

# ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS IN TERMS OF TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

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## ABSTRACT

In Europe in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, events such as radical economic and social change, globalisation and its expression in culture, politics, the economy and the environment, and progress in scientific and information technology had an impact on education. At school, today's students must be taught such knowledge and skills so that they can survive and be successful in the changing 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Preparing students for life and work is in the spotlight in 21<sup>st</sup> century education. The aim of the study is to explore and analyse the development of transversal skills in English language textbooks and to explore the possibilities in order to evaluate English language textbooks in terms of transversal skills.

In this research, five English textbooks for 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade were analysed. Qualitative research, descriptive research and content analysis were used in this research.

The author reveals that in the latest English textbooks, issued in 2017 and 2018, there are significantly more tasks, thus creating transversal skills for students. In turn, older English textbooks, issued in 2013, lack tasks based on a transversal skills approach. The result of this study shows which English textbooks of the five the author of this study recommends using at school in terms of their transversal skills.

From this study, the author has created a recommended checklist for teachers in order to analyse foreign language textbooks in terms of communicative skills, collaborative skills, critical thinking and creativity skills.

*Keywords: checklist, foreign language textbook, transversal skills.*

## Introduction

The skills that a student needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are defined by documents published by international agencies such as the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

(OECD) project *The Future of Education and Skills Education 2030*, Partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the World Economic Forum, Centre for Curriculum Redesign, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). These organisations are discussing the skills that students will require in the future, and which should now be included in the learning content (Centre for Curriculum Redesign & OECD, 2012; European Commission, 2018; OECD, 2018; Scott, 2015).

After graduating from school, today's students must be able to take responsibility for themselves and personal lifelong learning. Students should be determined, informed and creative. They should be active citizens and participate actively in society (Moore, 2013; Redecker et al., 2011).

The primary goal of education is to prepare students for their future lives (Care & Luo, 2016). For that reason, textbooks in English lessons can be used as a tool for improving students' life skills. Informational textbooks with plentiful sociocultural structures are needed to promote students' life skills. Textbooks are significant because they serve as a key tool in promoting student life skills (Gavela & Dolores, 2015; Khosravani, Khosravani, & Khorashadyzadeh, 2014).

According to the results of the OECD and The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds were found to have higher results in those countries where high-quality textbooks were used. In South Korea textbooks are used about 99% of the time at schools, and in Taiwan that number is 88% (Barnaby, 2015; Wiggins, 2015). A good textbook is the key to success for any nation (Mikk, 2000).

Considering the digital advantages in the learning process at school, teachers face a dilemma when they have to decide whether to use digital tools such as interactive blackboards, laptops, smartphones or iPads in the learning process. Teachers still rely heavily on their paper textbooks (Sikorova, Horsley, Garcia, & Rodriguez, 2013). For students, the textbook can be the main source of language learning and independent study (Richards, 2001). High-quality textbooks help students achieve higher results (Oates, 2014; Richards, 2006; Reints & Wilkens, 2009).

The textbook is an important tool for learning foreign languages at school (AbdelWahab, 2013; Pingel, 2010; Reints, 2013). According to Sawyer's (2008) opinion, foreign language textbooks should be designed in such a way that students are not only educated but also prepared for life by learning different skills.

The aim of this study is to explore and analyse the development of transversal skills in English textbooks and to explore the possibilities in order to evaluate English textbooks in terms of transversal skills.

Five English textbooks meant for 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade were analysed in this study. These textbooks are used for teaching English as a second language at schools in Latvia. The following English class books were analysed:

- Bright Ideas, class book I, by C. Palin, issued in 2018, publisher Oxford University Press;
- Family and Friends, class book III, by T. Thompson & N. Simmons, issued in 2018, publisher Oxford University Press;
- Poptropica, pupil's book 1. English Islands, by S. Malpas, issued in 2017, publisher Pearson Education.
- Incredible English, class book 1. Second Edition, by S. Phillips, issued in 2015, publisher Oxford University Press;
- Happy Street, class book 1, by S. Maidment & L. Roberts, issued in 2013, publisher Oxford University Press.

In Latvia, the usage of textbooks at schools is determined by the national general education standards that are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2018).

These selected English textbooks for analysis are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and correspond to the national general education standards in Latvia.

To analyse the textbooks qualitative research, descriptive research and content analysis were used.

After evaluating five English second language textbooks in terms of transversal skills, the author has established a recommended checklist for teachers in order to analyse foreign language textbooks in terms of communicative skills, collaborative skills, critical thinking and creativity skills.

## **Methodology and Materials**

Based on the classification of educational studies, the type of this study is a descriptive one. A descriptive study provides a scientifically accurate description of the current situation, relationships and educational developments (Geske & Grinfelds, 2006).

The author studied and compared transversal skills in five different foreign language textbooks. Content analysis was used to perform a descriptive qualitative study. Content analysis is one of the ways of obtaining data, but in the previous literature, it is also considered as a separate study method. Content analysis is a procedure for compressing and categorising textual, audio or video information to be classified systematically, in a tabular presentation. Content analysis is a quantitative method that allows an individual to process a large amount of information. Content analysis has two levels. At the first level, descriptive analysis of the

content of the document is performed without analysing the meaning of the content. The second level is the interpretative or latent level, when the meaning of the content and the resulting conclusions are revealed. Content analysis is widely used in textbook analysis (Geske & Grinfelds, 2006).

Criterion for selecting these specific textbooks was the fact that they are currently used in primary schools in Latvia to teach English as a second language. In each book the tasks were analysed from units one to five. Four transversal skills (communicative, collaborative, critical thinking and creativity) were analysed in the tasks of the five books.

The analysis of collaborative skills was based on the findings of Purēns (2017) and Hajimohammadi, Mukundan, and Nimehchisalem (2011). They claim that cooperation is promoted in pair work or group work and that a foreign language textbook can be evaluated according the tasks that develop speaking skills. Criteria for collaborative skills were developed. Criteria correspond to the type and name or instruction of the task in order to analyse the types of tasks in the textbooks to see how the tasks develop collaborative skills in students (see table 1).

The analysis of communicative skills was based on the findings of authors Purēns (2017), Richards (2006), and Gomez-Rodriguez (2010). The authors claim that communicative skills develop through speaking, writing, listening and reading skills. The analysis of communicative skills in tasks was based mainly on speaking skills activities. The author of the study has supplemented and developed communicative skills criteria by naming tasks (see table 1).

The analysis of critical thinking was based on Bloom's taxonomy, according to thinking levels and names of tasks (Purēns, 2017).

The names of the tasks have been selected to correspond to the tasks studied in foreign language textbooks (see table 1).

The analysis of creativity was based on Fadel (2017) and his adaption of Nilsson's use of thinking levels such as imitation, variation, combination and transformation.

Criteria for creativity skills has been supplemented and developed by naming tasks (see table 1).

## **Results and Discussions**

Methods for evaluating a foreign language textbook were developed. These methods allow teachers to evaluate tasks when using a foreign language textbook at school. Using these methods (see table 1), collaborative skills, communicative skills, critical thinking skills and creativity skills were analysed in five foreign language textbook tasks. When studying in practice the tasks of textbooks according to the criteria in table 2 (see table 2),

the criteria can be used successfully in the evaluation of textbooks in terms of transversal skills. Therefore, as part of good practice, the author recommends a checklist for teachers in order to analyse collaborative skills, communicative skills, critical thinking skills and creativity skills in foreign language textbooks (see table 1).

*Table 1. A Recommended Checklist for Teachers in Order to Analyse Foreign Language Textbooks*

Transversal skills (by tasks)	Totally disagree	Don't agree	Agree	Totally agree
<b>A-Communicative skills</b>				
<b>1 Mechanical practice</b>				
Listening skills: Listen, point and repeat Listen and repeat Listen and read the text Listen and sing a song Listen and chant the text Listen and say the tongue twister				
Speaking skills: Say the given dialogue Sing a song				
Grammar: Read and say the given grammar pattern				
<b>2 Meaningful practice</b>				
Speaking skills Ask and answer using the given picture or a phrase Look at the picture and answer the teacher's given questions Look at the picture and describe it Play a board game				
Listening skills Watch the video and answer the questions Listen to a recording and offer answers using the given pictures				
Reading skills: Read the text and answer the questions Read the text/story/book				
<b>3 Communicative practice</b>				
Speaking skills: Answer the open-ended questions in the context of teaching subject topics				

Transversal skills (by tasks)	Totally disagree	Don't agree	Agree	Totally agree
<b>B-Collaborative skills</b>				
Speaking skills: Pair work Dialogue Ask the questions Answer the questions A guessing game Play a board game in pairs or groups				
Speaking skills: Group work A boarding game Act out a story in groups				
<b>C-Creativity skills</b>				
Imitation level: Loudly quoting a piece of literary work in front of the class				
Variation level: Rewrite a sentence from a literary work, maintaining its grammatical structure and only changing the words used.				
Combination level: Create a machine or other object from figures created in the classroom.				
Transformation level: Create a timeline for historical events that separates political, social and economic units, using the notes you have made in the class				
<b>D-Critical thinking</b>				
Remembering: Say! Name! Remember and insert the missing one!				
Understanding: Describe using your own words! Describe it! Arrange in a specific order! Connect the compatible one! Find what's asked.				
Application by sample: Solve by model! Add up! Find among the given ones! Choose between the given ones!				
Analysis: Say what belongs to this group.				
Create: Create from details!				
Assessment: Assess by comparing criteria!				

(Fadel, 2017; Gomez-Rodriguez, 2010; Hajimohammadi et al., 2011; Purēns, 2017; Richards, 2006; the author of this study)

According to the criteria in table 1, four skills—collaborative, communicative, critical thinking and creativity—were analysed and summarised in tasks of five foreign language textbooks (see table 2). Textbooks were defined as A, B, C, D, and E. To analyse tasks in foreign language textbooks, criteria for each skill in table 1 were used.

*Table 2. Transversal skills in five English textbook tasks*

Skills	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Collaborative	27	17	25	19	16	104
Communicative	134	88	90	57	44	413
Critical thinking	46	67	63	29	20	225
Creativity	37	56	38	22	29	182
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>228</b>	216	127	109	924

(author of the study)

According to table 2, it is evident that the tasks are based on the transversal skills approach in all five foreign language textbooks. The results show that the highest number of transversal skills that appear in the tasks are in the following textbooks: A = 244 (year 2018), B = 228 (year 2018) and C = 216 (year 2017). Fewer transversal skills are in textbooks D = 127 (year 2015) and E = 109 (year 2013). The author explains these results by the year of issue of the textbooks. However, it is evident that in the latest textbooks, issued in 2017 and 2018, there are significantly more tasks that create transversal skills for students. In turn, older textbooks, issued in 2015 and 2013, the tasks are less based on a transversal skills approach.

Based on content analysis results and taking into account the spotlight on transversal skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the author recommends the following foreign language textbooks, A, B, and C, for usage at schools because in these textbooks, the tasks are significantly more based on a transversal skills approach than in the textbooks D and E. Therefore, the author does not recommend textbooks D and E for usage at schools.

## Conclusions

- The author considers the textbook to be an important tool in the teaching process not only with respect to knowledge but also with regard to communicative, collaborative, critical thinking and creativity skills.

- The author considers the evaluation of foreign language textbooks to be essential because it enables teachers to choose a textbook that meets the requirements of 21<sup>st</sup> century education, including tasks that develop transversal skills for students.
- The author has developed methods for evaluating tasks in foreign language textbooks. In practice, the author concludes that these methods can be used successfully in the evaluation of tasks in foreign language textbooks in terms of such transversal skills as communicative, collaborative, critical thinking and creativity skills.
- According to results of this study, the author recommends the following foreign language textbooks, A, B, and C for usage at schools because in these textbooks, the tasks are significantly more based on a transversal skills approach than in the textbooks D and E. Therefore, the author does not recommend textbooks D and E for usage at school.
- Before choosing a foreign language textbook at school, teachers should evaluate the textbooks. Teachers should be convinced that they are using textbooks that include tasks based on a transversal skills approach. Based on this study, the author has created criteria for teachers in order to evaluate tasks in foreign language textbooks in terms of four transversal skills: communicative, collaborative, critical thinking and creativity.

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### **The list of analysed foreign language textbooks**

- A – Palin, C. (2018). *Bright Ideas*. Class Book 1. Oxford University Press.
- B – Thompson, T., & Simmons, N. (2018). *Family and Friends*. Class Book 3. Second Edition. Oxford University Press.
- C – Malpas, S. (2017). *Poptropica*. English Islands. Pupil's Book 1. Pearson Education.
- D – Phillips, S. (2015). *Incredible English*. Class Book 1. Second Edition. Oxford University Press.
- E – Maidment, S., & Roberts, L. (2013). *Happy Street*. Class Book 1. Oxford University Press.