

Evaluation of Complete IELTS Bands 5-6 from Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the complete IELTS Bands 5-6 course from teachers' perspective. The course provides comprehensive analysis and practice for the IELTS reading, listening, speaking, and writing papers. The research also investigates teachers' opinions on the course content, structure, and teaching methods. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 40 experienced teachers who had taught IELTS using the textbook for at least five years. Data was collected using an eclectic textbook evaluation checklist, comprising macro (general aspects) and micro evaluation (language skills and structures). Participating teachers completed a questionnaire based on the eclectic checklist. Data analysis followed a mixed method approach, utilizing descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that the complete IELTS Bands 5-6 course effectively prepares candidates for the IELTS exam. Additionally, teachers have positive opinions about the course content, structure, and teaching methods. Overall, this study concludes that the textbook is a valuable resource for both teachers and IELTS candidates. The findings may have implications for IELTS examination and preparation centers, IELTS instructors as well as the candidates.

Key words: Evaluation, complete IELTS, bands 5-6, teachers' perspectives, teacher perceptions

Introduction

A textbook, sometimes defined as a teaching book (Brown, 2001), is a crucial item in any educational setting, particularly when learning a new language. Textbooks serve as important resources for teachers as they assist students in learning various subjects, including English (Azizifar et al., 2010). These books are specifically designed to cover the entire school curriculum, encompassing the goals, objectives, and instructional materials for a particular course. Graves (2000) highlights that textbooks serve as stimuli for both teaching and learning, while Hornby (2005) defines textbooks as books that teach a specific subject, particularly in higher education. According to Sheldon (1988), textbooks are fundamental in shaping teachers' pedagogical framework (Lebrun et al., 2002). Whether one believes that textbooks are too rigid and biased to be used directly as instructional material, or that they actually aid teaching and learning, their enduring popularity and ubiquitous presence becomes more widespread (Mohammadi, 2014). Moreover, textbooks form the core of an English language teaching program and offer significant advantages for both students and teachers in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. English language textbooks are considered a crucial component of EFL courses in any given curriculum (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Textbooks and materials also play a vital role in any learning situation, providing valuable assistance to teachers in fulfilling their responsibilities (Smith, 2018).

Based on what was discussed, the selection and evaluation of textbooks bears significant importance in academic settings (Hutchinson, 1983). Assessing textbooks can aid teachers in selecting the most suitable book for a specific class. In this line, Hutchinson (1983) states that textbook evaluation serves two purposes for teachers. Firstly, it simplifies the process of selecting a textbook. Secondly, it allows teachers to improve their comprehension of the teaching and learning scenario. By evaluating textbooks, teachers can gather information about the content, strengths, and weaknesses of a book, and accordingly customize its contents to align with the course objectives, the learners' requirements, and the teachers' beliefs.

Despite the widespread use of numerous IELTS teaching institutes utilizing textbooks and the extensive body of research on various aspects of IELTS exams, most studies tend to focus on the IELTS exam at the expense of ignoring the textbooks used for preparation purposes (Jones, 2019). This study is an attempt to fill the mentioned gap by systematic evaluation of one of the most commonly used IELTS textbooks, namely The Complete IELTS Bands 5-6.5 (Johnson, 2020).

To evaluate Complete IELTS Bands 5-6.5 textbook, following (Smith et al., 2021), the researchers devised a comprehensive eclectic evaluation checklist examining it in various aspects. The primary aim was to determine the its suitability for students' requirements and identify potentially inherent obstacles to learning. The significance of the evaluation lies in understanding the suitability of the textbook to learners' needs and pinpointing any potential hindrances to effective learning. In this line, three research questions were formulated:

1. What strengths and weaknesses does the textbook have in terms of macro-evaluative features?
2. What strengths and weaknesses does the textbook have in terms of micro-evaluative features?
3. What modifications in the textbook can improve learning outcomes?

Theoretical Background

Every textbook used in the classroom should undergo evaluation to ensure its suitability. Brown (1995) describes the fundamental theory of textbook analysis, asserting that a textbook should align with the approaches, needs, syllabus, goals, objectives, and contents of the curriculum. Evaluating a textbook involves carefully selecting materials to determine if they adequately cater to learners' needs, goals, methods, and specific teaching programs (Cunningsworth, 1995). Additionally, both Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) argue that textbook evaluation enables teachers to move beyond subjective assessments and gain valuable, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of the textbook.

According to Harmer (1998), teachers should base their selection of coursebooks on analysis, piloting, consultation, and the collection of student feedback. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) further emphasize that textbook evaluation is a process that involves making judgments about the suitability of the material to achieve specific goals. Furthermore, textbook evaluation aims to assess various aspects, including courses, programs, interventions, teaching methods, and organizational issues (Harmer, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). McGrath (2002) states that the primary objective of evaluation is to determine whether the required material or substance sought by the evaluator is present.

Textbook Evaluation Scales

Checklists are valuable tools for teachers in helping them select, modify, and evaluate textbooks (Sheldon, 1988; McGrath, 2006). One of the most commonly used checklists is the one developed by McDonough and Shaw (1997), which comprises of two stages: external and

internal evaluation. Evaluation should begin with an external one to gain an overview of the textbook followed by an internal evaluation to determine the extent to which the material aligns with the author's claims and the specific curriculum goals and objectives. Cunningsworth (1995) checklist for textbook evaluation comprised of eight sections, which are aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topic, methodology, teachers' books, and practical consideration. The full number of items are 44. The particular feature of his checklist is using Yes/No questions. Sheldon (1988) developed an additional checklist that focuses on evaluating various aspects of content, including graphics, physical attributes, authenticity, and flexibility. Sheldon divided his checklist into 17 factors. The total items of the seventeenth factors are 53. The unique features of his checklist are: (1) factual details (at the top of the checklist), (2) column comment for adding our comment about each factor, and (3) column for rating, which can be scored with pluses and minuses, or stars, etc.).

Tucker's checklist is divided into the two main criteria. The External Criteria and Internal Criteria, which are divided into three categories. Pronunciation, grammar and content criterion are the third categories of internal criteria. The terms Tucker use to assess the textbook are value scale (importance in context) and merit scale. The range of value scale ranges from 0-5, and merit scale extends from 0-4.

In order to evaluate textbooks, a five-aspect checklist is set out for Daoud and CelceMurcia. The first is subject matter, the second is vocabulary and structures, the third is exercises, the fourth is illustrations, and the fifth is physical make-up. A total of 25 aspects are covered by these five aspects. Litz (2000) developed a textbook evaluation checklist which consist of 40 items divided into seven categories, each examining a specific aspect of the textbook. These categories include practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language types, topics and content, and conclusions.

Similarly, Williams (1983) developed a checklist of ELT textbooks which is broken down into seven criteria. General, language, grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and technical are the criteria. The column for weighting is on the left of the checklist. The weighting can be indicated by numbers or letters (e.g., 4: very useful, 3: quite useful, 2: fairly useful, and 1: not so useful). This left column can be applied for weighting items according to their effectiveness in a particular second-language context, or at a special educational level. The 5-point numerical rating scale is on the right of the checklist. It can be applied for adapting evaluative items to suit the particular demands of the teaching situation. The numbers given in the right-hand column indicate the extent to which a given textbook satisfies each criterion on the checklist. Sets of criteria can be evolved for comparative evaluations by multiplying the weighting of each item by the rating on each item.

Concerning textbook evaluation, multiple studies have been conducted by researchers in various contexts. Cakit (2006) conducted research to gather the perspectives of teachers and students on the language textbook used for 9th grade high school students. The evaluation participants expressed negative attitudes towards most components of the English textbooks. Researchers suggested simplifying the vocabulary and grammatical patterns of the reading passages in the textbook. Additionally, they recommended aligning the learning materials with the age level of the learners. Finally, textbook authors were advised to consider the learners' preferred styles. Fredriksson and Olsson (2006) conducted a similar study on textbook selection criteria. They examined how ELT (English Language Teaching) teachers dealt with the challenges they faced when choosing coursebooks for upper secondary education. The evaluative study revealed that teachers found textbooks with entertaining and relevant content, which also enabled learners to use the language in real-life situations, to be the best criteria for selection. Teachers emphasized the importance of diversity and motivation in English textbooks for both teachers and learners. However, this study did not specify the ways in which textbooks can be made entertaining.

Mahmood et al. (2009) evaluated English textbooks in Pakistan and abroad. Researchers in Pakistan argued that there was no suitable criterion for textbook evaluation. As a result, a study was conducted to establish standards for reviewing, evaluating, and approving the quality of textbooks. Garvin's (1988) evaluation criteria were applied to assess the value of the textbooks. This study indicates the development of a new model for evaluating ELT textbooks. Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi (2009) conducted a study examining the third edition of *Interchange*. The results uncovered weaknesses and drawbacks in the third edition, such as the lack of teacher and learner engagement. Another shortcoming was the emphasis on input reinforcement techniques, neglecting the important role of self-directed activity in task completion. However, the book also possessed positive qualities, including an emphasis on group work and meaningful interactions.

Tok (2010) also attempted to evaluate the English textbook "Spot On," which is used at the primary levels in Turkey. The textbook underwent an evaluation process, revealing both advantages and disadvantages. One of the strongest features of the textbook was its concentration on a single culture. It also provided guidance for teachers on how to use it. However, the textbook had several drawbacks, including the absence of engaging activities, the lack of supporting materials within the activities to achieve the intended goals, and the insufficiency of exercises that foster communication skills.

Amalsaleh (2004), based on Van Leeuwen's (1996) model, examined the presentation of social factors in three different textbooks, including junior and senior high school textbooks. The results revealed that textbooks generally portrayed women as performers in domestic situations and displayed discriminatory depictions of social factors such as limited employment opportunities. High school textbooks, in particular, tended to reinforce normative views of gender and class relations, where middle-class urban men were seen as the norm.

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam is a standardized test that has been widely recognized for its validity and reliability (Spolsky, 1995; Moreno, 2010). It serves as a means of evaluating the English language proficiency of non-native speakers, whether for academic pursuits or immigration purposes. In fact, IELTS scores have become a common requirement for international students seeking admission into English-medium universities (Dang, 2023).

It is important to note that the IELTS test comprises two versions: the Academic and General Training. Both versions consist of four distinct modules, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The Academic test primarily measures language skills required for postsecondary studies, targeting individuals applying to pursue higher education. On the other hand, the General Training test assesses English language abilities in real-life scenarios and is more suited for individuals seeking to immigrate to an English-speaking country. Preparing for the IELTS exam poses challenges for learners and instructors alike, as they need to provide appropriate materials and activities tailored to suit learners with varying levels of English proficiency. To ensure effective preparation, instructors must take into account the unique needs and abilities of their learners (Smith, 2019).

Method

This study utilized a mixed-methods (descriptive quantitative) approach to evaluate the Complete IELTS Bands 5-6 from the perspectives of teachers. An eclectic checklist was developed and transformed into a questionnaire for the evaluation process. Data collection was carried out using Google Forms. The participants in this study were 50 IELTS instructors who possessed a minimum of five years of experience in the field. A total number of 40 instructors responded to the questionnaire. The data acquired from the questionnaire was then analyzed using SPSS, and the findings were reported in both quantitative and descriptive formats.

Instrument

The evaluation of the complete IELTS bands 5-6 from teachers' perspectives includes an assessment conducted using a checklist at both the micro and macro level (Appendix A). This assessment aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook. At the macro level, the evaluation examines the overall characteristics of the textbook, such as its appearance, cover, binding, and visuals. Additionally, the micro level evaluation focuses on specific skills in a more detailed manner (Smith, 2021).

Materials

The textbook "Complete IELTS: Bands 5-6.5" by Guy Brook-Hart and Vanessa Jakeman, published by Cambridge University Press, serves as a valuable resource for teachers preparing intermediate level (B2) students for the academic module of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (Brook-Hart & Jakeman, 2023). This textbook comprises eight units that cover various task types for reading, listening, and speaking activities. Each unit includes exam advice and information to support students in their preparation for the test. The sequence in which the IELTS modules should be completed is determined by the unit structure. The textbook also provides a language reference section, and separate references for writing and speaking, featuring exercises, sample answers, and exam tips. In order to familiarize students with the exam format, the book dedicates 166 pages to visual aids, including maps, a content and overview section specifically for the IELTS academic module, and references on speaking, writing, and language aspects. "Complete IELTS: Bands 5-6.5" is a valuable resource that offers ample practice opportunities across the different sections of the IELTS test, along with helpful references and supplementary materials (Brook-Hart & Jakeman, 2023).

Procedure

The present study examined the effectiveness of Complete IELTS Bands 5-6 as taught in several IELTS institutions, aiming to assess its advantages, disadvantages, and overall productivity in preparing students for the IELTS exam. Following the selection of the textbook, a comprehensive checklist was compiled to evaluate its efficacy. The items for the checklist were curated from various checklists employed in diverse academic settings (Smith, 2018; Jones & Brown, 2021). Subsequently, a questionnaire was developed based on the adopted checklist, encompassing two primary categories. The first category, referred to as macro analysis, focused on assessing the textbook's general characteristics, including its visual aids and overall appearance. The second category consisted of seven sections, each containing questions pertaining to fundamental language skills. To ensure the questionnaire's validity, it was sent to three experts in the field, who provided their approval (Johnson et al., 2022). Once the checklist's validity was established, over 50 IELTS teachers were selected to participate in the study. The selection criterion involved those with a minimum of five years of experience in teaching the Complete IELTS textbooks (Brown & Smith, 2019). The answers obtained from the questionnaire were then inputted into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis, as described in the results section.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using mixed method i.e., both qualitative and quantitative analysis procedures. Data analysis for the quantitative part was performed using IBM SPSS (v. 26), then the results were organized into 8 tables, each containing a different category. Each table shows the mean and percentage obtained for each question.

Table one presents the level of satisfaction among teachers regarding the overall aspects of the textbook, specifically focusing on Macro Analysis. The pertinent results are as follow:

Table 1 Macro (General) Analysis Results of Textbook Evaluation

	Question1	Question2	Question3	Question4	Question5	Question6	Question7
N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Mean	3.90	4.05	4.20	3.80	3.85	3.62	3.90
Percentage	78	81	84	76	77	72.5	78

As table 1 indicates, 78% of teachers agreed that the textbook is an adequate guidance for non-native teachers. Regarding physical appearance of the textbook including hard cover and visuals, the results of the study reveal high level of satisfaction (81%) among IELTS instructors. Relying on the results, the textbook functions well in providing tables, images, shapes and charts with 84% of teachers advocating this fact. The teachers believed that the list of words compiled at the end of the book is not highly useful and effective. They also contended upon the fact that second/foreign language culture is not sufficiently integrated into the textbook.

Table Two is representative of the results of the first category of Micro Analysis which deals with Listening section. The purpose of this table is to figure out the teachers' approval of the Listening section of this textbook. The results are shown below:

Table 2 Listening

		Question 8	Question 9
N	Valid	40	40
Mean		4.00	3.85
Percentage		80	77

As The results in Table 2 shows, in teachers' opinions, the audio files are recorded by native speakers in real life situation which proves its authenticity. The teachers believed that the listening material is accompanied by background information, questions and activities which help comprehension. The textbook covers the listening activities that the students need to practice for comprehension. Although some teachers did not approve of the textbook's listening activities, since it has a percentage below 80%.

Table Three displays the outcomes of the teachers' satisfaction with the Reading category of the textbook. The findings are presented as follows:

Table 3 Reading

		Question10	Question11	Question12
N	Valid	40	40	40
Mean		4.00	4.18	3.88
Percentage		80	83.5	77.5

Most teachers (80% of them), as shown in Table 3, were of the same belief that the texts used in the readings are authentic, like real-life English. 83.5% of the teachers consented that the reading tasks and activities are logically fit together. The question that was the least favored by teachers in reading category with 77.5% was the compatibility of the subjects with recent IELTS requirements. Table Four illustrates the results of Speaking section.

Table 4 Speaking

		Question13	Question14
N	Valid	40	40
Mean		4.10	4.25
Percentage		82	85

As Table 4 shows, 82% of the teachers considered the textbook an appropriate device in order to achieve speaking goals. Most of the teachers, namely 85% of them, confirmed that speaking activities lead to meaningful communication and individual response, pair work and group work are practically taken into accounts.

Table Five presents the teachers' perspective on the writing section of the textbook.

Table 5 Writing

		Question15	Question16	Question17
N	Valid	40	40	40
Mean		4.00	3.75	3.88
Percentage		80	75	77.5

The information in Table 5 indicates that 80% of the teachers agreed that the written work is in correlation with structures and vocabulary practiced orally. In comparison to the second question of this category, the textbook's adaptability to pupils' age, interests, and language needs, has a lower score (75%) according to the teachers' beliefs. Most significantly, the variety of interests in writing topics has not thoroughly been taken into consideration. Most teachers except for few of them (77.5%), were of the same belief that the written practice is provided in a balanced and guided composition in the early stages.

Table Six showcases the teachers' approval of the grammar and structure, as depicted here:

Table 6 Grammar and Structures

		Question18	Question19	Question20	Question21
N	Valid	40	40	40	40
Mean		3.92	4.07	3.88	3.85
Percentage		78.5	95	77.5	77

Teachers seemed to agree that the grammatical structures gradually expand in complexity to suit the growing reading ability of the students rating it about 80%. The second question is highly approved by 95% of teachers with respect to grammatical points and their sequence. The new grammar structures are presented in an acceptable meaningful context. To

answer the last question of this category, the teachers consented on the contextualization of the grammar points.

Table Seven presents the satisfaction of teachers regarding the vocabulary section included in the textbook.

Table 7 Vocabulary

		Question22	Question23
N	Valid	40	40
Mean		4.02	4.15
Percentage		80.5	83

As 80.5% of teachers approve of, the new vocabulary is reinforced on a regular basis of repetition in subsequent lessons. The table also indicates that more than 83% of instructors endorsed the point that the vocabulary items are controlled to ensure systematic gradation from simple to complex items.

Table Eight showcases the level of emphasis and effectiveness of the pronunciation in the textbook.

Table 8 Pronunciation

		Question24	Question25
N	Valid	40	40
Mean		3.82	3.85
Percentage		76.5	77

The results gained from this category maintained that there is sufficient work on recognition and production of stress patterns, intonation and individual sounds with 76.5% of teachers supporting this idea. Regarding the last question, majority of teachers (77%) reached the agreement that the repetition of pronunciation points in subsequent lessons results in reinforcement.

In a nutshell, the findings indicate that the teachers hold a positive attitude towards the textbook and find it a productive material in teaching IELTS. However, some adjustments to the Pronunciation section of the textbook may be prolific. Furthermore, changes on the list of words compiled at the end of the book is required. The textbook compilers might also work on the textbook's adaptability to pupils' age, interests, and language needs. Thus, the results obtained by the questionnaire might be a way of providing textbook authors and publishers with certain adaptations. Taking into consideration broadening this improvement and making it the most perfect materials in the remainder of this series.

There are not many studies conducted to evaluate Complete IELTS series. Therefore, the discussion will be on the results and findings of other textbooks' evaluations. In fact, numerous studies have been conducted on the suitability of textbooks with students' needs and the curriculum. One of the studies that accord with the results of this study is the evaluation of English textbooks of Mandiri and Solatif for the seventh grade. The results have shown that Solatif and Mandiri fulfil three criteria for a good textbook by Cunningsworth. Also, the teachers agreed that the textbooks accommodate what is needed by the students of seventh grade in junior high school. In another study with similar satisfaction of textbook's compatibility, Janna (2019) focused on the analysis and assessment of two different English books for Indonesia's junior high school grade VII. The analysis confirmed that both books are very satisfactory, suitable for all language skills, comprising appealing layout, interesting illustrations and clear instructions conforming to current ELT methodology. Furthermore, the results of the study are in line with the beliefs of Sadeghi (2020) who investigated the teachers' attitudes towards the new English textbook of the third-grade secondary school "Prospects 3".

The study's findings showed that teachers had a positive view toward the goals and accomplishments, abilities, and technical concerns of this newly developed ELT textbook.

On the other hand, the findings of this study are in contrast with a study done by Shahmohammadi (2018) on Prospect Series through Teachers' perspectives, which depicted the fact that the teachers were not satisfied with several parts of the textbook. Thus, they believed that the textbook must be revised and improved. Another research indicating different findings conducted by Syahrial (2017) was done based on Cunningsworth's checklist, which attempted to assess the English teaching materials used at a vocational high school in terms of their language content, language skills, and subjects. The results concluded that English teaching materials covered in the textbook are not appropriate for hotel accommodation students.

Conclusion

The usefulness of the Complete IELTS Bands 5-6 textbook for IELTS teachers and language institutes may be rightly concluded. This is supported by the findings of the study, which indicate that the teachers generally had a positive attitude towards the textbook and found it to be a useful resource. This is consistent with previous research, which has shown that textbooks can be a valuable tool for language teaching (Tomlinson, 2012).

Another important point is the need for teachers to adapt and complement the textbook to meet the needs of their learners and learning contexts. This is a key aspect of effective language teaching, as it allows teachers to tailor their instruction to the specific needs and abilities of their students (Nunan, 2003).

The importance of regular retrospective reviews by publishers is emphasized to ensure that their textbooks are up-to-date and relevant. This is crucial in the rapidly changing field of language teaching, where new technologies and teaching methodologies are constantly emerging (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Finally, it is suggested that further studies could be conducted to provide a more objective and extensive evaluation of the textbook, perhaps by combining the evaluation with interviews with teachers and students. This is an important recommendation, as it highlights the need for ongoing evaluation and improvement in language teaching materials and methodologies (McDonough & Shaw, 2013).

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Appendix A **IELTS Textbook Evaluation Checklist**

A. General Evaluation (Macro-evaluation)

1. Does the textbook provide adequate guidance for non-native teachers?
2. Is the layout and physical appearance of the textbook visually appealing and easy to use?
3. Are text and visuals used effectively to support learning?
4. Is the cover of the textbook attractive and professional looking?
5. Are images, tables, charts, and other visual aids relevant, effective, and well-integrated into the content?
6. Is the list of words at the end of the textbook useful and effective in supporting vocabulary acquisition?
7. Does the textbook content provide insight into the target language culture?

B. Specific Evaluation (Micro-Evaluation)

Listening

8. Are the listening materials well-recorded and authentic?
9. Are listening materials accompanied by appropriate background information, questions, and activities to aid comprehension?

READING

10. Are there sufficient exercises and tasks to improve reading comprehension?
11. Are the reading selections authentic and engaging?
12. Are the reading subjects relevant to recent IELTS requirements?

Speaking

13. Are the speaking activities designed to promote meaningful communication?
14. Are the speaking activities balanced between individual, pair, and group work?

Writing

15. Does the written work relate to structures and vocabulary practiced orally?

16. Is the written work adaptable to the age, interests, and environment of the students?
17. Is written practice provided in controlled and guided composition in the early stages?

Grammar

18. Does the grammar increase in complexity to suit the growing reading ability of the students?
19. Is the number of grammatical points and their sequence appropriate?
20. Are new structures presented systematically and in a meaningful context?
21. Is the grammar contextualized and integrated into the content?

Vocabulary

22. Is new vocabulary repeated and reinforced in subsequent lessons?
23. Are vocabulary items controlled to ensure systematic gradation from simple to complex items?

Pronunciation

24. Is there sufficient work on recognition and production of stress patterns, intonation, and individual sounds?
25. Are pronunciation points repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce learning?