algerian history and no other text deals with national values, it means, the whole syllabus does not go with the objectives set in the national curriculum.

Besides, the texts directed to the 3AS Literature and Philosophy do not vary in terms of types; only two text types are provided (expository and narrative), this means that 3rd year pupils do not have the opportunity to discover or learn more about types and their characteristics.

Furthermore, all the texts are rich in terms of vocabulary, but they include a lot of abstract and difficult words which are not explained and thus make it difficult for pupils to understand the reading texts.

The research also unveiled that all the reading texts are authentic, but standardized in terms of layout; they have the same font size, color and a margin for transcriptions. All the reading texts are too long and contain indented paragraphs. In addition, their accompanying visuals are relevant to them with the exception of text 4.

As a result, authorities (Ministry of the national Education) are recommended to make a thorough evaluation of the reading texts of 3AS on the basis of the suggested criteria in the current research. The evaluation can be fruitful and result in important modifications and improvements in the text book and the contained texts for an effective learning.

Teachers are recommended to adopt and shorten the long reading texts to meet the LLs' needs, to suit their level and the teaching objectives.

Teachers are also recommended to replace difficult texts with others which are motivating and go with the LLs' age, culture and values.

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Appendices:

An evaluation of the reading texts in The English text book for the 3rd year of secondary education

Questionnaire to evaluate the reading texts directed to third year pupils –Literature and Philosophy (3ASLPh)

Part I: Please choose the appropriate answer and add a commentary where necessary:

Questions	yes	No	Other answer
1. Are the reading texts directed to 3ASLPh and available in the third year English textbook easy to read and understand?			
2. Do they tackle interesting topics and various domains?			
3. Do they enrich pps' knowledge about different topics, types and genres?			
4. Do they provide pps with much new information?			
5. Do they provide pps with little new information?			
6. Do they have relation with pps' background/ previously acquired knowledge?			
7. Are they in accordance with pps' age range?			
8. Are they related to pps' culture and religion?			
9. Do they reflect The USA/ British culture?			
10. Do they include values ad good manners,			

11. Do they reinforce national values and raise pps' awareness about their country?			
12. Are the reading texts authentic?			
///	/	/	//////
13. Do they contain a suitable number of new words?			
14. Do they employ too many or too few abstract or concrete words?			
15. Are the new words highlighted/ written in bold in the text?			
16. Are the new words in the reading texts explained?			
17. Are the new words easy to learn?			
18. Are they above learners' ability/ level?			
///	////		/////
19. Are the reading texts written in a suitable font size? small normal large size			
20. Are there sufficient margins on the four sides of the text?			
21. Are there sufficient spaces between text paragraphs and lines?			
22. Are text paragraphs indented? (use indentation)			
23. Are the reading texts accompanied with visuals (pictures, photos, tables, charts..)?			
24. Are the visuals relevant to texts' topics?			
25. Do they help understand the text?			

26. Are they authentic or standardized?			
///	////	/	/////
27. Do texts in the 3ASLPh textbook contain long paragraphs?			
28. Do texts in the 3ASLPh textbook contain long sentences?			
29. Do texts in the 3ASLPh textbook contain long words (polysyllabic words)?			
30. Are the reading texts too long, short or average length?			

Part II: please answer the following questions relying on your experience as an Eglish teacher in the secondary education.

1. Which reading texts do you find interesting and suitable for your learners?
   a. Text:…………… unit: ….

   b. Text:………… …… unit: ….

   c. Text:………… …… unit: ….

   Why?..
2. Which reading texts do your pps find difficult to understand?
   a. Text:…………… unit: ….

   b. Text:………… …… unit: ….

   c. Text:……………… unit: ….

   Why?..
3. Which reading texts do you find useless/ unpurposeful and need to be replaced by other texts?
   a. Text…………… unit: ….

   b. Text:… …………… unit: ….

   c. Text:……………… unit: ….

   Why?..

4. Which visuals do you find functional / helpful in comprehending the reading texts?
   a…………………………………
   b…………………………………..
   c…………………………………
   Why?...
5. Which visuals help better your pps to understand the text?
   a………………………
   b……………………
   c………………………
   why?...
6. Other comments on the reading texts of 3ASLPh.
   ………………………………………………………