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Evaluating EFL Upper Primary Content in Light of Quality and Accreditation Standards

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ABSTRACT

Researcher's name: Abdelal Mohamed Abdelal Abdulrahim

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Abstract: The present study aimed at evaluating the content and the textbook of the English language "Hello" for primary 6th to determine if "Hello" for primary 6th is aligned with NAQAAE EFL Content Standards and NAQAAE Textbook Standards. Instruments used in this study were a "standards-based evaluation checklist" and a "questionnaire" for English teachers.

A- When Analyzing Hello for primary 6th ,the following results were reached:

1. The reading domain occupied the first position and got (44.05%).
2. The writing domain occupied the second position and got (23.05%).
3. The speaking domain occupied the third position and got (21.38%).
4. The listening domain occupied the fourth position and got (11.52%).

B- A questionnaire was administered to eighty-one English language teachers in three Egyptian directorates. The questionnaire consisted of thirty-eight items grouped under 3 main domains: the general design, evaluation tools and educational technology. The textbook was aligned with NAQAAE Textbook standards. The finding also revealed that there were no significant differences between the means of the three directorates.

Key words: evaluation, content, textbook, standards-based evaluation.

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مستخلص الدراسة

ملخص الدراسة باللغة العربية

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Introduction

The international, economic, political and social variables in the age of globalization and knowledge revolution imposed many challenges on the different educational systems. This entails dealing with the rapid changing variables of globalization effectively and consciously to reach a better understanding of the present situations in order to be ready to face the future challenges.

Education reform initiatives over the last several decades have grappled with the problem of how to develop a school environment in which every child succeeds, and a great deal of time have been put into creating a standards-based education system. Clear and comprehensive high expectations for all students have been captured in national, international content and performance standards. (Gaddy, et al 2002).

According to Lachat (1999), content and performance standards stipulate the knowledge and skills that student should know and master. Standards also provide the foundation for other factors in standards-based education system, including resources, professional development, assessment, and curriculum.

Based on standards, educators are able to develop a curriculum that reflects what student should be taught in the classroom. A standards-based curriculum is the one that reflects or is aligned with national and international content and performance standards.(Nematik,2009,p25). Student learning in the context of standards-based curriculum means that the curriculum is based on the same expectation of all students (Lachat, 1999, p3). Although,

standards vary considerably on their relative orientation between important basic skills and higher- order thinking, standards-based curricula are student centered, integrated around real world tasks and require students to engage in reasoning, problems solving, and communication. (Isaccs, et al.2001).

Therefore, it is important to understand how standards are implemented at the classroom level, and how this translates into teachers' instruction (content coverage and pedagogy) and student's achievement. Standards-based education is more successful when teachers have the capacity to understand what standards mean in terms of the curriculum and their pedagogy and when they are able to engage their students into activities to promote learning.(Masoud, ,2002).

Investigating the research literature on standards-based curricula can lead to a better understanding of how to implement these curricula, how they can effectively guide teacher instruction, and how they lead to favorable learning experience for students. Resnick and Zuruawsky(2005) describe four tenets of standards-based education that emerged in 1990s from national- level discussion among educators, business leaders, legislators and stakeholders:

"(1) a public process to establish standards for what students should know and be able to do at different grades, (2) standards- based assessments to inform students about their learning and teachers about their instruction, (3) standards-based instructional programs and teacher professional development and (4) accountability systems to determine whether students are achieving the standards" (p.52).

A major effort to improve education in the Egyptian schools has focused on the use of "National Standards" to ensure the delivery of

quality education. This reform movement is based on the premise that all educators can and should achieve high standards of learning. Standards describe what learning should look like and how learning should be provided to increase students' achievement. The standards are presented as a stepping-stone to change. They offer powerful opportunities for all educational programs to change and grow into institutions that can better serve their students (The Pharos project, 2003, p.43).

The Ministry of Education (MOE) (2008, p.34) in its vision of pre-university education seeks to provide education of high quality for all, working to prepare students for the society of knowledge, information and communication technology. To reach such quality, the ministry developed the following strategies for curricula:

- Developing curriculum goals and reformulating the content of textbooks in light of the national standards for education so as to assure the education quality.

- Caring for modifying the content of curricula to keep up with international levels. The ministry completed developing curricula for the first four grades in the primary education, focusing on reading and writing through friendly educational activities for pupils, depending on three major dimensions:

  - Active Learning

  - Comprehensive Evaluation

  - Training the national standards of curricula so as to create

a standard-based educational culture

The MOE implemented the comprehensive evaluation project introduced in the first three grades of primary education in2005-2006, and extended it to the fourth grade in 2006-2007.This project has been disseminated to cover the basic education by 2012. (MOE, 2008 p. 13)

So, in response to the national needs for the quality of education in Egypt, the law number (82)/2006 for the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) was issued and followed by the presidential decree number (25) regarding the executive bylaws and assigned board members. The duties assigned to NAQAAE entail setting policies to assure the quality of education and procedures necessary for accreditation of educational institutions in Egypt".(NAQAAE, 2008, p.4).

NAQAAE is not an inspecting authority, but it is an accrediting body for the educational institutions that can meet the requirements of the national standards. Therefore, NAQAAE is keen on providing all forms of guidance and advice to these institutions to help them improve the quality of their outcomes through objective and realistic mechanisms of self-evaluation and accreditation.(NAQAAE, 2008, p.7).

To achieve the aforementioned, NAQAAE is keen on providing and disseminating sufficient and accurate information that can help the educational institutions in self-evaluation and getting accreditation. Hence, NAQAAE has prepared a set of standards documents for the pre-university education system in Egypt, including the standards of quality assurance and accreditation of the pre-university educational institutions, the graduate standards, the curriculum standards and the teacher standards. In addition, all of the pre-university education

subjects including The Egyptian English Language Content Standards Document were developed.(NAQAAE, 2009 p. 5).

This English language content standards document primarily aims to enhance Egyptian students learning of English language through improved instructions. To help EFL educators achieve this goal, this document provides the basis for curriculum developers to design a standard-based curriculum which is currently the basis of reform in education worldwide. The document provides a detailed description of what students should be able to achieve by the end of each stage: primary 1-3, primary 4-6, preparatory 7-9, and secondary 10-12.The standards in this document have been grouped under five main domains, namely listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing and vocabulary (NAQAAE, 2011 p. 8).

Background of the problem:

The need for this study stems from the following reasons.

Firstly: several Arab and Egyptian studies such as Eissa, (2009), and Qeshta (2007) proved that the traditional evaluation system is unsystematic, subjective and has never been effective especially in terms of improving the quality of contents and textbooks.

Secondly: this study is considered, to the researcher best knowledge, the first study in Egypt to evaluate EFL upper primary stage based on the most recent and update standards which is NAQAAE EFL Content Standards.

Thirdly: at the very beginning, the researcher intended to evaluate EFL upper primary content in light of NAQAAE EFL content standards, but after carrying out the research he decided to evaluate

the textbook besides the evaluating the content of Hello for primary 6th,because he realized the following points:

- The importance of linking the content with its textbook, as the textbook is considered very important to the psychological support of the learners concerning the general design, layout, evaluation tools, educational technology.

-The national authority for quality assurance and accreditation issued textbook normative standards only in 2011 and the researcher started his research in 2010.

Based on the above mentioned information, it is obvious that there is a pressing need to have standards based evaluation system to create a unifying, systematic evaluation of contents and textbook.

Although educational standards are viewed in Egypt in the last few years as a new trend for improving education, those standards have not been tackled for designing a standardized tool for evaluating the content and textbook of English as a foreign language (EFL). Therefore, the researcher attempted to design a standard- based evaluation tool to evaluate the content and the textbook of English as a foreign language (EFL)in the primary stage as a real entrance to achieve total quality in education. The evaluation instruments were designed according to NAQAAE standards.

Statement of the Problem:

It is obvious that there is an urgent need to investigate whether "Hello" for primary 6th is aligned with NAQAAE national content standards and to identify teachers' views regarding the alignment of "Hello" for primary 6thwith NAQAAE textbook standards.

Therefore, the present study is an attempt to evaluate "Hello" for primary 6th through seeking answers to the following questions:

1-*To what extent is the content of Hello for primary 6th aligned with NAQAAE EFL content standards?*

2-*What do Egyptian teachers think about the textbook of "Hello" for primary 6th?*

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the content and textbook of Hello for primary 6thwhich has been prescribed for use in the primary stage by the Ministry of Education .The merits and demerits of the textbooks were discussed in detail in light of the recent EFL content and textbook standards set by NAQAAE. The study could give some suggestions as to how to overcome some of the shortcomings encountered in Hello for primary 6th textbook and content. So the present study aimed at:

1- Determining the extent to which Hello for primary 6th is aligned with NAQAAE EFL Content standards.

2- Knowing teachers' expectations about hello for primary 6th textbook through designing a questionnaire based on NAQAAE Normative Standards.

Delimitations of the study:

The present study proceeded within the following delimits:

1- Only the NAQAAE Standards were used since they are related to the Egyptian Content curriculum. NAQAAE EFL Content Standards

consist of five domains that have close relevance to the Egyptian EFL curriculum Content Standards. The five domains are:

a) Listening

b) Speaking

c) Writing

d) Reading

f) Vocabulary and Structure

The researcher tackled only four domains:

a) Listening

b) Speaking

c) Writing

d) Reading

2-Analysis and evaluation were only delimited to "Hello" for primary 6^{th}.

3- A sample of eighty- one Egyptian EFL primary teachers whose teaching experience is more than 5 years to judge the textbooks, and they teach the upper primary stage.

Significance of the study

1- It might be helpful in providing authors with a scheme for evaluating EFL textbooks.

2- Findings of this evaluation could be shared among EFL teachers to raise their awareness of the features of standard-based textbooks.

3- It would be a great advantage for researchers if they could have ready access to reliable information on how well Hello for primary 6^{th} content is aligned with NAQAAE content standards.

Definition of terms: