

## The Use of Textbooks: A Mandate or an Option - Perceptions of EFL Teachers in M'sila Secondary Schools

استخدام الكتب المدرسية: تكليف أم خيار - تصورات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية بالمسيلة

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**Abstract:** Textbooks are undeniable teaching resources that reflect pre-determined educational objectives based on learners' needs. They are the most popular primary teaching instruments that offer considerable amounts of content arrangement and curriculum aims outlined gradually in a structured framework. Nevertheless, it is recognized that there is no perfect textbook; therefore, teachers are asked to adapt and select what fits their teaching styles and learners' needs. As it stands, EFL secondary school textbooks of all three levels were subject to an intensive evaluation by several researchers to delineate their advantages and drawbacks whereas few research has been conducted on the actual use of textbooks from the perspective of teachers as the main experts in the domain. Therefore, this paper investigated EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions towards the use of textbooks in real contexts, as well as the extent they depend on them. The study opted for a mixed methodology wherein the quantitative data were collected through an online survey questionnaire administered to EFL secondary school teachers of M'sila; and an online semi-structured group interview was conducted with (3) teachers to gather qualitative data. The results disclosed that teachers do not totally rely on the textbook; instead, they adapt, select, and support the deficiencies with supplementary instructional materials.

**Keywords:** EFL Teachers- Secondary School- Teachers' Perceptions- Textbooks Use.

**الملخص:** تعتبر الكتب المدرسية موارد تعليمية لا يمكن إنكارها، فهي تعكس أهدافاً تعليمية محددة مسبقاً بناءً على احتياجات المتعلمين. إنها أدوات التدريس الأساسية الأكثر شيوعاً والتي تقدم قدرًا كبيرًا من ترتيب المحتوى وأهداف المنهج الموضحة تدريجيًا في إطار منظم. ومع ذلك، فمن المسلم به أنه لا يوجد كتاب مدرسي مثالي لذلك يُطلب من المعلمين التكيف واختيار ما يناسب أساليب التدريس الخاصة بهم واحتياجات المتعلمين. كما هو الحال خضعت الكتب المدرسية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية للمستويات الثلاثة لتقييم مكثف من قبل العديد من الباحثين لتحديد مزاياها وعيوبها. في حين تم إجراء عدد قليل من الأبحاث حول الاستخدام الفعلي للكتب المدرسية من وجهة نظر المعلمين باعتبارهم الخبراء الرئيسيين في هذا المجال. لذلك، بحثت هذه الورقة في تصورات

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معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية تجاه استخدام الكتب المدرسية في سياقات حقيقية، وكذلك مدى اعتمادهم عليها. اختارت الدراسة منهجية مختلطة حيث تم جمع البيانات الكمية من خلال استبيان مسح عبر الإنترنت تم إجراؤه لمدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية بالمسيلة وتم إجراء مقابلة جماعية شبه منظمة عبر الإنترنت مع (3) معلمين لجمع البيانات النوعية. أظهرت النتائج أن المعلمين لا يعتمدون بشكل كامل على الكتاب المدرسي؛ وبدلاً من ذلك، يقومون بتكييف الاختيار ودعم أوجه القصور بمواد تعليمية تكميلية. الكلمات المفتاحية: المرحلة الثانوية – استخدام الكتب المدرسية معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية – تصورات المعلمين.

## - Introduction:

Teaching and learning a foreign language necessitate the availability of teaching and learning materials that facilitate and outline the framework for the teaching of the required knowledge, language skills and communicative interaction. Among the commonly used print teaching materials are textbooks, which according to Cunningsworth (1995) are best resources in achieving pre-determined aims and objectives to meet student needs (p.7). Furthermore, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) emphasize the crucial role of a relevant textbook in the completeness of each teaching-learning situation (p.315). As it stands, textbooks are vital primary teaching materials that cater for the needs of teachers as well as learners. In addition, they are substantial teaching instructional materials that provide clear illustrations of curriculum implementation and how to achieve educational objectives. It is highly significant that those textbooks include essential elements of language and culture, in addition; they correspond to learners' needs, cultural background and level of linguistic proficiency (Bojanic & Topalov, 2016).

A textbook is regarded as a core resource as it provides a plethora of instructional materials and activities available to the teacher from which he can select and adapt. Furthermore, textbooks play a crucial role in the realm of language teaching and learning presented as an important factor in the EFL classrooms wherein they are a useful tool in the hands of the teacher, and the teacher must know how to use it, and how useful they can be for everyone (Rajeev, 2018). In this vein of thoughts, Richards J. C. (2001) defines the textbook as the " key component in most language teaching

*programs and that they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom".* He further adds that textbooks are the basis for designing lesson plan content and a helpful supplementary instructional material. Additionally, Ur (1996) echoed that one of the advantageous aspects of textbooks is that they provide a clear framework that enables teachers to set structured progressive instruction (p.184). He goes on to proclaim that textbooks can be a helpful guiding material for inexperienced teachers who are unsure about the knowledge of the language.

However, the use of textbooks in EFL contexts has been a debatable issue due to the potential and limitations encountered using them. Some teachers are heavy dependents on the textbook content whereas others tend to be selective and creative when using them to meet their teaching styles and learners' needs. According to Cunningsworth (1995), *"The role of course book is to be at the service of teachers and learners but not their master. Its role is not to exercise a tyrannical function as the arbiter of course content and teaching methods"* (p.7). He further pinpointed that a clearly perceived and well-balanced complementary relationship between textbooks and teachers is important to achieve common goals when each of them brings its special contribution. Therefore, teachers are required to adapt, select and supplement the content of the used textbooks to assure the effectiveness and success of the teaching learning process.

Heavy reliance on textbook content may impede teacher innovation, deskill them and kills their creativity through being standardized performers of predetermined ideas set by others. Correspondingly, textbooks may contain inadequate, uninteresting out of date materials that can demotivate both teachers and learners. Relatedly, Cunningsworth (1995) points out that *"Heavy dependence on textbooks is far from ideal as it reduces the importance of the Individual contributions that good teachers make at all levels in the learning process. It can stifle innovation and it severely limits flexibility"* (p: 10). Similarly, Ur (1996) confirms that textbooks can be limiting and

restricting materials opining that "*its set of structure and sequence may inhibit a teacher's initiative and creativity, and lead to boredom and lack of motivation on the part of the learner*" (p.185). In the same vein, Ur (1996) proposed three options for textbook use. First, some teachers use Textbooks for granted with heavy dependence on its content. Second, teachers may not use the textbook; instead, they rely on the syllabus. Finally, a compromise situation is proposed where teachers selectively use the textbook and support its content with supplementary materials.

It is commonly recognized that heavy dependent teachers on textbook content tend to be less knowledgeable about its nuances and deficiencies because they use it as the perfect source that does not need to be evaluated or refined. Williams (1983) states that "*It is ironical that those teachers who rely most heavily on the textbooks are the ones least qualified to interpret its intentions or evaluate its content and method*" (p: 251). Finally, textbooks are teaching materials with advantages and disadvantages henceforth they are oriented to support teachers and learners rather than imprison them in the cycle of its content. This view was confirmed by O'Neil, R (1982) claiming, "*Textbooks, like any other medium, have inherent limitations*". (p.110).

Based on the aforementioned definitions and different views on the role of textbooks, the study was conducted in the Algerian context, specifically the region of M'sila as one of the hinterlands that needs more exploration to unveil specifics of such a forsaken Algerian area. The study aims at exploring EFL Secondary school teachers' perceptions on their use and dependence on textbooks as facilitators of the teaching process and classroom instruction. Furthermore, the study aims to unearth EFL teachers' perspectives towards the different strategies espoused to cope with the deficiencies in the three levels English language textbook and their distinctive supplementary materials employed to support the textbook content. The research aspires to answer the following questions:

- ✓ What are EFL teachers' perceptions towards the use of textbooks?

- ✓ To what extent do EFL secondary school teachers depend on textbook content?
- ✓ Do textbooks provide adequate support for teachers or they need supplementary teaching materials?

### **1.1- The use of Textbooks in EFL teaching and learning**

The use of textbooks in EFL teaching and learning is a worldwide issue that concerns several researchers. Voluminous research studies have been conducted in different contexts to investigate and explore EFL teachers' perceptions towards textbook use from different criteria. According to Moulton (1997) textbook use differ from context into another. Moulton' review of literature on the different studies conducted in USA and some other developing countries such as Nigeria and Chile revealed that USA teachers seem to be heavily depending on textbook content. Meanwhile, teachers in developing countries "under use" textbooks and tend to supplement its content with other teaching materials. Further, Moulton concluded that USA teachers "over use" textbooks nearly as a curriculum to the extent that they use materials on textbooks from the beginning of the school, page by page until the end of the year. In addition, Moulton ' review disclosed that teachers' use of textbooks differ considerably in terms of variables such as experienced, inexperienced, teacher education and pedagogical competences.

Another study by Herlinda (2014) on two EYL (English for young Learners) teachers' use of the textbook in the teaching learning process indicated that both teachers recognize the fundamental role of textbooks in being the primary teaching material. They acknowledged the textbook positives and benefits on the performance of both teachers and learners. However, in practice, both teachers use different approaches to adapt and supplement the textbook content to cater for their students' needs. Like Moulton, Herlinda's research emphasized the role of teachers' beliefs and educational background in determining strategies for using textbooks and adapting supplementary materials. Contrary to Moulton's (1997) findings, Herlinda's research

demonstrates that experience is not a constant determinant of teachers' reliance on textbooks.

In the same concern, the research of Okitasari & Palupi (2019) disclosed that teachers' perceptions towards EFL textbooks split them into two groups. The first group acknowledged the helpful and important role of textbooks in terms of lesson performance, a source for materials and its efficiency to subvert time constraints. Nevertheless, the second group, which represents the minority, denied the role of textbooks and preferred to the adaptation of other materials, as they were more authentic and challenging.

### **1-2- The Evaluation of Algerian Secondary school Textbooks:**

The evaluation of textbooks provide opportunities for teachers, inspectors, administrators, and materials developers to make judgments about textbooks and how to select what suits their learners' needs. In this course, Hamidi & Bouhars (2018) explored and evaluated the authenticity of the Algerian third year secondary level textbook entitled "New Prospects " from the perspectives of EFL teachers in the region of Mascara. Their research disclosed that all the participant teachers agreed that the "New Prospects" textbook doesn't offer classroom learners adequate opportunities for learning authentic language. Subsequently, EFL teachers, regardless their teaching experiences and their level of pedagogical knowledge, confirmed that the prescribed textbook content should be supplemented with the adaptation of other authentic materials that would support the teaching situation and cater for learners' needs.

Additionally, Aunali (2014) in his thesis for the degree of Magister, examined the suitability and effectiveness of English textbook "New prospects" from different aspects. The thesis demonstrated that the intended textbook has positives and negatives alongside. Concerning the negative points, Aunali's research revealed that the studied textbook does not conform to good textbook criteria, for example, the topics are not up to date and the content is not congruent with the learner –centered and communicative interaction promises. In addition, the content of the textbook should be

accompanied with supplementary materials as it lacks audio CD's and visual aids. Nevertheless, some positives could be attributed to the studied textbook in the fact that it contains website links for pupils for further research on topics.

Aitaissa (2017) evaluated the English Foreign Language textbook for the Algerian second year secondary school "*Getting Through*" from the perspective of secondary school teachers in the region of Setif. His study aimed at exploring EFL teachers' perceptions of the quality of the textbook in relation to ten criteria. The findings revealed that the textbook lacked a number of important criteria such as an informative layout, rich language, sufficient activities for the productive skills, rich and varied teaching methods, and the dominance of the modern teaching approaches over traditional approaches. Furthermore, the research illustrated that there was a consensus among EFL teachers that the textbook provides clear objectives and demonstrates to some extent the feasibility of the process of interaction. However, though instructional illustrations in the textbook is quite good, the quality and sound illustrations are less found in the classroom.

Down to earth, the three evaluative studies of the different Algerian secondary education English language textbooks, mentioned above, has confirmed the inadequacy and inconsistency of the content of secondary school textbooks. Therefore, it should be supported with other supplementary materials to assure the effectiveness of the teaching learning process and cater for learner's needs and teaching situations. However, the evaluation of secondary school textbooks have demonstrated to a far extent that textbooks play a supportive role in instruction standardization and implementation of curriculum objectives.

## **2- Methodology:**

### **2.1- Method:**

The research adhered to an exploratory study wherein mixed methods were employed to investigate secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions towards their use and dependence on textbook content in the teaching process. To obtain the results two

techniques were used; an online survey questionnaire and an online group semi-structured interview. The researcher used online instruments as teachers were on their summer holidays, so it was not possible to deliver questionnaire sheets or conduct face-to-face interviews.

## **2-2- Participants:**

Participants in this survey were in-service EFL teachers working at the different secondary schools in M'sila. Thirteen (30) teachers responded to the survey wherein twenty-six (26) responses were confirmed. As a secondary school teacher, the researcher opted for a convenience sampling in selecting the sample of the present study. The participants voluntarily responded to the online questionnaire.

## **3- Data collection instruments:**

### **3.1- Online survey questionnaire:**

The quantitative data were collected through an online survey questionnaire designed by the researcher and administered to in-service EFL secondary school teachers working in different secondary schools in the region of M'sila, Algeria. The questionnaire was posted on two face book groups for M'sila teachers namely "S.E. English language teachers of M'sila" and "M'sila second district teachers of English". The online questionnaire comprised of two sections; the first section was devoted to teacher's profile entailing two questions about educational degree and teaching experience. The second section consisted of (7) questions about EFL teachers' perceptions on their use and dependence on the textbooks content as instructional teaching materials.

### **3-2- Online Group Semi-Structured Interview**

To sustain the quantitative data, an online group semi-structured interview was conducted with three (3) non-participant EFL teachers to gather qualitative data. The selection of the three teachers pertained to a convenience sampling to assure the participants' accessibility availability to arrange an online group meeting. A set of open-ended questions were employed to get in-depth information about in-service teachers'



actual use and dependence on the textbook content. The questions were set to serve the research objectives and questions, henceforth the teachers' responses were analysed accordingly.

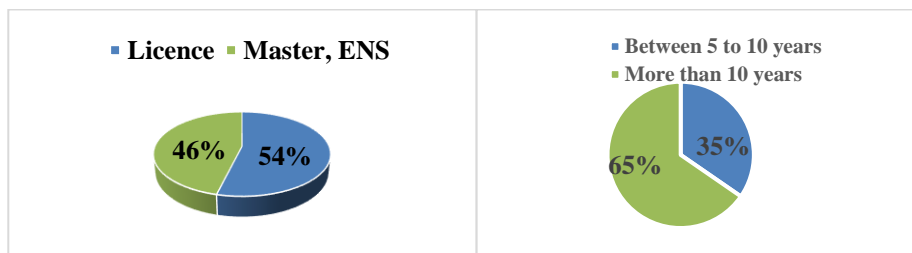
#### 4-Data Analysis:

The data obtained from the survey questionnaire was quantitatively analyzed in order to seek overall perceptions of secondary school teachers of English toward English textbooks. The responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS statistics program. Regarding the Qualitative data gathered from the online group interview, the transcripts were analysed through content analysis to serve the research questions framework

#### 5-Findings:

##### 5-1. Teaching experience and educational degree:

According to the quantitative results (100%) of teachers' participation was voluntarily. Teachers were asked about their teaching experience and educational degree to provide a reference point that the use of textbook has a relation with teachers' experience and educational degree. A significant portion of the participants (53.8%) holds a BA (license) educational degree whereas (46.2%) hold a Master degree or ENS graduates. The participants' teaching experience ranged from 5 years to more than 10 years. Therefore, the majority (65.4%) of participants had an experience of more than 10 years. The minority (34.6%), then, ranged between 5 to 10 years of teaching experience.

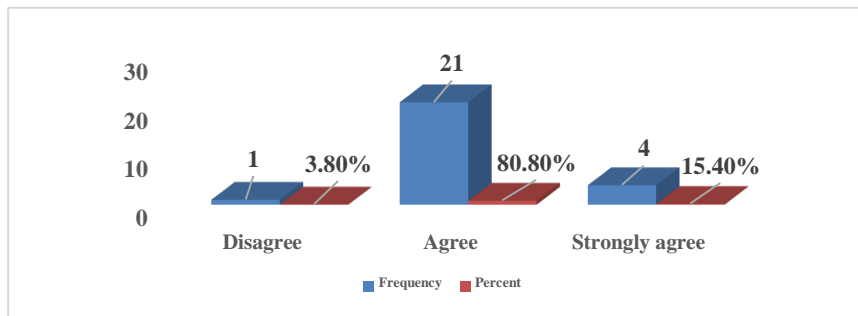


Graph 1. Educational degree

Graph 2. Teaching experience

##### 5-2. Textbook as an essential facilitating instructional material:

According to the participants' responses, there has been an overall consent on the importance of the textbook as a facilitating and essential classroom instructional material. The majority (80.8%) of teachers expressed their agreement that the textbook is an essential and facilitating teaching material whereas (15.4%) of teachers strongly

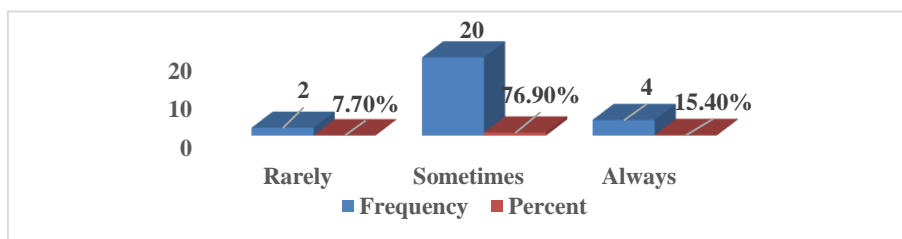


agree. The minority (3.8%) discounts the role of the textbook in facilitating the teaching process.

**Graph 3. Textbook as an essential facilitating instructional material**

### 5-3. Frequency of using textbooks as an instructional material

When teachers were asked about how frequently they depend on the textbook as an instructional teaching material, the majority (76.9%) claimed that they sometimes use it for classroom instruction. The minority split between always (15.4%) and rarely (7.70%) use it. Therefore, the results demonstrated that teachers do not totally depend on the textbook content for classroom presentation and interaction.

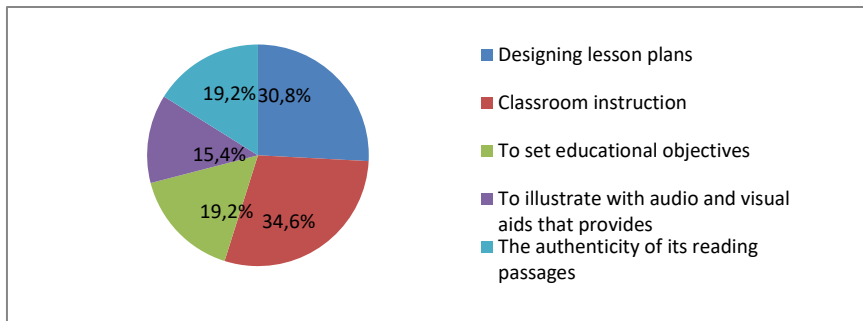


**Graph 4. The Frequency of using the textbooks as an instructional material**

### 5-4. The Different functions of the textbook :

Regarding the purpose for using the textbook, teachers' views demonstrate the variable supporting uses of the textbook. The majority (34. 6%) of teachers use the textbook for classroom instruction while presenting their lessons. The second high

percentage (30.8%) goes to designing lesson plans, as the majority of teachers feel secure using textbooks as a basis for their lesson plan. Setting educational objectives comes in the next class with the ratio of (19.2%). The lowest percentage (19.2%) goes for both using the textbook to illustrate with audio and visual aids that provides and for the authenticity of its reading passages.



**Graph 5. The different functions of the textbook**

### 5-5. EFL teachers' perceptions towards using textbooks:

As demonstrated in the table below, secondary school teachers do not use the textbook as a sole teaching resource and obviously do not totally depend on its content. In addition, no teacher claims that he does not use the textbook or rely only on the syllabus. Accordingly, teachers (46.2%) referred to the textbook as guide to achieve educational objectives. Besides, the majority (53.8%) of participants stated that they feel free to modify, eliminate and refine the textbook content. Finally, (26.9%) of teachers asserted that they adopt other supplementary materials (26.9%) to cater for their teaching styles as well as learners' needs.

**Table N°1. EFL teachers' perceptions towards using textbooks**

How textbooks are used	Repetitions	Percentage
As the sole resource, I totally depend on it	00	(00%)
As a guide to achieve educational objectives	12	(46.2%)
I feel free to modify, eliminate and refine the content	14	(53.8%)
I use it with other supplementary materials	7	(26.9%)
I do not use it; I depend on the syllabus	00	(00%)

### 5-6. Textbooks as supplementary materials and resources:

As teachers stated that they modify, refine and use supplementary materials to support the textbook content, the researcher sought to unearth the nature of these materials and resources. Subsequently, the participants were asked to identify what other materials and resources that were frequently used by teachers. As shown in the table below, the majority of participant teachers (65,4%) use handouts that were usually taken from the net followed by the use of additional audio and visual aids (57,7%). The minority (11,5%) argued that they depend on the syllabus and curriculum as supplementary resources. Finally, no (0%) participant use concrete objects for instructional purposes.

**Table N°2. EFL teachers' perceptions towards using textbooks**

Use of supplementary materials and resources	Repetitions	Percentage
Handouts	17	(65.4%)
Audio and visual aids	15	(57,7%)
Concrete objects	00	(00%)
Syllabus and curriculum	3	(11.5%)

#### **5-7. Reasons for the utility of the textbook:**

To sustain the findings, Teachers were asked why the textbook was a useful material and what did it mainly provide to them. The majority (61.5%) asserts that the textbook is a helpful teaching material because it provides them with a variety of activities. Providing clear educational objective comes next with the rate of (23.1%). For the aspect of providing illustrations of curriculum implementation and offering a variety of activities a rate of (61.5%) goes for both of them. The minority (11.5%) stated that the textbook offers adequate audio and visual aids.

**Table N°3. Reasons for the utility of the textbook**

What do textbooks provide	Repetitions	Percentage
Variety of activities	16	(61.5%)
Adequate audio and visual aids	3	(11.5%)
Clear educational objectives	6	(23.1%)
Illustrations of the curriculum implementation	10	(38.5%)

#### **5-8. Textbook sections that need refinement:**

Participants were asked to reveal their views regarding which section of the textbook needs to be refined. As the table below shows, the majority of teachers (73.9%) referred to the inadequacy in up-to-date audio, visual aids, and types of topics, division and order of units (61.5%) as the major areas that need to be reviewed and adjusted. Relatively lower percentages went to areas such as reading passages (23, 1%) and the type and redundancy of activities with the rate of (11.5%).

**Table N°4. Textbook sections that need refinement**

Section needs refinement	Repetitions	Percentage
Topics, division and order of units and sequences	16	(61.5%)
Audio and Visual aids	19	(73.07%)
Type and redundancy of activities	3	(11.5%)
Reading passages	6	(23.1%)

As regards the qualitative data, the three interviewed teachers willingly participated in the online semi-structured interview. Worth mentioning, the interviewees did not participate in the questionnaire survey. When teachers were asked about how they used the textbook and for what purposes, they strongly affirmed its crucial role in facilitating pedagogical instruction. They confirmed that they did not use textbooks as a sole resource because they thought textbooks lack some important criteria that may hinder the effectiveness of the teaching process. Contrary, they considered it as a guide that helps them set objectives for their lessons and provides a framework for the implementation of the curriculum objectives. According to teachers, the textbook is an essential teaching material that helps them design lesson plans, use a variety of activities and mainly assign homework for pupils. Furthermore, one of the teachers mentioned that following the textbook content might provide a standard classroom instruction conducive to equal opportunities for learner evaluation. Participant teachers further pointed out that textbooks were time efficient since they provide ready-made teaching materials and activities.

Nevertheless, when teachers were asked about their views on the limits on using the textbook content for classroom instruction, all of them show a consensus that the

three levels secondary school textbooks content contains many deficiencies needed to be adjusted and refined. The teacher participants claimed that the textbooks lack up to date and interesting audio and visual aids that cater for technology teachers and learners' needs. Additionally, an interviewee stated that following the textbook content limited their language skills and vocabulary luggage as they perform the same units and activities to various classes each year. Admittedly, most teachers and even learners, according to teachers, may feel bored to constantly following the textbook content. Teacher participants were then asked about the different strategies used to cope with the textbook limits. All teachers stated that they use other supplementary materials such as handouts, power point presentations and audio scripts. Besides, teachers pointed out that the adopted materials were not teacher-made initiatives; however, they get them freely from Facebook groups or sometimes pay to get them.

#### **6- Discussion:**

From the research findings, we can deduce that EFL secondary school teachers in M'sila were aware of the crucial role of the textbook in the teaching learning process. Their use of textbooks for a variety of purposes demonstrated their positive perception towards textbook content. They believe that the textbook is a guide to achieve educational aims but not the sole resource that leads to standardization and inflexibility of classroom instruction. On the other hand, the research revealed that EFL secondary school teachers, in the region of M'sila, were not heavy dependents on textbooks content, they would rather opt to use other resources and supplementary materials. As it stands, they commonly utilize handouts, audio and visual aids and mainly referring back to the syllabus and curriculum to support the textbook deficiencies and ultimately to meet the up-to-date learners' needs.

Another conclusion that can be deduced from the research findings is that, coincidentally, though all participants were experienced teachers; they use the textbook as a helpful material. Admittedly, the experience factor can be a constant norm to measure teachers' dependence on the textbook content.

It was proved through secondary school textbook evaluation literature review (Hamidi& Bouhars 2018, Aitaissa 2017, Aunali 2014) that the Algerian secondary school textbooks show considerable deficiencies and inconsistency in its content. As it stands, the evaluation research demonstrated an insufficiency in authentic materials, audio, and visual aids. Admittedly, the current research supports these findings through EFL teachers' use of supplementary materials to cope with those deficiencies. Moreover, teachers' perceptions on their actual use of the secondary school textbooks demonstrated that; though the textbook plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of the teaching learning process they cannot totally depend on its content and seek to regularly supplement it.

Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should be careful in selecting and adopting additional supplementary materials. These latter should serve learners' needs as well as work hand in hand with the textbook content. Besides, it is highly recommended that textbook content should be reviewed, adjusted, and refined sporadically to cope with globalization and technological advancement in the world. In addition, teacher mentors and inspectors should organize regular seminars and workshops in order to collaboratively exchange and elaborate teaching materials that supplement the textbook content and help teachers cope with textbook deficiencies as well.

## **7- Conclusion:**

The present study aimed to explore EFL secondary school perceptions towards the use of textbook and the extent they depend on it in their classroom instructional performances. The study disclosed that participant teachers have a strong inclination to adjust, refine, and support the content of textbooks with supplementary materials such as handouts and audio and visual aids. As it stands, they proclaim that some sections need to be adjusted and refined especially topics and teaching aids. Nevertheless, teachers recognized the undeniable role of textbooks and the invaluable content they provide.

The current research findings can be limited to the participant teachers sample as the sample is not large enough to be generalized. Besides, all participant teachers were veterans, therefore teaching experience variances may affect the research findings generalizability and plausibility leading to different results with different teaching experiences.



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