

## **A Critical Analysis of the Intermediate First Year English Pupil's Book in Saudi Arabia**

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**Abstract.** This investigation is conducted to determine the effectiveness of Textbook 1, currently in use in all intermediate schools for boys in Saudi Arabia. There are two primary purposes of this study: to provide feedback to educators in general and teachers, teachers trainees and administrators in particular; and to increase the awareness and involvement of teachers, curriculum designers and whoever is concerned with school activities. The data for analyzing and criticizing the textbook are: publisher's claims included in the introduction of the teacher's book; and the contents of the Pupil's Book such as vocabulary, expressions and the subject matter as a whole. Criteria for the analysis are the theoretical, empirical and practical findings set forth by numerous specialists in the field of TEFL.

The investigation shows how important it is for native Arabs to have control of the curriculum in general and FL content in particular in order to avoid the faults foreign agents cannot help committing because of cultural differences. A comprehensive body of references is cited and utilized in order to strengthen the writer's arguments and show the reader how others perceive the problem of FL textbooks' construction. In addition to a lengthy list of references and appendices, the investigation is concluded by specific recommendations based on the findings.

The teaching of a foreign language at the primary level is at the mercy of its materials. Reliance upon materials becomes more significant when there is a shortage of trained teachers, inadequate assessments of students' needs, or a lack of assistance from governmental or institutional agencies. In a highly developed country, such as the USA and in few other European countries, teachers, evaluators, and curriculum designers are able to keep abreast of the rapidly expanding information in their field of specialization. Most other countries are deprived of this new knowledge base due to various factors beyond the scope of this study. Current information, generally well researched and timely, gives a policy maker access to the relevant issues. The situation in Saudi Arabia in regard to teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is rather different. The foreign language textbooks are written by foreign publishers under the Ministry of Education guidelines. The Macmillan Press claims that this variation of a notional/functional approach to language teaching has been specially designed for Saudi Arabia.

English is the only foreign language taught in Saudi Arabia's public intermediate and high schools. Three years of instruction are offered at each level. It is a compulsory subject similar to other required subjects in the curriculum. Students are exposed to four, forty-five minute periods of English instruction per week. With the exception of Arabic and Religion, more time is devoted to English than to any other subject. Under a centralized education system, as is the case in Saudi Arabia, decisions about course content are prescribed by the Ministry of Education. This is done to ensure that the same content is provided in all schools. According to the syllabus given in advance, teachers are expected to have covered a certain number of units in the textbook by a specified date.

A teacher with extra class time and a willingness to direct additional activities can explore the material, adding to, or discarding parts of a unit. However, the teacher may be at risk and must watch carefully for pupil, colleague, and supervisor attitudes towards this innovative move. Primarily, the teacher is obliged to complete the syllabus for all classes in the same manner. The teacher's performance will be assessed by the school principal and foreign language supervisors. Most likely the teacher will receive immediate feedback on how the innovative performance is viewed. Even positive support of innovative practices does not prevent a teacher of English as a foreign language from viewing assessment with mixed feelings. On the one hand, a teacher who over-uses a book, and repeatedly follows the same sequence for different classes on the same day, becomes bored and boring over a period of time. On the other hand, classes will appear similar to the particular teacher using leveled up, routine activities. Innovative teachers feel that English textbooks are written with a general-student audience in mind. They consider every class unique and no one can offset this tendency easily, except themselves. They describe commercially published textbooks as dull, massfood which lacks the flavor of a special dish.<sup>1</sup>

It is not the intention of this author to consider the statements above as proof that textbooks as a whole are as bad as they are pictured by some of the foreign language teachers in Saudi Arabian public schools. After all, some textbooks in the market have been written, recommended, and revised by teachers with considerable knowledge and skill. They are open-minded enough to admit the fact that no one textbook can incorporate it all. Morely puts it thus:

As a matter of principle it is perhaps wise for the teacher to avoid any idea that there exists a single "best course," tailor-made to his requirement. A traditional strength in Britain has been that course materials are not prescribed, and although this does not simplify the teacher's task of selection, it does not mean that selection remains the

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<sup>1</sup>The investigator got this impression during the intensive visits he made to public schools supervising student teachers as part of their requirements for the B.A., and also from an exchange of ideas with in-service-training program personnel held at the College of Education, King Saud University, where he was the coordinator for more than two years.

teacher's privilege. A team of advisors can discuss salient points and guide the teachers towards the relevant range of materials, but in the final analysis it is him — the teacher — who should choose the text which in his judgement will best suit the objectives of his program and which he is likely to be happiest using [1, p. 177].

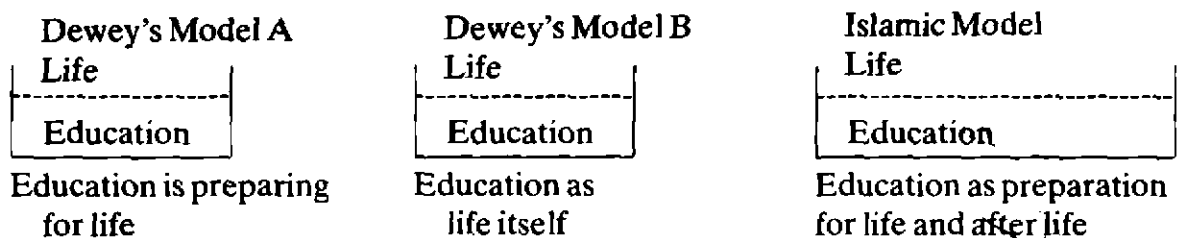
Brumfit insists that teachers,

cannot really be excluded from the process. This suggests that we can choose either a weak or a strong form of the Tanzanian experience ... and would welcome the establishment of a *common frame of reference for discussion* ... this would be seen as a way of helping people to improve, and at the same time of ensuring sufficient feedback to keep materials and curriculum reform in touch with the people for whom they were being prepared.

The strong form sees this design more radically, as an attempt, not to abolish experts, but to train them where they belong, in the classroom. If teachers develop curriculum, their teaching will improve and curriculum development will be realistic [2, p. 92].

The arguments and views held by teachers, administrators, and students concerning EFL in the Saudi Arabian educational system is not new to this investigator. [3] As a matter of fact, every man and woman who has children attending school where English is offered is familiar with this issue. They are witnesses to the heated debate in local papers and various channels of the media. They know from school reports and from their children's grade reports that EFL is the most difficult subject within the hierarchy of the school curriculum, in spite of the promising statements and claims offered by textbook publishers.

Moreover, if they have a stated educational purpose and a process that accompanies it in the West, it is not necessarily similar to ours in Muslim countries. John Dewey's interpretation of education as preparation for life and, in later writings, as life itself, is not identical to ours. [4] We perceive education as preparation for life and after-life; a belief that some people overlook.



It is this particular point that dictates most school objectives within the Saudi Arabian school context and, thus, necessitates a selection of structure, lexis, and activities to comply with this concept. The vast majority of people within the Arab world and, of course, among foreign language teachers as well, feel justified to be involved in this selection process. They also believe that no matter what a foreign

**publisher says about his materials, his judgement remains subjective, unrealistic, or entails failure. As Tahmasian has observed,**

Teaching English in an Arab country presents a set of circumstances and opportunities that one does not usually find in the ESL classroom in the United States or Great Britain. Most notably, in the EFL classroom in the Arab country, one is dealing with a homogeneous group of students. Whereas students may actually be natives of several different countries, the vast majority shares the common Arab background — language, culture and religion. It is this background, religion and its relationship to culture in particular, that can be used to great advantage in the general EFL classroom [5, p. 17].

**Textbook publishers neither admit nor deny the present polarity of internal or external needs and considerations, in spite of the claim that they wrote it with full awareness of the people buying it. As Swales advised,**

As a first step, it would be useful to consider the potential virtues to be found in published materials. One such virtue is that they have a clearly discernible shape: a beginning, a middle and an end. One of the paradoxes of ESL in the seventies has been the laudable aim, on the one hand, to design the most useful courses possible for particular groups of customers while on the other, the actuality of often denying to those customers opportunities to perceive the secrets of that design [6, p. 18].

### **The Scope of This Investigation**

Based on this investigator's broad experience with EFL in Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and as a specialist in this field on the other, he takes the initiative to conduct an analytical study of the textbook currently in use at the Saudi Arabian intermediate level for boys. The subject of this analysis will be the content of the book, its organization and the claims of its publishing company compared against theories, principles, and concepts pertaining to the field of EFL.

### **Aims of This Study**

This study will provide functional feedback to foreign language users and textbooks producers. It also will increase awareness and involvement of local personnel, agencies, and institutions responsible for constructing, adapting, or adopting textbooks for public schools.

This writer takes this one textbook as an example of the entire textbook series currently in use at the Saudi Arabian Intermediate Schools (SAIS). Thus, some of the questions and answers raised by this study may be inferred as applicable on various situations and levels. It is also the hope of this writer to rely on the pertinent empirical and theoretical findings as far as the criticism extends. The study will be limited to the content and methodological suggestions included within the textbook. This will be the data which will serve, I hope, to guide the study to something tangible

on the one hand; and, on the other, free both the writer and the reader from going on their own, criticizing something that is not there.

### **The Textbook and What It Includes**

Saudi Arabian School's English (SASE) for the intermediate first grade consists of the following:

- |    |                  |        |
|----|------------------|--------|
| a. | Pupil's Book     | - PB   |
| b. | Workbook         | - WB   |
| c. | Teacher's Book   | - TB   |
| d. | Wallcharts       | - W    |
| e. | Handwriting Book | - HB   |
| f. | Flashcards       | - FC   |
| g. | Cassettes        | - Tape |

#### **1- Pupil's Book**

First published in 1980 by the Macmillan Press Limited, and reprinted with revisions in 1981, without revision in 1982, with revisions in 1984, this book covers 24 units. Units 1-12 should be dealt with during the first term of a school year. Units 13-14 are to be introduced during the second term of the school year. Each unit of this book is divided into 4 teaching lessons of the basis of 4 teaching periods per week. It should be noted here that each period lasts 45 minutes, and each term is 15 weeks in length. The grand total of words, phrases and/or derivations of the same words is 652 scattered over the 24 units PB includes. This number of words and expressions is not to mislead the reader, because the word count covers the first time a word is introduced and the different situations in which it has been used. For example the word "what" occurs five times, "how" six times in expressions such as:

- "How can I get to?"
- "How far?"
- "How heavy/old/tall?"
- "How many?"
- "How do you spell it?"
- "How much?" ... and so on.

Another point worth mentioning is that some of the vocabulary included in the PB is merely popular names of Arabic people or places. There are fifty six words of this nature used in the 24 units. Appendix I contains numbers of units and titles of the text.

## 2- Work Book

The student's workbook contains various kinds of tests and exercises concentrating on listening and reading skills. Some of the activities used are to be done at home and occasionally checked by the teacher. This workbook and the rest of the components of the course are designed in such a way as to run parallel to the pupil's book. The W, HB, FC and tapes are extra aids where teachers are guided by the TB when to use them and for what purpose.

All of these aids plus the teacher's book are distributed to teachers on the first day of school with special instructions on how to use them and reminders to return them at the end of the school year. Every teacher is also entitled to a tape player, except in the few schools with language laboratories.

## 3- Teacher's Book

The teacher's book includes lesson plans that teachers are urged to follow, step by step. It also contains directives, a list of do's and don'ts on how to deal with situations raised in the textbook or the supplementary materials. It states the aims of the course and the expectations, presents a variety of techniques, and explains some underlying concepts the publisher had in mind when constructing this course for the Saudi Arabian young learners. Citation from the TB itself will help highlight its direction:

This variation of a national/functional approach to language teaching has been specially designed for Saudi Arabia, p. 4.

Letters are grouped according to likeness. For example, L and E need the same kind of wrist movement, they are also letters which are likely to be confused by the pupil, and can be compared if taught together, p.2.

Extra activities ... are not an essential part of the course, but they provide useful extra practice, p. 2.

This book suggests a plan for each lesson of the school year. It divides each lesson into three steps. They are usually:

Step 1 Presentation (teacher introduces new language)

Step 2 Practice (pupils practice the new language)

Step 3 Application (pupils use the new language in everyday situation, in games)

SASE also has a skills basis. Each of the skills is developed in gradual stages. The main activities for SASE intermediate 1 are as follows: Speaking, listening, reading and writing. All four skills are introduced from the beginning of the course, pp. 4-5.

Now let us look at the claims issued to all teachers of English by the Department of English, Riyadh Educational Zone. This directive does not include a date, but the

writer assumes that it was issued immediately after the SASE was revised in 1984. After listing the shortcomings of earlier courses it describes the Macmillan course as:

1. This course is written specifically for your people in Saudi Arabia. It takes into account the learner's Saudi, Arab and Islamic background. It caters for the particular problems faced by the Saudi learner of English.

2. The course teaches structure, but it differs from earlier courses because:

- a) As well as presenting new language, it is also full of suggestions for practice and free application.
- b) Exercises allow for plenty of practice, and ensure that lessons are not overloaded with too many pieces of new information and language.
- c) Language is presented and practiced in context both meaning and form are important.
- d) New tenses are widely spaced. Traditional grammar groupings are broken up into small units. Throughout the course, tenses which have already been taught are recycled and revised again.

3. The teacher is always encouraged to demonstrate. Students do not simply listen to the teacher reading aloud.

4. The course creates communicative situations in the classroom to give pupils a reason for using English. The topics used in each book are meant to be meaningful.

5. The pupil's books are designed to motivate. For example, pictures are used frequently and make an important contribution to classroom lessons.

The main objective is, of course, to ensure that Saudi students have learned the basics of *English to equip them for life by the end of their school course*. The Macmillan course aims to do this as effectively as possible. By means of topics which have been covered, the grammar and vocabulary which have been taught, and the real uses to which English has been put at school, *students should be competent in English even without the guidance of the teacher*, (emphasis added) [7].

### **The Critical Analysis of the Textbook and Its Results**

Corresponding to the proposal at the beginning of this investigation, an in-depth analysis of the textbook will take place here. The claims of the publisher will be discussed and various aspects of the content will be critically analyzed in light of the numerous questions set forth by specialists in the field. For instance, Candlin and Been (1979), Swales (1986), Matthews (1985), Smith (1981), Harmer (1983), Hyl-

tenstam and Pienemann (1985), Ewer and Boys (1986), Mackay (1986) have written about the textbook problem.

### 1 – Publisher’s Claims

Even though the introduction to the TB contains components of the course, notes on these components, content of the course, and skills sequencing and techniques to be followed, there is no mention of course objectives which this writer believes would be very helpful for teachers and students. Included instead are general, vague statements such as, “Specially designed for Saudi Arabia,” and “recognize that language teacher has two aims: communication and accuracy.” Obviously, the purpose of not including objectives preceding each unit is to get the product sold, to guarantee a market without commitment to objectives that may be unobtainable during the course. If the publisher’s excuse for the absence of educational objectives is that teachers should have the objectives distributed by the General Directorate of Education and they seem to believe that the responsibility rests there, one still demands an explanation. It does seem reasonable that a foreign language textbook that is to be implemented by speakers of another language should be practical enough. It does not actually matter what language the textbook presents. The language cannot be put into effective use without a precise set of objectives accompanying every unit. After all, no other agent could specify objectives of the language course of instruction better than the agent who designed it.

Let us now examine the statement introduced at the beginning of the TB which reads, “This variation of a notional/functional approach to language teaching has been specially designed for Saudi Arabia.” What does the publisher mean by Saudi Arabia? Is it the country as a whole? Is it the people? Is it the student or the teacher? Or, is it the culture and religion of this geographic area in the Arab world? The statement raises so many questions. The needs of students, teachers, parents, the educational philosophy of the country, its resources and ambitions, its culture and, of course, the areas of linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and pedagogical concepts have to be woven into an effective language program. Obviously, proof is lacking that the publisher did so. What the publisher, in this case British, did was merely to adopt what the Council of Europe did when it assembled in 1971 to study certain linguistic problems confronting the European nations at the time of the creation of the Common Market [8, p. 88]. What fits Europe does not necessarily fit an Arab Country! Thus, the notion, “specially designed for Saudi Arabia, is a fallacy” (cf. figure on p. 11).

In his intensive review of the English Language situation in Jordan, Field expresses the following notions:

a) Poor teaching results less from teachers’ knowledge than from the inadequacy of the course book.



b) A very unsatisfactory course, and most of the blame for the decline in standards of English in the Jordanian schools can be placed on it (the textbook) [22, p. 4].

Field also criticizes the curriculum design in Jordan as being mostly structural, situational and notional which produces courses that lack tangible structures. He goes on to say:

A wholly notional approach is viewed to be unrealistic for Jordan because it requires teachers with good command of English and with a high degree of sensitivity to English syntax. Moreover, it fails in conveying some of the abstract concepts in English [22, p. 12].

Field's concluding advice was to build the course on a core syllabus which is a combination of the three approaches. Despite his findings about the course of EFL in Jordan, he did not avoid those shortcomings in what he offered, revised and reprinted for Saudi Arabia (Field is an advisor to Macmillan Press Limited and the author of the language series, his name and title appear on all the materials currently in use in Saudi Arabian Intermediate Schools).

It is tempting to explain this situation as a lack of communication between the two Arab states involved in an urgent educational matter. When an evaluative process takes place in one Arab state the others should wait for the results and then start their program using the recommendations provided by the study. This should be done to save money, effort and time. Of course, it would be in the best interest of the whole area and all inhabitants. The eagerness of commercial companies to sell a product and the lip-service that accompanies the process are understandable, but what is important for a nation may not agree with commercial desires. It is amazing that on two different occasions the notional/functional syllabus did not fit for one Arab nation but did for another.

Take as an example a statement such as, "to equip them for life" (cited before). It is doubtful whether we can expect, at the intermediate and high school levels, to teach our students communicative competence. We are quite sure that it is not possible for EFL to equip a student for life. This is not only an impossible goal, but unnecessary in a country such as Saudi Arabia. What is needed is an acceptable English standard, which does not have to be British, and objectives to teach our students to achieve a satisfactory level of communication. We will be happier when our children are capable of conveying their thoughts efficiently and to a certain extent through a foreign language. The concept of equipping them for life and after-life is best left to other subjects within the school. In other words, to avoid losing our own Arabic and Islamic heritage we should not exceed the utilitarian and instrumental aspects of the foreign language. In the Arab world, the role of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation should be filled by the same person. An Arab, in par-

ticular, is urgently needed in this case, especially when we realize that the process of either activity is a continuous one in which feedback always takes place. Feedback inevitably necessitates assessment, revision and/or elimination of parts of the program. Reliance on a foreign language to equip our Arabic natives for life has never crossed the minds of any wise man or woman from that area.

The publisher's claim that "students should be competent in English even without the guidance of the teacher" by the end of the course is not possible at such an early stage. Effective communication in a FL is the most advanced stage a learner is expected to obtain and, of course, he will not be able to reach this level after the first year of exposure to the FL no matter what the latest fashion of commercial textbooks claim. Well prepared teachers and an active learner are required to keep FL teaching/learning moving toward language competence. Moreover, there are specific problematic areas for Arab learners in regard to EFL. These areas have been identified by M.A. and Ph.D. graduates who have completed degrees in this field, (see Appendix II). Distinct problems are to be treated distinctively. Consequently, many aspects of a FL should be graded and learner needs should be anticipated prior to constructing a textbook. There is no evidence of this being done by the publisher. This omission leaves this investigator in doubt about the usefulness of the textbook and troubled by the publisher's claims. Another fallacy arises.

In short, the publisher's claim that students at such an early stage in a FL could go on their own to communicate competently is a fluffy and unrealistic one. A better choice is suggested by Pienemann as follows:

1. L2 items are focused on in the order they are learnable.
2. L2 forms are introduced which have proved to be communicatively effective in natural L2 development.
3. The focus on meaning can be maintained in the instruction [23, p. 68].

In another study, Pienemann shows that instruction can:

1. accelerate passage through the sequence
2. increase the frequency of rule application
3. and, broaden the range of linguistic context in which the rule governing a stage is applied [24].

Thus there is no mention in the literature on FL teaching which eliminates the role of the teacher, especially during primary stages, except for Macmillan's point of view. The public, in Saudi Arabia, has been misled by hasty, unfounded conclusions by various foreign agents. Macmillan is no exception. Native language specialists are waiting for genuine solutions to be made available. They believe, however, that such solutions have to be produced at home. It will be a pity if no one accepts the challenge.

Another aspect of the SASE textbook is noteworthy here. The publisher declares that the textbook has been written using a notional/functional approach, leading to accuracy and communication. The problem, then, shows itself in two ways:

1. If communication is an ultimate goal, then the process of testing must parallel the goal. Our students are tested using written examinations and pen and paper exams do not measure communicative manifestations. The textbook should emphasize a communication testing to implement such a goal.
2. Since language through its use, from a notional/functional point of view, is seen as the means to make each student a member of the speaking community, what is left for Arabianism and Islam?

Both principles, however, should be avoided by a country that has its own culture and heritage to maintain. Harmer argues that:

*We have said that the idea of communicative competence cannot be immediately applied to the student of a foreign language since it is based on too many cultural assumptions [25, p. 27].*

This is exactly the principle followed by Macmillan Company: a delay, but not a denial of cultural assumptions. Obviously, they did not say it, but it could easily be inferred.

## 2- Content

As mentioned before, the investigation will lend itself, here, to the other facet of the problem, namely the selection and sequencing of items in a textbook. The same analytical procedures will be adopted. A particular item will be cited and discussed. The following citations are examples of irrelevant and unrealistic items:

- a brown egg, unit 8
- a lake, unit 10, 12
- cardamom and grind, unit 18
- he has the same nose, unit 19
- yellow hair, unit 19
- ghotra (head-cover), unit 19

These examples are obviously going to produce vigorous protests among students and inevitably be a waste of time. It would be better if they were put in another form such as:

- a white egg
- black/brown hair

- he has a similar nose
- head-cover or Arabian head-cover

“Lake” should not be introduced, at least at this time. “Cardamom” and “grind” should not be taught at all. Thousands of minutes of class time could be saved if irrelevant and unfamiliar items are avoided. If the assumption of fluency on the students’ part is behind the inclusion of such items, accuracy to the pupil is of equal importance. After all, it is through accuracy that pupils are going to be tested. But, unfortunately, paper-pencil process is used instead.

Unit 18, Lesson 1, shows children how to make coffee, but fails to proceed in the Arabian way. Thus, two problems occur: (1) the inclusion of low frequency words such as “cardamom and grind,” and (2) the improper way of making coffee by adding coffee and cardamom at the same time. Students and teachers will not appreciate this cultural difference on the publisher’s part. They may also be furious about other instances of cultural insensitivity. For example, the question included in the teacher’s book that reads, “Find photos of famous people, e.g. the Queen of England, the President of the U.S.A., the Prime Minister of India ... famous buildings, e.g. Taj Mahal, Eiffel Tower, Big Ben ....” TB p. 45. Dumb advice that only an arrogant man, or one not familiar with a culture, would dare to suggest. It seems that the publisher has divorced the fact that the learners, for whom the textbook was prepared, are Arabs. Most likely the students are familiar with famous names of people and places in their surrounding area. Their love of their culture and their area is unmatched in London, Paris, New Delhi or Washington. Matthews offers the following remarks:

The action of many textbooks is understandably set in Britain, partly because the authors wish to teach something about everyday British life and customs, but also because so many such books are aimed at foreign students who follow a language course in Britain. This type of book may not be particularly appropriate in your teaching situations [26, p. 204].

It is not surprising, then, that the following words are not included within the textbook: God, The Holy Mosque, Quran, The Holy Quran, Madinah, Haj, Pray, Prayer, Ramadan, Prophet, and so forth. It seems as if the textbook is written for a state that separates religion and education. Of course, this is not the case in Saudi Arabia. Yet, the authors claim that the textbook is specially designed for Saudi Arabia. Obviously, this is not so.

From a contrastive linguistics point of view, the following words will cause problems for Arabian students:

temperature	biscuits	thanks
triangle	match	twelfth
umbrella	cupboard	mustache
banknote	excuse	crossroads

Australia	instead	postcard
fortnight	program	picture
straight	screwdriver	...etc.

Any word with a cluster, no matter where it occurs, is going to present a problem for the Arabs since in the Arabic language clusters do not exist. The situation worsens if such problematic features are presented to beginners. Clusters should be delayed until pupils have grasped some basic vocabulary, then structures of an easy nature may gradually be introduced. This, also, helps prevent the students' motivation from deteriorating.

A further examination of the content of each unit shows that they are unwisely loaded with new items. Twenty-one new items are the unit average, with the exception of unit 19 where thirty-two items are included. (These statistics were developed after the exclusion of 56 items from the total, which are names of common Arabian places and persons.) Teachers are not advised about what to do to make up for unpredicted occasions when students are given holidays during the semester. In addition, one may find congested classes, students, without suitable desks, and a teacher whose language skills are poor working in a very hot climate.

Given the problems identified above, one wonders if the purposes advocated in the TB are going to be accomplished. Nevertheless, the publisher suggests to the teachers to go on according to a preselected technique, namely, (a) introduce new language, (b) pupils practice the new language, (c) pupils use the new language in everyday situation. What the publisher explicitly or implicitly states contradicts, on most occasions, the actual classroom behavior. Neither classtime nor the teacher's competence in EFL is going to make it possible for students to be able to communicate at such an early stage in learning the FL. Regretfully, some of the claims, in the TB, promote a pessimistic attitude among teachers. The teachers are held responsible by officials from the Ministry of Education to fulfill the standards stated in the book. Often, they fail to achieve the standards for reasons they cannot explain. This failure happens because of the publisher's idealized approach that is so far from reality. Moreover, any textbook, regardless of the subject, will face the same fate if the teachers who will use it are not consulted in the beginning. To decrease failure one has to increase acceptance from learners and teachers. Their experience and characteristics must be utilized as the basis for all activities centered around them.

Obviously, the inclusion of the extra activity in Unit 17 is unjustifiable. It shows a happy white man, singing on his wagon, as the American Indians follow and watch him. To be accurate, it should depict the opposite; the white man was the threat not the Native American. This is a very sensitive matter. Do the authors not know how much it hurts someone who bands with the oppressed. Implicit in the process of teaching/learning in general, and teaching foreign languages in particular, is the need to establish priorities on what is to be taught and for what purpose. The example cited above not only perpetuates the historical myth of white benevolence, it also

lacks linguistic significance. Additionally, it violates the principle of having materials fully correspond to objectives for teaching a FL within a given school context. One wonders why a recently completed study (Byrd 1987) did not include among its ten recommendations the elimination of such cultural bias or prejudice. Ironically this study was co-sponsored by the Arab Bureau of Education in the Gulf States (ABEGS) and the United States Information Agency (USIA). Moreover, the study declares that the choice of content was assured to be acceptable according to local mores [27, p. 12]. Had his study been done by a native Arab, the result would probably vary. Arabs will do better in assuring local mores without the help from the USIA or the British Council when EFL in the area is involved.

### 3- Other Linguistic Parameters

Of primary importance is the lexical frequency count of all items beginners are exposed to in EFL. Those items should also be of great utility, drawn from the general corpus of the native language and the target language by means of contrastive analysis. Had this principle been taken into consideration by the publisher, we would not find within the body of vocabulary such words as:

stomach ache	compasses	cardamom	scissors	overtake
Indian	button	diary	button	earache
pitch	shark			

Obviously, these words and those listed before will not elicit meaningful language situations and will not enable pupils to elaborate upon them. As the course progresses, the size of authentic problematic features will accelerate. These problems will create a hindrance for achievement on all levels.

Since, at the beginning of the FL, speaking is the skill that dominates most of the class time, special attention should be paid to pronunciation. Indeed the authors knew that [p] vs [v] were problematic sounds, but they did not show the same awareness for short vowels, clusters, and words that have more than one syllable. Arabs encounter problems in such areas that need attention from the beginning of instruction. If care is not taken early, students will perform incorrectly even at advanced levels of the FL. Of equal importance is the choice of variety of language, whether British or American. When the textbook is solely British in pronunciation and spelling, it ignores the reality that the American system is easier. Pupils will find the American way of spelling "program," "color," or "center" easier than the British. And more teachers are familiar with the American accent and its varying phonological and stylistic ramifications than they are with the British because the majority of teachers are graduates of either the national universities in Saudi Arabia, where the majority of professors speak the American way, or they themselves have studied in the USA. In addition, the pupils are more likely to meet Americans when they meet

foreigners at home. Thus, there is little point to insist that they follow the British model. In actuality, it should be the other way around. Perhaps one day in the foreseeable future the British will abandon their model and follow the American one, since they now imitate the USA in most other affairs. What is meant by the American model is the standard American English educated women and men adopt in their daily interactions.

The frequent mention of Arabic names and places seems to show that the authors were searching for as many different kinds of communicative forms as possible. To create a great reservoir of usable lexical items, it is necessary for the individual to be a master of both languages. In resolving the problem, the blame should not fall entirely on the publisher. In a sizable number of schools in Saudi Arabia, English is taught by poor masters of the language. Under such circumstances, the process will suffer and the result will not be satisfying even when the materials are carefully prepared.

The fact that the textbook is based upon the notional/functional approach, leading to communicative competence, should not delude us. One knows that communication is unsystematic and unpredictable, but one uses systematic, graded, understandable, and organized language to achieve it. This notion is pedagogically acceptable. It necessitates a process to give items within a textbook their proper names on the one hand, and on the other, requires that time be devoted as demanded by the situation. The articles will not be comprehended by Arab learners if they are introduced only once (Unit 6). An, as an indefinite article, is not introduced here. It has been delayed until the pupils have reached Unit 8. Since the pupils are going to face the articles in their entirety in Unit 8, it is logical to introduce them together. This is done to stop pupils from hypothesizing falsely about items that have something in common.

Admitting it or not, when phonological and morphological input is considered, the publisher used varying principles belonging to more than one linguistic camp. For example, they advise teachers to contrast |t| with |d|; these are not problematic for Arabs, but are for Indian and Spanish speakers. The authors utilize a very awkward and traditional method when they suggest: "show pupils how we write a list in English (comma between each word except before and)" TB, p. 72. They encourage translation on an extremely wild range. When one fully examines the following citations from the teacher's book, one will come to the conclusion that many contradictions are taking place:

- Pupils say times in chorus, p.84
- They (pupils) explain in Arabic what they have understood. p. 86
- Divide class into teams. They must recite the dates in order. Choose a month that is not too difficult to say (e.g. May, June). A pupil in team 1 says, "It's the first

of (May).” a pupil in Team 2 says, “It’s the second of (May),” etc., pp. 104-5.

- Tell the class in Arabic they must follow your instructions, p. 114.
- Pupils read aloud in pairs, p. 115.
- Each time you teach a new word, revise those taught already, p. 53.
- Explain in Arabic, that “They are” is used when there is more than one man or woman, even if there are two, three, four or five, p. 43.
- Pronunciation: practice the |a| sound in half, past, far, p. 39.
- Practice |r| in Iran, Riyad, Practice |h| in behind, he, Mohammed, p. 26.
- Teach NOP QRST first, then teach UVWXYZ. Practice the 13 letters as a rhyme (use the American Z), p. 14.

The authors present bizarre, invalid approaches that rely on guesses for what Arabs may encounter as problems in EFL. Their methods vary from deduction to translation to even indoctrination (cf. quotes above). The areas perceived as troublesome for Arabs lack both theoretical and empirical foundation. The [h] in Mohammed will not cause a problem for an Arab, nor will [a]. Teachers of EFL in Saudi Arabia, know almost intuitively that [n], [e], and [a] supersede what the authors specified as problems for pupils. Therefore, this area deserves more emphasis. Consequently, the results will be confusing for the teachers. They may extend the argument to suspect the entire underlying assumptions, principles, and methodology of linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. In simple terms, the instructional and the linguistic input neither corresponds to the teacher’s nor to the internal and external learner’s perspectives. This particular point can be found easily in research reported on the situation of EFL in the Arab world. Appendix II lists some of this work. The necessity to distinguish between universal learning problems, common to all FL learners, from specific learning problems of individuals is inescapable. Unfortunately, to a certain extent, the textbook does not consider this principle. Dubin and Olshtain (1987) suggest the following:

In order to carry out this difficult assignment [constructing a textbook(s)], writers of communicative course materials need both general and specific expertise. In terms of their general background, writers must have up-to-date understanding of linguistic and learning theories, broad knowledge of cultural patterns pertaining to the target language as well as to the learners’ first language and familiarity with the educational context within which their materials will be utilized [28, p. 83].

#### 4 – Final Remarks

Even though some of the explanations, examples, and exercises provided in the textbook and the supplementary materials are neatly built around the notional/functional model, which resembles the program of the Council of Europe, they do not work well in an Arabian environment. The apparent disadvantage is that Arab needs do not necessarily compare with European needs. Consequently, the process followed by the writers and their claims can be easily accused of being highly specula-



tive. The materials are not supported by direct empirical or practical evidence. Also, the validity of the theoretical assumptions underlying the construction of the textbook are questionable. Because of the emphasis on irrelevant items and lengthy directions for teachers, this textbook has become troublesome for both teachers and pupils. By imposing and *ad hoc* operational activity, without reference to clear practical principles, it is unlikely that its use will achieve the desired aim.

Foreign language instruction must be brought into closer alignment with the other subjects in order to better serve the same person(s) and nation. This can only happen when EFL is subjected to the same process other courses go through, thus leading to anticipated outcomes. This process starts from the reality that there are Arabs who are capable of designing, implementing, and evaluating the knowledge to which students are exposed. Arabs have most things in common, and when successful experiences have been achieved in one country and shared with others, continued success is likely to happen.

At this time, EFL is a deviant example, where every country goes its own way, contracting with foreign agents to construct textbooks while remaining ignorant of what has succeeded or what has not worked. Consequently, neither the knowledge gained by students nor their needs are fulfilled. In addition, Arab unity on this most important educational issue is in danger of not being preserved. In either case the result is unsatisfying and heartbreaking.

Apart from criticizing the textbook under investigation, one must indicate what Arabs need to take into account when making decisions about FLT. Since, the purpose of education in all courses is inseparable, one must raise questions that can be springboard to thoughtful consideration by teachers, curriculum designers, administrators, scholars and parents all over the Arab world. The time is long over due. This educational issue must be taken seriously and in a collective manner. In addition to salaries and other expenses paid, one should acknowledge the help from foreign experts, but one must consciously and deliberately decide when, why and how this help is needed. After all, this is what the whole concept of education is about.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Although English is the only foreign language offered in Saudi Arabian public schools, it nevertheless presents serious problems for students, teachers and administrators. With my long involvement with EFL, I have voluntarily taken the initiative to criticize and analyze the first Intermediate Pupil's Book (Textbook 1) written and published by the Macmillan Press Limited. The textbook is part of a series written for all levels of public schools in the country. The data for criticizing and analyzing the textbook are: a) publisher's claims included in the introduction of the Teacher's Book, and b) the contents of the Pupils' Book such as vocabulary, expres-

sions and the subject matter as a whole. Criteria for the analysis are the theoretical, empirical, and practical findings set forth by numerous specialists in the field of TEFL.

Even though the analysis presented here rightly lays stress on Textbook 1 for EFL, it should be realized that the principles revealed apply equally to the series and in other educational situations. When one realizes that, one laments the fact that the public schools in Saudi Arabia have decided to put all their eggs into one basket by contracting a particular company and using the product as the sole teaching text, a text which is taken at face value. One of the strengths of any educational system is its ability, even with limits, to perceive its own weaknesses and to take steps to eliminate them.

This investigation stresses Arabism and Islam and calls for solidarity and alignment not only among Arabs on all educational decisions, but also, with regard to the subject matter, courses, and activities within public schools. This point should not be misunderstood to mean unifying all courses and ignoring the various geographical and economical realities of the Arab world. Moreover, the investigation shows how important it is for natives to have control of the curriculum in general and FL content in particular in order to avoid the faults foreign agents cannot help committing because of cultural differences. A comprehensive body of references is cited and utilized in order to strengthen my arguments. Despite one's conscious attempt to maintain objectivity, one cannot deny that some personal opinions may have delved into the report. The following items will further highlight the conclusions of this investigation:

1. Examples of irrelevant lexical items are pointed out along with what pupils encounter as linguistic difficulties depending on contrastive linguistics findings.
2. Examples of low frequency words are given which neither have a great utility nor help as stems to build a communicative activity around them.
3. The extensive occurrence of Arabic names and places within the text hinders the authenticity of EFL and are included only to please buyers.
4. There are items within the textbook that should be excluded either for their cultural bias or merely for the fact that they do not fit the student needs, level of educational and/or ages.
5. Because the syllabus is built around notional/functional approach it does not fit an Arab country. This approach has been made for Europeans; we do not share with them the majority of objectives.
6. There are basic vocabularies that should have been included which belong in the learner's effective domain, at least low frequency ones should be substituted.

7. Most of the claims made by the publisher are hasty, fluffy and unrealistic. The material is characteristic of that of any commercial agent whose product cannot be taken at its face value.

8. Bizarre techniques and approaches to FLT are suggested by the publisher that have been proven to be nonproductive when judged against the ease of language use for pupils and results achieved at schools. The national universities are required to set their own intensive English programs because of low student achievement in English.

9. The textbook is too British when the American model in pronunciation and spelling is more advantageous for several reasons.

10. Units are overloaded with new items which cause difficulty for teacher implementation and prevent better student understanding.

11. EFL in an Arab state should not exceed the utilitarian and instrumental levels no matter what some advocates of EFL may claim. In any case, the FL must cater to students, teachers, and societal needs and aspirations.

12. There is no gain expected from a textbook that encourages communication competency, as it claims, yet tests students by means of written examinations. If communication is the goal, then the means that reveal communication competency must be adopted.

13. A department of FL education should set the standards of effectiveness and require evidence of any publisher that the textbook will meet such standards prior to entering into a contract.

14. Research should be promoted to clarify the situation. It is scientific research that led people to where they are; Saudi Arabia is no exception. There is not, and can never be, a definite answer to what the best textbook may look like for all times and all circumstances. As there are no universally valid tests and methods of teaching, there are no universally valid curricula. Curriculum, tests, and methodology are valid only under specific circumstances and for specific purposes. One wonders, if the educational phenomenon has ever been dependent.

15. Lastly, since revision and evaluation are always required from administrators, teachers, curriculum designers, university departments, and so forth, then it should go without saying, textbook construction and development should be made at home. Home, however, is meant to be defined in its fullest sense. A general principle appears workable: profit from current research-based thought and establish a procedure which will take such thought into account. Adopt a reasonable description of what is needed from the FL; identify the most frequent, powerful elements of the language that are in accord with the stated objectives, consider and allow for pedagogical and evaluative treatment.

### Appendix 1 Textbook Contents

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Unit 17	How much is the Camera ? It Is Four Hundred and Twenty-five Riyals	76
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Unit 23	I'm Going To Phone Him. I'm Going To Phone Them	110
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### Appendix II

The following references present some of the work that has been done on English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Thanks to Dr. Abdullah al Subaiy for allowing me to borrow extensively from his invaluable bibliography: *American and Canadian Doctoral Dissertations on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, (1935-1987)*. Washington, D.C. 1987.

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## تحليل نقدي لكتاب الطالب لمادة اللغة الإنجليزية المقرر على السنة الأولى في المرحلة المتوسطة في المملكة العربية السعودية

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المملكة العربية السعودية

ملخص البحث . أجريت هذه الدراسة لإبراز فاعلية الكتاب المقرر لمادة اللغة الإنجليزية على طلاب السنة الأولى في المرحلة المتوسطة للبنين، والمستخدم حالياً في المملكة العربية السعودية . وهناك غرضان رئيسان لهذه الدراسة : تهيئة التغذية الراجعة للمربين عامة والمعلمين والمعلمين المتدربين والإدرايين على وجه الخصوص ؛ تكثيف حرص وانشغال المعلمين ومصممي المناهج والمهتم عمومًا بأنشطة المدرسة . أما مادة التحليل والنقد فهي : إدعاءات الناشر والتي أوردها في كتاب المعلم للمرحلة المعنية ؛ محتوى كتاب الطالب من المفردات والتعبير والمادة ككل . واعتمد التحليل على المعايير النظرية والتجريبية والنتائج العملية التي توصل إليها كم هائل من المختصين بحقل تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية . وتبرز الدراسة أهمية دور المواطن العربي المختص للتحكم بالمنهج عمومًا ومحتوى مادة اللغة الأجنبية خصوصًا، وذلك لتفادي المثالب التي لا بد وأن يقع بها الأجنبي نظرًا لخلفيته الثقافية . ولقد اعتمد الباحث على عدد وافر من المصادر لتقوية حجته من جانب، ولإيقاف القارئ على نظرة الآخرين حيال مقررات اللغة الأجنبية ومنهجها من الجانب الآخر . وبالإضافة إلى المراجع والملاحق تفضي هذه الدراسة إلى توصيات محددة، بنيت على ضوء ما تم الوصول إليه من نتائج .