

Evaluating EFL Textbook: Checklist and Rubric Approaches in a Qualitative Library Research

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Abstract

Assessing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks is essential to ensure that learning materials meet students' needs, align with curriculum requirements, and support instructional objectives. Previous evaluation approaches commonly rely on checklists, which are efficient but often lack depth, while rubric-based assessments provide richer analysis yet remain underutilized in EFL research. This study aims to develop a comprehensive textbook evaluation model by integrating both approaches. Using a qualitative library research method, the study synthesizes key textbook evaluation frameworks proposed by Cunningsworth, Tomlinson, Richards, Samuda, and Brown. The findings result in a hybrid evaluation model that combines the structured clarity of checklists with the analytical depth of rubrics. This model enables more valid, reliable, and reflective evaluation of EFL textbooks, including those incorporating digital and interactive elements. The study contributes a practical and systematic tool to support teachers, researchers, and decision makers in selecting and evaluating EFL textbooks.

Key words: Checklist Approach, EFL Textbook Evaluation, Qualitative Library Research, Rubric-Based Assessment

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks play a central role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as they function not only as sources of linguistic input but also as structured guides that shape classroom practices and learning outcomes (Cunningsworth, 1995; Richards, 2001; Bal, 2024). In many EFL contexts, particularly in formal education settings, textbooks become the primary reference for both teachers and students in achieving curriculum objectives. They provide systematic exposure to vocabulary, grammar, and integrated language skills, while also offering tasks and activities that promote communicative competence and learner engagement (Amilia & Hidayah, 2021; Harmer, 2007). Given this crucial role, the selection and evaluation of EFL textbooks are essential to ensure their relevance, quality, and alignment with learners' needs and pedagogical goals (Anugraheni et al., 2020; Tomlinson, 2013).

Over the years, various approaches to textbook evaluation have been developed, with checklist-based evaluation being one of the most widely used methods. Checklists typically consist of predetermined criteria that assess aspects such as content suitability, language presentation, skills integration, cultural relevance, and physical design (Mukundan et al., 2011; McGrath, 2002). This approach is valued for its practicality, clarity, and efficiency, especially in contexts where teachers need to make quick decisions about material selection. However, several scholars argue that checklist evaluation tends to reduce complex qualitative judgments into binary or limited-scale responses, which may not fully capture the depth, flexibility, and contextual appropriateness of teaching materials (Ellis, 1997; Tomlinson, 2013). As a result, important dimensions such as authenticity, learner engagement, and adaptability may be overlooked.

In contrast, rubric-based evaluation offers a more nuanced and descriptive framework for assessing textbooks. Rubrics allow evaluators to define performance levels across multiple criteria, providing detailed descriptions that highlight both strengths and weaknesses of instructional materials (Brookhart, 2013; Stevens & Levi, 2013). This approach supports more reflective and systematic analysis, enabling evaluators to consider qualitative aspects of textbooks in greater depth. Despite these advantages, the application of rubrics in EFL textbook evaluation remains relatively limited. Existing studies tend to prioritize checklist approaches due to their simplicity, while rubric-based methods are often underutilized or applied only in specific assessment contexts (Lestari & Martiarini,

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2021; Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2012).

This situation reveals several important gaps in the literature. First, there is a methodological gap, as most studies focus on either checklist or rubric approaches independently, with limited efforts to integrate both into a comprehensive evaluation framework. Second, there is a practical gap, where teachers and practitioners often rely on checklist instruments that may lack depth, while more detailed rubric-based evaluations are perceived as time-consuming and less accessible. Third, there is a contextual gap related to the evolving nature of EFL materials, including the increasing use of digital, multimodal, and interactive textbooks, which require more flexible and multidimensional evaluation tools (Tomlinson, 2013; Bal, 2024; Karamoozian & Riazi, 2008). These gaps indicate the need for an approach that balances efficiency with depth, allowing for both systematic and interpretive evaluation.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by proposing an integrated approach that combines checklist and rubric methods in evaluating EFL textbooks through qualitative library research. By synthesizing relevant theories and previous empirical studies, this research seeks to develop a more comprehensive evaluation framework that captures both measurable criteria and qualitative insights. Such an approach is expected to provide a more holistic understanding of textbook quality and to support educators, curriculum developers, and researchers in selecting and designing more effective EFL learning materials in both traditional and digital contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach based on library research. It looks at existing literature to explore ways to evaluate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, especially using checklists and rubrics. The goal is to gather and understand ideas from respected experts, so we can create a useful and practical system for evaluating textbooks that can be used by teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers. (Tomlinson, 2011; Richards, 2001)

To identify relevant studies, the researchers consulted several academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, and ResearchGate. These sources provide extensive coverage of both foundational and recent research in language teaching and materials evaluation. The search process employed specific keywords such as “EFL textbook evaluation checklist,” “ELT materials evaluation rubric,” “textbook assessment frameworks,” “rubric in ELT materials,” and “checklist for language textbook evaluation” to ensure the relevance of the selected studies. Furthermore, the review encompassed publications from 1990 to 2025, allowing the inclusion of both seminal works and contemporary developments in the field (Cunningsworth, 1995; Tomlinson, 2011; Tinh, 2023).

To ensure the reliability and rigor of the study, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established in line with systematic literature review procedures. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly book chapters, and English-language textbooks were included, as recommended in prior research (Li et al., 2025). The selected sources specifically addressed the evaluation of EFL or ELT textbooks, with particular emphasis on the use of checklists, rubrics, or a combination of both. Studies were prioritized if they contributed to the development or application of evaluation frameworks. Conversely, non-peer-reviewed works, sources lacking academic relevance, studies addressing unrelated topics, and duplicate records across databases were excluded. The initial search yielded approximately 120 sources; after a rigorous screening process involving title, abstract, and full-text review, 35 studies were retained for in-depth analysis (Abdelwahab, 2013).

For data analysis, this study employed thematic synthesis as proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008), which involves systematic coding, categorization, and integration of findings. First, key concepts, evaluation criteria, and frameworks were extracted from each selected study. These elements were then coded and organized into categories such as content relevance, language skills development, pedagogical methodology, cultural representation, and learner engagement, drawing on established frameworks (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2012). Subsequently, these categories were further synthesized into broader analytical themes representing the core dimensions of textbook evaluation. The final stage involved integrating these themes into a hybrid checklist–rubric model,

combining the structured clarity of checklists with the descriptive depth and flexibility of rubrics (Litz, 2005; Tinh, 2023). This synthesis enabled the identification of both recurring patterns and emerging perspectives, resulting in a comprehensive and balanced evaluation framework.

The selection of theoretical frameworks was guided by both their historical significance and contemporary relevance. Foundational works by Cunningsworth (1995), Brian Tomlinson (2011), Jack C. Richards (2001), and H. Douglas Brown (1995) are widely recognized for their contributions to textbook evaluation, particularly through structured checklist-based approaches that emphasize content, pedagogy, and learner needs. However, such approaches have been critiqued for their limited depth and insufficient consideration of contextual factors. Therefore, this study also incorporates more recent scholarship advocating the use of rubrics, which provide more nuanced descriptors and support more reflective and context-sensitive evaluations (Litz, 2005; Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2012; AbdelWahab, 2013; Menkabu & Harwood, 2014; Tinh, 2023). These studies highlight the adaptability and analytical richness of rubric-based evaluation compared to traditional checklist methods.

Overall, by systematically identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant literature, this methodological approach ensures transparency, consistency, and academic rigor. The integration of checklist and rubric approaches reflects the evolving nature of textbook evaluation, transitioning from rigid, item-based assessment toward more holistic and flexible frameworks (Soe, 2024). The resulting model is intended to support educators and researchers in selecting, adapting, or developing EFL textbooks that effectively align with learners' needs and instructional objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the thematic synthesis of the selected literature, several key themes emerged as the core dimensions in evaluating EFL textbooks. These themes were systematically identified through processes of coding, categorizing, and synthesizing data, following the approach proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008). The analysis revealed recurring categories, including content relevance, language quality, skills integration, pedagogical approach, design and layout, evaluation and support, and digital adaptability. These dimensions reflect widely acknowledged criteria found in established evaluation frameworks, such as those developed by Cunningsworth (1995), Brian Tomlinson (2011), Jack C. Richards (2001), H. Douglas Brown (2007), and Mukundan et al. (2011).

To operationalize these findings, the identified categories were structured into two complementary evaluation tools: a checklist and a rubric. The checklist ensures systematic coverage of essential criteria, while the rubric enables more nuanced and descriptive assessment. The following sections present the synthesized checklist-based and rubric-based frameworks, followed by a comparative analysis of their respective strengths (Budiarsih, 2022).

Checklist-Based Framework

The checklist-based framework remains a practical and structured method for evaluating EFL textbooks. Drawing on the foundational works of Cunningsworth (1995), Tomlinson (2011), Richards (2001), Brown (2007), and Mukundan et al. (2011), this approach allows evaluators to systematically determine the extent to which a textbook meets key criteria such as content suitability, linguistic accuracy, pedagogical effectiveness, skills integration, and design quality (Işik, 2018). The synthesized checklist framework developed in this study is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Framework for Evaluating a High-Quality Textbook

Criteria	Key References	Key Considerations
Content Relevance	Cunningsworth (1995); Richards (2001)	Alignment with curriculum, learners' needs, and cultural appropriateness
Language Quality	Brown (2007); Tomlinson (2011)	Accuracy, progression, and authenticity of language use
Teaching	Tomlinson (2011); Samuda &	Learner-centeredness, communicative focus,

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Approach	Matuhara (2017)	meaningful practice
Integration of Skills	Cunningsworth (1995); Richards (2001)	Balanced development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing
Design and Layout	Cunningsworth (1995); Tomlinson (2011)	Visual appeal, clarity, organization, and usability
Adaptability	Richards (2001); Brown (2007)	Flexibility across contexts and proficiency levels
Evaluation and Support	Samuda & Matuhara (2017); Brown (2007)	Availability of exercises, assessment tools, and teacher guidance

Rubric-Based Framework

In addition to checklists, this study incorporates a rubric-based approach to enhance the depth and quality of textbook evaluation. Based on the work of Susan M. Brookhart (2013), Heidi Andrade (2025), Barbara M. Moskal (2000), and Dannelle D. Stevens & Levi (2013), rubrics enable evaluators to assess performance using scaled criteria (e.g., 1–5 levels), thereby supporting more detailed and interpretive judgments.

Within this framework, key aspects assessed include language authenticity, task meaningfulness, cultural inclusivity, and digital adaptability. These dimensions provide a more comprehensive understanding of textbook quality beyond binary judgments.

Table 3. Sample Rubric for Evaluating EFL Textbooks

Criteria	5 – Excellent	4 – Good	3 – Fair	2 – Poor	1 – Very Poor
Content Relevance	Fully aligned with objectives, highly relevant, culturally responsive	Mostly aligned with minor gaps	Partially aligned	Often misaligned	Not aligned
Language Quality	Accurate, authentic, well-graded	Generally accurate	Mixed quality	Frequent errors	Inaccurate
Skills Integration	Fully integrated skills	Mostly integrated	Partially integrated	Limited integration	No integration
Pedagogical Approach	Highly learner-centered and communicative	Interactive but limited depth	Some learner-centered elements	Mostly teacher-centered	Fully teacher-centered
Design & Layout	Highly engaging and well-organized	Clear with minor issues	Functional but inconsistent	Confusing layout	Poor design
Cultural & Digital Adaptability	Inclusive and digitally rich	Some inclusion and digital use	Limited diversity/digital elements	Stereotypical/minimal tech	No inclusivity or digital support

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis highlights the complementary strengths of checklist and rubric approaches. While checklists provide efficiency and consistency, rubrics offer depth and interpretive richness.

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Evaluation Approaches

Aspect	Checklist	Rubric
Form of Evaluation	Dichotomous (Yes/No)	Scaled (e.g., 1–5 levels)
Primary Purpose	Quick verification	In-depth evaluation
Depth of Analysis	Limited	Comprehensive
Flexibility	Low	High
Feedback Quality	Minimal	Detailed and explanatory
Ideal Use	Preliminary screening	Comprehensive assessment

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the central argument presented in the introduction that EFL textbooks play a pivotal role not only as sources of linguistic input but also as pedagogical frameworks that shape teaching practices and learning outcomes. The emergence of core evaluation themes—such as content relevance, language quality, skills integration, pedagogical approach, design and layout, evaluation support, and digital adaptability—demonstrates that textbook quality is inherently multidimensional. These dimensions align closely with the foundational perspectives of Cunningsworth (1995) and Jack C. Richards (2001), who emphasize that effective textbooks must address both linguistic and pedagogical considerations while remaining responsive to learners' needs and curricular goals.

The checklist-based framework identified in this study confirms previous research highlighting its practicality and efficiency in textbook evaluation. As noted in earlier studies (Mukundan et al., 2011; McGrath, 2002), checklists provide a structured and systematic way to ensure that essential criteria are not overlooked. The results show that checklist frameworks are particularly effective in organizing key evaluation domains and supporting quick decision-making, which is crucial in formal educational settings where teachers often face time constraints. This supports the claim in the introduction that checklists remain widely used due to their clarity and usability. However, consistent with critiques raised by Rod Ellis (1997) and Brian Tomlinson (2013), the findings also reveal that checklist-based evaluation tends to oversimplify complex judgments. Binary or limited-scale responses may fail to capture deeper qualitative aspects such as authenticity of language use, learner engagement, and contextual adaptability. As a result, while checklists ensure coverage, they may not fully reflect the actual pedagogical value of a textbook.

In contrast, the rubric-based framework developed in this study provides a more detailed and interpretive approach to evaluation. The use of scaled descriptors allows evaluators to assess varying levels of quality across multiple criteria, offering richer insights into textbook strengths and weaknesses. This finding aligns with the work of Susan M. Brookhart (2013) and Dannelle D. Stevens and Levi (2013), who argue that rubrics enhance analytical depth and support more reflective judgment. The inclusion of criteria such as language authenticity, task meaningfulness, cultural inclusivity, and digital adaptability further demonstrates the ability of rubrics to address aspects often overlooked in checklist approaches. This is particularly relevant in contemporary EFL contexts, where learning materials increasingly incorporate digital and multimodal elements, as highlighted by recent studies (Ba, 2024). Despite these advantages, the findings also confirm the practical limitations of rubric-based evaluation noted in the introduction. Rubrics require more time, expertise, and careful interpretation, which may reduce their accessibility for practitioners who need quick and straightforward evaluation tools. This explains why, as noted by Lestari and Martiarini (2021), checklist approaches continue to dominate classroom practice despite their limitations. Therefore, the issue is not the superiority of one method over the other, but rather how each approach can complement the other.

Importantly, this study addresses the methodological gap identified in the introduction by demonstrating that checklist and rubric approaches can be effectively integrated into a unified evaluation framework. The combined checklist–rubric model developed in this research balances efficiency and depth: the checklist functions as an initial screening tool to ensure all essential criteria are met, while the rubric

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provides a more comprehensive and nuanced assessment of textbook quality. This integrated approach responds directly to the need for more holistic evaluation tools, as suggested by Brian Tomlinson (2013), which capture both measurable features and qualitative dimensions of teaching materials.

Furthermore, the findings also address the practical gap by offering a flexible framework that can be adapted to different evaluation contexts. Teachers can use the checklist for rapid evaluation and apply the rubric selectively for deeper analysis when needed. This adaptability makes the framework more accessible and relevant for real-world educational settings, particularly in contexts where time and resources are limited.

Finally, the inclusion of digital adaptability as a key evaluation criterion reflects an important contribution of this study in addressing the contextual gap identified earlier. As EFL materials continue to evolve toward digital, interactive, and multimodal formats, traditional evaluation frameworks must also expand to accommodate these changes. The integrated model proposed in this study acknowledges this shift and provides a more future-oriented approach to textbook evaluation.

In summary, the discussion highlights that neither checklist nor rubric approaches alone are sufficient to fully evaluate EFL textbooks. Instead, their integration offers a more balanced, comprehensive, and context-sensitive framework. This study therefore contributes to the field by bridging theoretical and practical gaps, while also responding to the evolving demands of EFL teaching and learning in both traditional and digital environments.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the importance of adopting a comprehensive and balanced approach to evaluating EFL textbooks, given their central role in shaping language learning and teaching practices. The findings confirm that textbook evaluation is inherently multidimensional, encompassing aspects such as content relevance, language quality, skills integration, pedagogical approach, design, and digital adaptability. These dimensions reflect established theoretical perspectives in the field, particularly those proposed by Cunningsworth (1995) and Jack C. Richards (2001), which emphasize the need for alignment between instructional materials, learner needs, and curriculum objectives.

The study demonstrates that checklist-based evaluation remains a practical and efficient tool for ensuring systematic coverage of essential criteria. However, it also confirms its limitations in capturing deeper qualitative aspects of textbook quality. On the other hand, rubric-based evaluation provides richer, more descriptive insights, enabling more nuanced judgments of instructional materials. Despite its strengths, the rubric approach is often underutilized due to its perceived complexity and time demands.

By integrating both approaches, this study addresses key methodological, practical, and contextual gaps identified in previous research. The proposed checklist–rubric model offers a balanced framework that combines the efficiency of checklists with the analytical depth of rubrics. This integrated approach allows for both rapid screening and comprehensive evaluation, making it more adaptable to diverse educational contexts.

In addition, the inclusion of digital adaptability as a core evaluation criterion reflects the evolving nature of EFL materials in the modern era. As textbooks increasingly incorporate digital and interactive elements, evaluation frameworks must also evolve to remain relevant and effective.

Overall, this study contributes to the development of a more holistic and flexible evaluation model that can support teachers, curriculum developers, and researchers in selecting, adapting, and designing high-quality EFL textbooks. Future research is recommended to empirically test the proposed framework in classroom settings to further validate its practicality and effectiveness in real-world applications.

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