

Kuwaiti EFL Teachers' Views & Opinions towards Teaching the Textbook (Empower B1) at the College of Basic Education

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Abstract:

EFL teachers in the English language unit, Language Centre, in the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training always seek to improve EFL curricula to keep up with the latest textbooks needed to be taught in their classrooms. The currently utilized textbook for the remedial course 099 is Headway, which was introduced several years ago. As an attempt to replace it, a new textbook was proposed in the fall semester of 2018 by the Curriculum Committee (Empower B1). Before assigning the new textbook Headway B1, EFL teachers in the Language Unit were asked to teach it for one semester as a pilot teaching, and then after their experience, they were enquired about their evaluation. Hence, the purpose of the present study is to explore and investigate Kuwaiti EFL teachers' views and opinions towards teaching the new textbook (Empower B1) for the remedial course 099. 25 EFL teachers have participated in a semi-structured questionnaire, and 5 of them were interviewed. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions that covered two main branches of textbook evaluation: (Physical Appearance & Format) and (Contents, Units, Activities & Exercises Skills). The findings of this study showed that there was a great inclination toward teaching the new textbook Empower B1, but there were few EFL teachers who were against introducing the new textbook, claiming it did not suit their EFL students' language level.

Keywords: English language teaching, curriculum, TESOL, textbook evaluation

1. Introduction

Textbooks are still the prime players in the process of teaching English as a foreign or a second language, as they provide useful ready-for-use materials to both EFL/ ESL teachers and their students. However, the inappropriate utilization of textbooks may lead to de-skilling teachers and consequently lead to a negative impact on EFL/ ESL learners. Therefore, it is very important to identify and explore the EFL/ ESL teachers' beliefs and opinions before introducing a new textbook. At the college of Basic Education, the textbook of the remedial course 099 has been replaced by a new textbook called Empower B1. It has been decided for teachers to teach it for one semester as a pilot study of evaluation. This current study explores and investigates Kuwaiti EFL teachers' views and opinions towards teaching the new textbook after their pilot teaching. 25 EFL teachers have participated in a semi-structured questionnaire, and 5 of them were interviewed.

2. Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of the present study is to explore and investigate Kuwaiti EFL teachers' views and opinions at the College of Basic Education towards teaching the new textbook (Empower B1) for their remedial course (099). In other words, the study aims to find an answer to the following question:

- 1- What are the Kuwaiti EFL teachers' views and opinions towards teaching the new textbook (Empower B1) for their remedial course (099)?

3. Book Overview

The textbook Empower B1 provides core grammar and vocabulary input alongside a mix of skills. Speaking lessons offer a unique combination of functional language, pronunciation, and conversation skills alongside video that helps learners to communicate effectively in the real world. It consists of 12 units, and their contents are as follows:

| Unit number | Title and vocabulary content | Grammar |
|-------------|------------------------------|---|
| Unit1 | Communicating | Question forms-Present Simple and Present Continuous |
| Unit2 | Travel and Tourism | Past simple – Past Continuous |
| Unit3 | Money | Present Perfect – Past Simple -Present Perfect with Just, Already & yet |
| Unit4 | Social Life | Present Continuous – Going to -Will – Won't - Shall |
| Unit5 | Work | Must- Have to - Can – (will – might predictions) |
| Unit6 | Problems and Advice | Should – Shouldn't –Imperatives - Uses of to + Infinitive |
| Unit7 | Changes | Comparatives and Superlatives –Used to |
| Unit8 | Culture | The Passive:(Present Simple – Past Simple) – Present Perfect with for & since |
| Unit9 | Achievements | First Conditional –Verb Patterns |
| Unit10 | Values | Second Conditional –Quantifiers too – not enough |
| Unit11 | Discovery and Invention | Relative Clauses - Articles |
| Unit 12 | Characters | Past Perfect – Reported Speech |

4. Literature Review

There are many important elements that play roles in English language teaching, but the key feature for many ESL/EFL classrooms and programs is the textbooks that are used by language teachers and practitioners. Richards (2001), for example, believes that without textbooks, a program may have no significant core, and EFL learners may not receive a program that has been analytically designed and developed. Other researchers, such as Hutchinson and Torres (1994) think that EFL/ ESL teaching and learning cannot take place without the presence of suitable textbooks. They state:

"The textbook is an almost universal element of English language teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in various countries. No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook." (p.315).

Others like Sheldon (1988) goes beyond that and considers that textbooks not only "represent the visible heart of any ELT program" (p.237) but also provide significant advantages for both the EFL/ ESL learners and language teachers when using them in the EFL/ESL classrooms. One of the advantages is that they not only provide linguistic content such as vocabulary and grammar but also they are the major source for cultural information. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), a textbook can be a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skinner, and an ideology.

From the above literature, we understand the importance of textbooks and their role in English language teaching and, consequently the great need to find suitable textbooks and their appropriate contents for EFL/ ESL learners. One way to reach this objective is to explore EFL teachers' views and opinions.

5. Methodology

As mentioned above, this study aims to investigate and explore Kuwaiti EFL teachers' views and opinions towards teaching the new textbook Empower B1 for their remedial course 099. The textbook Empower B1 is introduced in the academic year 2019/ 2020 for EFL students who are studying bachelor degree in different specialties as a replacement of the old book Headway Plus. To get answers to the research questions, the researcher used the quantitative and the qualitative methods. Twenty-five Kuwaiti EFL teachers who are currently teaching in the College of Basic Education, Language Centre, were voluntarily asked to participate in a semi-structured questionnaire that contained 12 questions. Also, to support and enrich the data collected by the quantitative method, the researcher decided to use the qualitative method and ask 5 EFL teachers to participate in a semi-structured interview.

The questions of the semi-structured questionnaire were designed to examine two main sections of textbooks evaluation as follows:

A- Physical Appearance & Format:

- Q.1- The layout of the textbook motivates students to perform the tasks.
- Q.2- The illustrations in the textbook are directly related to the content to help the learner understand the printed text.
- Q.3- Main headings and subheadings in the textbook are well organized.

B- Contents: Units, Activities& Exercises Skills:

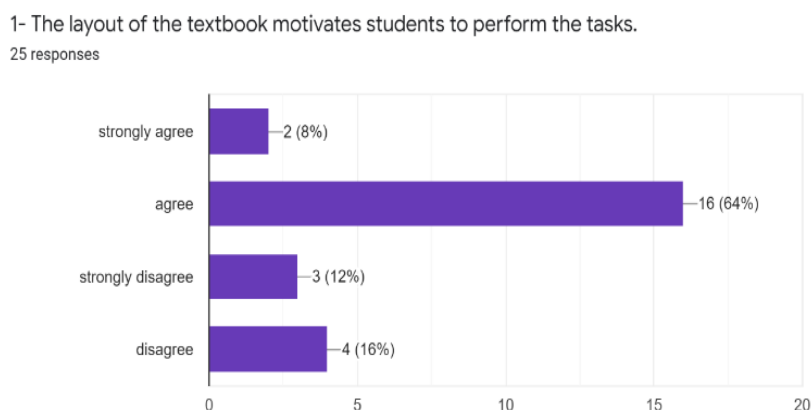
- Q.4- The difficulty level of the textbook is appropriate to the students’ level.
- Q.5- The content is organized according to the students’ language needs.
- Q.6- The topics of the units are interesting for students.
- Q.7-The units in the textbook provide students a coverage of four main skills and other sub-skills(vocabulary and grammar).
- Q.8- The textbook includes cultural content of different countries.
- Q.9- The reading exercises in the textbook are appropriate for improving students’ reading skills.
- Q.10- The writing exercises in the textbook are appropriate for improving students’ writing skills.
- Q.11- The speaking exercises in the textbook are appropriate for improving students’ speaking skills.

The semi-structured questionnaires were followed by semi-structured interviews for 5 EFL teachers to get more and in-depth details and information about the topic. The researcher decided to use both the quantitative and the qualitative methods to gather the data needed to the study for certain reasons. Several researchers such as Creswell (1994) argued that by combining the two methods, researchers can have a better understanding of the phenomenon under study and can add breadth and scope to the study. Moreover, as Frechtling, Sharp & Westat (1997) believed, mixing the two methods (quantitative and qualitative) would increase the validity and reliability of the study, and can sharpen our understanding of research findings, in other words, data from interviews can clarify data collected from a questionnaire. Also, they indicated that a mixed method design in a single study strengthens the validity of research results. Merriam (1988) also argued that quantitative data from questionnaires or other instruments can be utilized to support findings from qualitative data.

6. Results & Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this study is to explore English language teachers’ views and opinions regarding teaching the textbook Empower B1 in the College of Basic Education. To get answers for the research questions, a semi-structured questionnaire containing 2 sections and 12 questions was distributed among 25 EFL teachers followed by interviews for 5 EFL teachers.

If we start with the findings of section 1 (Physical Appearance & Format) , we discover in Q1 that the majority of EFL teachers (16 EFL teachers, 64%) agreed, and (2 EFL teachers, 8%) strongly agreed that the layout of the book Empower B1 motivated EFL learners to do their tasks. Whereas (4 EFL teachers, 16%) and (3 EFL teachers, 12%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the same topic.

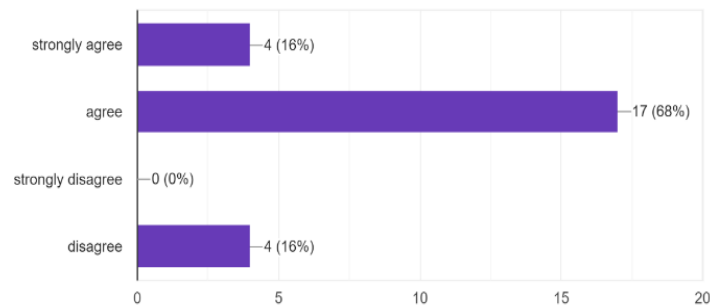


(Table 1)

Regarding Q2, which is about illustrations in the Empower B1 textbook, the majority of participants agreed that the illustrations are directly related to the content to help the learner understand the printed text. In fact, (4 EFL teachers 16%) strongly agreed and (17 EFL teachers 68%) agreed. Only (4 EFL teachers 16%) disagreed.

2- The illustrations in the textbook are directly related to the content to help the learner understand the printed text.

25 responses

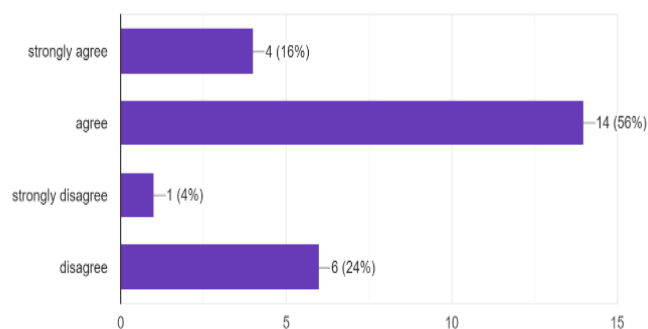


(Table 2)

Q3, which tests the organization of the headings and subheadings, most of the respondents agreed that the main headings and subheadings are well organized. (4 EFL teachers 16%) strongly agreed and (14 EFL teachers) agreed. One EFL teacher strongly disagreed and (6 EFL teachers 24%) disagreed.

3- Main headings and subheadings in the textbook are well organized.

25 responses

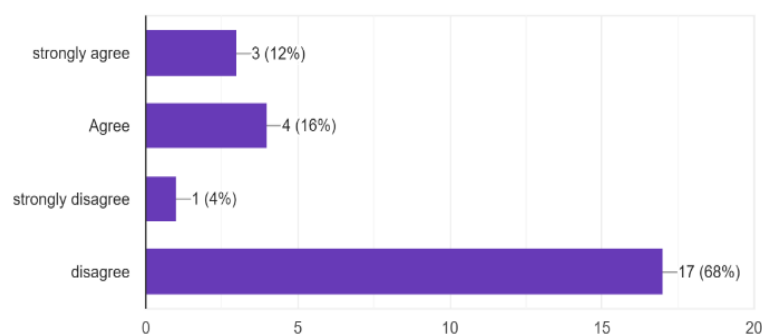


(Table 3)

The findings of Q4 showed that the majority of participants disagreed that the difficulty level of the textbook is appropriate for EFL students' level. In fact, (17 EFL teachers 68%) disagreed and (1 EFL teacher 1%) strongly disagreed. On the other hand, (3 EFL teachers 12%) strongly agreed and (4 EFL teachers 16%) agreed. When interviewing with EFL teachers disagreed with Q4, most of them complained that the level of their EFL students is below the level of the textbook. Teacher A for example, said 'My students' level of English is very poor, I find difficulty teaching them Empower B1 content. I think they need another textbook'. In a suggestion to overcome his students' underachievement, he proposed using lower grade textbook of the same series.

4- The difficulty level of the textbook is appropriate to the students' level.

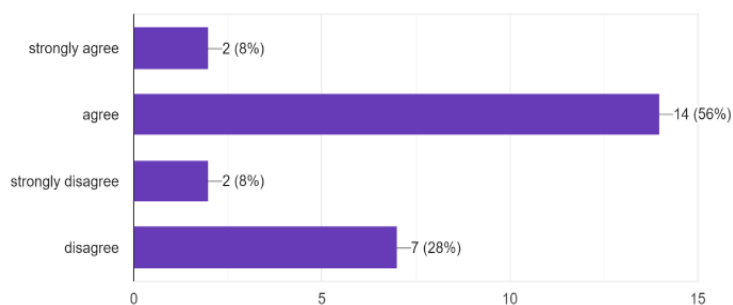
25 responses



(Table 4)

5- The content is organized according to the students' language needs.

25 responses

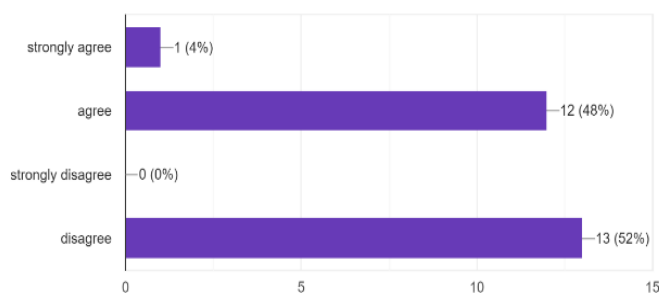


(Table 5)

Regarding Q5, which tested the content of the textbook Empower B1, the majority of teachers, according to Table 5 (14 EFL teachers 56%), and (2 EFL teachers 8%) strongly agreed that the content is organized and suited the students' language needs. However, (2 EFL teachers 8%) agreed and (7 EFL teachers 28%) strongly disagreed that the content needs more organization. Teacher Bas an example, who has MA in Applied Linguistics from the UK stated that his EFL students' language competence is very low; hence, the content, especially in units six and seven didn't match with his students' language needs. The findings of Q6 are very interesting. Almost half of the respondents believe that the topics of the textbook Empower B1 are interesting, while the second half think there are not. (12 EFL teachers 48%) agreed and (1 EFL teachers 4%) strongly agreed with Q6, whereas (13 EFL teachers 52%) disagreed and no one strongly disagreed.

6- The topics of the units are interesting for students.

25 responses

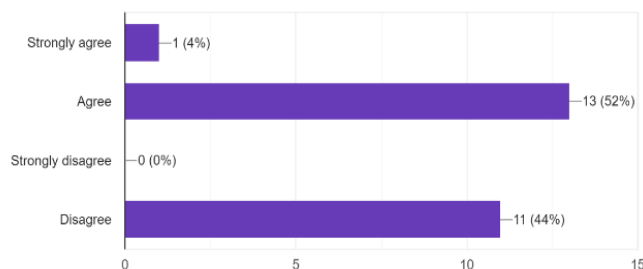


(Table 6)

Regarding the findings of question 7 in Table 7, which discusses whether the units in the textbook cover the four main skills and other sub-skills (vocabulary and grammar), most of the teachers agreed (13 EFL teachers 52%) and (1 EFL teacher 4%) strongly agreed. (11 EFL teachers 44%) disagreed and no one strongly disagreed.

7- The units in the textbook provide students coverage of four main skills and other sub-skills (vocabulary and grammar).

25 responses

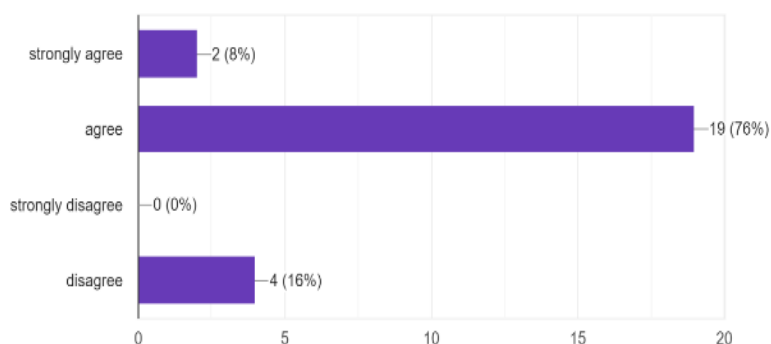


(Table 7)

As for question 8, which tests the cultural content of the textbook Empower B1, the vast majority, according to Table 8 showed that (19 EFL teachers 78%) agreed and (2 EFL teachers 8%) strongly agreed that the content of the textbook is multicultural. Only (4 EFL teachers 16%) disagreed.

8- The textbook includes cultural content of different countries.

25 responses

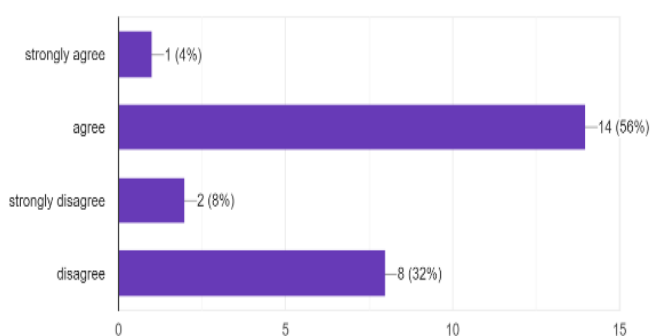


(Table 8)

The results of table 9 show that (14 EFL teachers 56%) agreed and (1 EFL teacher 4%) disagreed that the reading passages in the textbook help in enhancing EFL students' reading skills. (8 EFL teachers 32%) disagreed and (2 EFL teachers 8%) strongly disagreed. When interviewing teacher C who has MA in TESOL from the USA, stated that most of the reading passages in Empower B1 are more advanced compared with students' level and does not suit her students' proficiency level. But she added that this problem could be overcome since the textbook has many units and a variety of topics to be chosen to match with students' language level.

9- The reading exercises in the textbook are appropriate for improving students' reading skills.

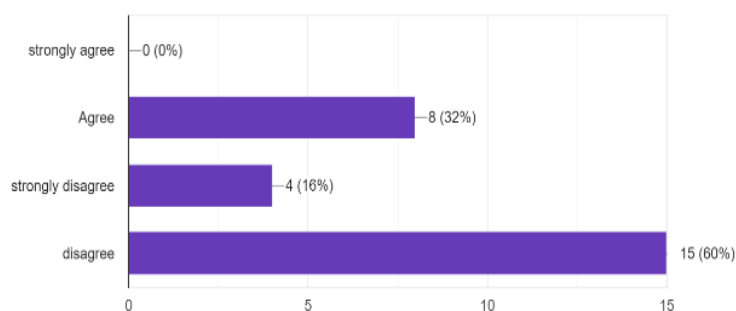
25 responses



(Table 9)

Findings from Table 10 proposed that the majority of EFL teachers did not agree with Q10. (15 EFL teachers 60%) disagreed and (4 EFL teachers 16%) strongly disagreed that the writing exercises in the textbook are appropriate for improving students' writing skills. In fact, some teachers, such as teacher D and teacher E stated that the writing exercises are very few in the textbook.

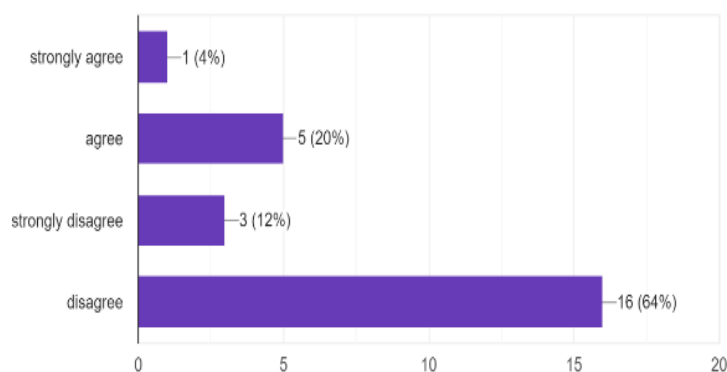
10- The writing exercises in the textbook are appropriate for improving students' writing skills.
25 responses



(Table 10)

The findings of Table 10 showed that most EFL teachers (16 EFL 54%) disagreed and (3 EFL teachers 12%) strongly disagreed that the writing exercises in the textbook Empower B1 are appropriate for improving students' writing skills. Only (5 EFL teachers 20%) agreed and (1 EFL teacher 4%) strongly agreed.

11- The speaking exercises in the textbook are appropriate for improving students' speaking skills.
25 responses



(Table 11)

7. Conclusions and recommendations

As mentioned before, the purpose of this study is to explore and investigate Kuwaiti, EFL teachers' views and opinions at the College of Basic Education towards introducing the new textbook Empower B1 for their remedial course 099. The findings and the data of this study showed a great inclination toward introducing the textbook Empower B1. Most of them appraised the physical appearance and format of the textbook. Furthermore, the vast majority of EFL teachers also valued the contents of the units regarding activities and exercise skills. Most of them thought the textbook suited the level of their students' language proficiency in regard to the reading passages, the writing and listening exercises. Concerning the cultural content, most of them also agreed that the cultural content did suit the Kuwaiti culture and could be introduced to EFL students. However, few thought that the level of the textbook was beyond their EFL students' language competency, but they also supported teaching the textbook as it has many units that could suit all levels.

Depending on the findings of his study, which involved 25 EFL teachers, the researcher highly recommends teaching the textbook Empower B1 for the remedial course 099 in the College of Basic Education as it seems to be an appropriate textbook that could replace the current Textbook Headway.

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