
Collaborative Textbook Selection: A Case Study Leading to Practical and Theoretical Considerations

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This case study developed a collaborative approach to the selection of a Spanish language textbook. The collaborative process consisted of six steps, detailed in this article: team building, generating evaluation criteria, formulating a meaningful rubric, selecting prospective textbooks, calculating rubric results, and reflectively reviewing results. Following the selection of the textbook and its introduction into the curriculum, both the collaborative approach and the textbook itself were evaluated using teacher ($n = 10$) and student ($n = 120$) satisfaction surveys. The survey results, which were positive for both groups, offered empirical data from which to theoretically consider the textbook.

INTRODUCTION¹

Textbooks have been recognized as an anchor for program development, curricula, and students' learning experiences (Angell, DuBravac, & Gonglewski, 2008; Duffy et al., 1989; Pardiñas-Barnes, 1998). Textbook research has been common in some educational fields, such as mathematics, and it is currently emerging as a valued topic of research within second language studies (Harwood, 2014), primarily addressing English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks. However, additional research is needed, specifically with respect to textbook content, consumption, and production (Harwood, 2014).

The present case study aims to outline a collaborative textbook selection process for teachers and program directors, responding to the limited attention that has been paid to second language textbooks other than ELT textbooks. The study aims to contribute to textbook research by presenting empirical data and offering practical and theoretical considerations. It maintains that textbook selection involves the examination of the three areas mentioned by Harwood (2014)—textbook content, consumption, and production—, and the study considers the importance of collaborative decision-making.

RELEVANT RESEARCH

This case study considered two areas of previous research: textbook research and teacher collaboration. The goal of this section is to provide a succinct overview of the two areas and offer suggested texts for further reading.

Textbook Research

Textbooks have been studied under the rubrics of materials development, materials evaluation, users and producers of materials (e.g., teachers, learners, writers, publishers), and contexts surrounding materials, such as classrooms, programs, and educational or societal influences (Angell et al., 2008; Harwood, 2010, 2014; McGrath, 2002; Tomlinson, 2003, 2012). While the research in these areas contributes practical ideas for implementation, textbook research has recently adopted a more theoretical stance as well.

The theoretical framework that guides the current analysis views textbooks from three interrelated perspectives: textbook content, consumption, and production (Harwood, 2014). A benefit of this framework is that it creates a relationship among the various strands of textbook research (e.g., materials, users, context)—where the contexts and users help to define the processes of consumption and production—while maintaining a central focus on the textbook itself.

Textbook content has been the focus of most textbook research, and in the case of Spanish, most studies have evaluated certain aspects of a textbook's content (e.g., Gross, 1984; Winke & Stafford, 2002). Evaluations have assessed sentence and content structures (Hague, 1994), sociolinguistic variation (Wieczorek, 1991), or the degree to which textbook activities are communicative, meaningful, contextualized, or interactive (Terrell, 1990). While Spanish textbook evaluations offer ideas about the evaluation process and allude to a theoretical understanding of the role of textbooks, they are less directly useful than some recent work on best evaluation practices (Harwood, 2010; Tomlinson, 2012). The outcomes of specific textbook evaluations are often not generalizable to other contexts. Thus, a more useful approach to textbook content research for purposes of evaluation and textbook selection is to examine the process of textbook evaluation and selection itself, making findings generalizable to other teachers and program directors. Furthermore, the examination of a textbook selection process may help teachers and program directors to implement a clear, systematic approach — something that has been shown to be lacking (Mukundan & Ahour, 2010).

A second area of textbook research is textbook consumption. Consumption includes not only teachers' and learners' perspectives related to textbooks, but also how they actually use textbooks in particular contexts (Harwood, 2014). Textbook consumption depends on various contextual factors, such as allegiances to certain educational standards, specific program-wide goals, or course objectives (Angell et al., 2008; Birckbichler, 1987; Tomlinson, 2003). Other factors impacting how teachers and learners use textbooks include class length, number of meeting times, number of semesters, preparation of students or teachers, economic resources, students' motivations, and the teachers' degree of autonomy in the classroom (Angell et al., 2008). The ways in which textbooks are used by teachers and learners demand increased research. The current study sheds light on aspects of teachers' textbook consumption.

A third level of analysis is textbook production. Production refers to the textbook as a commodity that has monetary value and is marketed to audiences. The knowledge and

perspectives of both the market audience (e.g., teachers and students) and the producers of the commodity (e.g., textbook writers and publishers) should be investigated (Harwood, 2014).

The present case study of textbook selection represents a key process that is at the nexus of all three dimensions. Therefore, the three-part framework not only structures the current study but also provides a starting point for additional theoretical considerations of the textbook as it functions in educational contexts.

Teacher Collaboration

Besides a theoretical and practical understanding of textbooks, research on teacher collaboration is also relevant to the current case study. Teacher collaboration has been studied in terms of professional learning communities and continuing professional development (Kennedy, 2005). Various outcomes have been associated with teacher collaboration, such as increased student achievement (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Graham, 2007; Minor, 2011; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008), enhanced teacher satisfaction (Lawes & Santos, 2007), and enhanced professional knowledge (Lawes & Santos, 2007). Angell et al. (2008) found that teachers prefer to be included in the textbook selection process. Because of the positive outcomes associated with teacher collaboration and teachers' indicated desire to participate in textbook selection, the current study focuses on the textbook selection process as a collaborative activity.

CASE STUDY: STEPS OF THE TEXTBOOK SELECTION PROCESS

At the time of the study, the program had recently undergone administrative change with the first author becoming the director of the Spanish language program.² At that time of transition, the program had been using a textbook for a number of years, and teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the textbook and limited power to consider potential programmatic changes.

This case study presents a description of the six-step process, details about the ideas and experiences contributed by teachers, evaluations of textbooks, analysis of the textbook evaluations leading to meaningful results, and preliminary survey data about teacher and student satisfaction.

The case study took place over two years and involved six steps: 1) build a team; 2) generate evaluation criteria; 3) formulate and apply a meaningful rubric; 4) select prospective textbooks; 5) calculate results; and 6) review results collaboratively and reflectively. These steps will be outlined below.

1) Build a Team

The ten-member team consisted of the program director, full- and part-time lecturers, and graduate student teaching assistants, all of whom collectively are referred to as *teachers* in this article. Initial team building occurred during the first year. Surveys, meetings, and workshops organized by the program director, and at times in collaboration with teachers, were used to gauge the degree of shared knowledge and opinions among the teachers and to encourage the team to share perspectives. On one survey, teachers indicated dissatisfaction

with the textbook and interest in considering a new one. The teachers' comments listed below marked the beginning of a discussion about selecting a new textbook and provided insight into how the teachers envisioned the role of the textbook as an educational material:

The curriculum as it stands goes toooooo fast! There are so many great supplemental activities we could be doing in all levels, but can't because there simply isn't time.

What I don't like about this text is that so many of the exercises do not require the students to actually produce the verb forms... [and] dozens upon dozens of words that students will never need in their vocabulary.

There seems to be a huge jump between the grammar production required on 80% of the homework exercises, and what we require on exams. I have to find a way to fill in that gap somehow.

We just completed the garbled presentation of indirect object pronouns. What a mess!

Teachers were invited to participate in the selection process. Seven of the ten teachers volunteered, and four of these were randomly selected to do preliminary research and review work. The reason for this was to ease organization of meetings and tasks and to facilitate finishing the process within one semester.³ The program director participated as a non-voting member.

The four teachers had between four and 20 years of Spanish teaching experience, including experience teaching at the current university. They had taken graduate courses related to language teaching and participated in continuing education workshops together. Therefore, they had similar views about the language learning goals associated with the program and practical needs of their students and colleagues.

2) Generate Evaluation Criteria

The four representative teachers attended the first meeting, prepared to share ideas about approaches to teaching language, student and programmatic goals, and requirements of educational governing bodies. The goal was to suggest criteria for textbook evaluation related to language learning goals and practical considerations.

The team concluded that their shared approach to language teaching stemmed from a communicative perspective. Therefore, suggested criteria included opportunities for input before output and communicative activities. Textbook topics had to be relevant to students' lives, encourage communication in Spanish, and help students improve their language proficiency considering American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) (2012) proficiency levels. Finally, the textbook had to provide out-of-class practice opportunities and various types of ancillary materials. Notes were taken during this first meeting to record ideas about criteria for textbook selection.

3) Formulate and Apply a Meaningful Rubric

There were three steps related to criteria: selecting criteria, gauging the degree to which each criterion was present in textbooks, and weighting each criterion individually with respect to its importance to the program.

Select criteria. Following the initial meeting, the team members agreed on the 19 evaluation criteria (Table 1). Twelve of those criteria evaluated the textbooks themselves, and seven criteria evaluated the related online materials. The textbook criteria emphasized Spanish communication, grammar, writing, listening, reading, ACTFL goals, natural language, input before output, meaningful drills to communicative activities, life applicable topics, visual appeal, and clear instructions. The criteria for online materials emphasized home practice, interesting activities, ease of use, and the sufficiency and quality of the online materials. At this step, the team also referred to the existing research related to materials evaluation (e.g., Harwood, 2010; McGrath, 2002; Tomlinson, 2012) as a way to verify that the most relevant criteria for their program were included. At the second meeting, teachers examined and discussed the list of criteria, making sure that they similarly understood each criterion.

Instructions: Evaluate each criterion for each textbook using the following scores:

5 = ideal for our program

4 = matches very well with our program

3 = manageable for our program

2 = undesirable for our program

1 = complete mismatch with our program

Weighted values	Textbook evaluation criteria	Text #1	Text #2	Text #3	Text #4	Text #5
3	Communicative orientation	—	—	—	—	—
4	Grammar practice	—	—	—	—	—
1	Writing activities	—	—	—	—	—
1	Listening activities	—	—	—	—	—
2	Reading activities	—	—	—	—	—
4	Chapter division allows for our ACTFL goals	—	—	—	—	—
3	Demonstrates natural language	—	—	—	—	—
2	Provides input opportunity before output	—	—	—	—	—
4	Meaningful drills to communicative activities	—	—	—	—	—
3	Topics are applied to students' lives	—	—	—	—	—
1	Visually appealing text	—	—	—	—	—
3	Clear instructions	—	—	—	—	—
	<u>Online material evaluation criteria</u>					
1	Home vocab practice	—	—	—	—	—
4	Home grammar practice	—	—	—	—	—
1	Interesting activities	—	—	—	—	—
3	Ease of assigning	—	—	—	—	—
3	Ease of grading	—	—	—	—	—
3	Easy to navigate	—	—	—	—	—
3	Amount and quality of additional materials	—	—	—	—	—

Table 1: Evaluation Rubric

Scale criteria. Following the advice of Ansary and Babaii (2002), a Likert-like rating scale considering each criterion was used.⁴ Our approach sought to incorporate a *meaningful* way of associating the numerical 1 to 5 indicator with the degree to which the textbook was *appropriate for our particular program*. A 5 meant “ideal for our program.” A 4 meant “matches very well with our program,” 3 meant “manageable for our program,” 2 meant “undesirable for our program,” and 1 meant “complete mismatch with our program.” Each member of the textbook evaluation team evaluated each textbook with respect to each of the 19 criteria, using the appropriateness scale.⁵

Weight each criterion. Not all criteria were equally important for the program. Therefore, the team’s representatives attributed a relative value to each criterion, weighting the values, a process similar to the one suggested by Skierso (1991). Team members assigned a 1 to any criterion that they believed was most important for the program. These values were summed, and for calculation purposes, a value of 1 was added to the weighted value of each of the 19 criteria (Table 1).⁶ These three sub-steps allow evaluators to customize their textbook selection process to match their program’s needs.

4) Select Prospective Textbooks

Also in the second meeting, team members suggested textbooks for evaluation. Fifteen textbooks were requested from publishers. While publishing companies often offer presentations of their publications, the team did not accept these offers to avoid possible undue influence. After a brief review of each textbook,⁷ the team selected five of the 15 textbooks as most promising for their purposes.⁸ Over five weeks, the team evaluated the textbooks using the weighted Likert scale rubric.

5) Calculate Rubric Results

The calculation of results is described in detail so other programs may use this procedure. A mean score, for each criterion and each textbook, was calculated from the four teachers’ Likert scale responses (Table 2). Those mean scores were then multiplied by the weight that had been previously attributed to each of the criteria (Table 3). Then for each textbook, a sum of its criteria’s weighted means was drawn. The bottom line scores (Table 3), each representing one of the textbooks, provided a percentage of an ideal maximum score, ranging from 71% to 89%. The ideal maximum score of 155 had been determined by summing the weighted maximum Likert ratings of 5 for each of the 19 criteria. Textbook #1 was calculated to be the most ideal numerically.

Evaluation criteria	Mean scores of 4 teachers' evaluations				
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Communicative orientation	4.5	4.0	3.8	4.8	3.8
Grammar practice	5.0	3.0	4.0	5.0	4.0
Writing activities	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Listening activities	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0
Reading activities	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Chapter division allows for our ACTFL goals	4.8	3.3	3.3	3.0	4.3
Demonstrates natural language	4.5	3.8	4.3	4.0	4.5

Provides input opportunity before output	4.3	3.5	3.5	4.3	4.3
Meaningful drills to communicative activities	4.5	3.5	3.5	4.3	4.3
Topics are applied to students' lives	4.5	4.0	4.5	4.3	4.0
Visually appealing text	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
Clear instructions	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0

Table 2: Textbook Evaluation Likert Mean Score

Evaluation criteria	Weighted values	Weighted textbook scores					Ideal maximum score
		#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	
Communicative orientation	3	13.50	12.00	11.25	14.25	11.25	15.00
Grammar practice	4	19.00	13.00	14.00	18.00	16.00	20.00
Writing activities	1	4.50	3.50	3.75	4.25	3.75	5.00
Listening activities	1	3.75	3.25	3.00	2.75	4.25	5.00
Reading activities	2	9.00	8.00	7.00	8.50	8.00	10.00
Chapter division allows for our ACTFL goals	4	19.00	13.00	13.00	12.00	17.00	20.00
Demonstrates natural language	3	13.50	11.25	12.75	12.00	13.50	15.00
Provides input opportunity before output	2	8.50	7.00	7.00	8.50	8.00	10.00
Meaningful drills to communicative activities	4	18.00	14.00	14.00	17.00	17.00	20.00
Topics are applied to students' lives	3	13.50	12.00	13.50	12.75	12.00	15.00
Visually appealing text	1	4.00	3.75	4.25	4.00	3.00	5.00
Clear instructions	3	11.25	9.00	9.75	9.75	8.25	15.00
Sum of weighted scores		137.50	109.75	113.25	123.75	122.00	155.00
Percentage of ideal maximum score		89%	71%	73%	80%	79%	

Table 3: Textbook Evaluation Weighted Scores as a Percentage of the Ideal

6) Review Results Collaboratively and Reflectively

The results were presented to the full collaborative team. After reviewing the evaluation rubric's criteria, two additional topics surfaced: the presentation of cultural information and the cost of textbooks. The team determined that the selected text met the needs of these two additional criteria. The final point of discussion was to indicate if the team felt confident that the quantitative results reflected their assessment of the textbooks. All team members agreed that they did. Textbook #1 was selected for implementation. Additionally, looking forward to the implementation process, a gradual release of the new book was planned. The team also decided that three forms of the textbook would be offered to students, allowing them

different price and form options (i.e., electronic textbook, hardback textbook, paperback textbook with pages relevant to each semester of class).

TEACHER AND STUDENT PRELIMINARY SATISFACTION

One year later, ten teachers were asked to evaluate the collaborative process and their general satisfaction with the textbook. Students ($n = 120$) were also surveyed about their general satisfaction with the textbook.

Seven of the ten teachers indicated that they strongly believed that the inclusion of a team of teachers facilitated a decision that aligned with the program. Two teachers indicated that the team probably helped, and only one teacher did not believe the team was beneficial.

Regarding general feelings about the textbook, teachers indicated satisfaction with the new textbook. Six of the ten teachers had experience with both the old and new texts. Among those six teachers, four were “more satisfied” and two were “much more satisfied” with the new textbook. The remaining four teachers, without benefit of comparison to the old textbook, also indicated positive feelings toward the new textbook with two of the new instructors being “very satisfied” and two being “satisfied” with the new textbook.

Students also indicated satisfaction with the new textbook (Table 4). The positive responses of “perfectly satisfied,” “very satisfied,” or “satisfied” all increased or remained the same in one case. Ninety percent of students expressed satisfaction with the new textbook, compared to 67% of students using the old textbook.

Student Responses ($N = 120$)			
	Old text	New text	
	3rd semester ($n = 24$)	1st semester ($n = 58$)	2nd semester ($n = 38$)
Perfectly satisfied	8%	12%	22%
Very satisfied	21%	36%	21%
Satisfied	38%	47%	41%
Less than satisfied	33%	3%	8%
Completely dissatisfied	0%	2%	8%

Table 4: How do you feel in general about the Spanish textbook?

While the number of survey questions was limited, teachers and students generally indicated satisfaction with the outcome of the collaborative textbook selection process. Teachers commented on the students’ improved speaking skills and attitudes following implementation of the new curriculum, noting a complex relationship among the textbook, curriculum, students’ language skills, and students’ attitudes. Some student comments also reflected general satisfaction with the textbook (“*Me gusta mi libro de español!*” “I like my Spanish book”). Regarding the textbook as a commercial product, almost a third of the student comments addressed the price and production quality of the textbook (e.g., “The book was far too overpriced,” “the costs of textbooks are outrageous”). Another type of student comment addressed the content of the textbooks, expressing a desire to have more English in the textbook, more translations from Spanish to English, and more samples of conversations to aid preparation for speaking. While the student comments call for further

consideration of textbook price and discussions with students about textbook content, a total of 120 students indicated overall satisfaction with the textbook.

DISCUSSION

The discussion addresses three practical considerations: clear selection rubrics, available time, and continued collaboration. Then, it addresses theoretical contributions of the process considering Harwood's (2014) framework that includes textbook content, consumption, and production.

Practical Considerations

This case study demonstrated that a collaborative process resolved some practical issues related to textbook selection. The issues, as reported in the literature, were that textbook selection often relies on checklists or rubrics that are unclear and that systematic selection is a time-consuming process (Mukundan & Ahour, 2010). The process described here resolved the first issue by having teachers work together to verify that all team members shared a clear understanding of the rubric. The collaborative team created the weighted Likert scale together and discussed their understanding of it. A benefit of the rubric was that the results clearly demonstrated how each textbook compared to an ideal textbook for the specific program.

Related to the time-consuming nature of the selection task, the organized steps assisted the team and could potentially reduce time spent on this task for others. In total, the team had three meetings that focused on textbook selection over one semester.

The final practical consideration is related to teacher collaboration. As evident in the textbook selection steps, teacher collaboration requires on-going effort, organization, and training, but it results in positive outcomes. These perspectives align with suggestions and findings presented in previous literature (Harwood, 2014, p. 28-29; Lawes & Santos, 2007).

Textbooks: Content, Consumption, and Production

Instead of addressing each of Harwood's (2014) textbook dimensions separately, the textbook selection process highlights the interrelatedness of textbook content, consumption, and production. Specifically, the way in which teachers envisioned textbook consumption influenced the evaluation of both textbook content and aspects of the textbook's production. Considering content and consumption, the inclusion of criteria like "Meaningful drills to communicative activities" in step 2 demonstrated that content evaluation relied on the teachers' ideal plan to use textbook activities in the presented order (a description of their textbook consumption). Within the textbook selection process, the ideal forms of consumption drove the evaluation of content.

Discussions during the selection process also highlighted the relationship between textbook production and both content as well as consumption. The discussion of textbook price and produced form (i.e., electronic, hardback, paperback) drew attention to the textbook as a produced commodity and aspects of production. What students and teachers consider an appropriate price depends on the planned consumption practice for that textbook. When using a textbook over three or four semesters, one may justify a higher

price. To use a textbook over multiple semesters, the textbook content must also be sufficient. This example demonstrates that production concerns, both price and form in this case, are evaluated by teachers in view of the textbook's content and the consumption plans.

These examples show that within the textbook selection process, modes of textbook consumption influenced the evaluation of content and the evaluation of production features. This relationship has been demonstrated in the context of the textbook selection process. Research should continue to develop Harwood's (2014) framework of textbook content, consumption, and production, with the goal of defining the interrelated relationships among the three elements as they interact in diverse educational contexts.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One limitation to the textbook selection process is that it cannot realistically consider all related content, all the ways in which teachers and learners will use the textbook, or all production-related information. Yet, the process presented in this article guides a language program team to consider the most important elements for that specific program. Additionally, this process suggests Step 6 to identify aspects that might have been neglected in the process and offers a way for teams to verify that their ratings and results are relevant to their program. Combining objective and subjective evaluative opportunities, the process increases the likelihood that results will align with the goals and needs of the program.

In terms of the collaborative nature, the process could have involved more teachers and students, thereby following more closely the suggestions of both Angell et al. (2008) regarding teachers' participation and Lester and Cheek (1997) regarding students' participation in textbook selection. Each program should determine what is feasible for its own process, while keeping in mind the suggested benefits of teacher and student collaboration in textbook selection.

Finally, the satisfaction data presented is preliminary. While it provides a sense of teacher and student satisfaction with the textbook, it also introduces additional concerns such as textbook price. A more comprehensive follow-up study of satisfaction could be considered for the future. Furthermore, the student comments prompted additional questions for future research about the relationships between learners' satisfaction with the textbook and their understanding of the approach to teaching.

The various edited volumes recently published on the topic of textbook research (Garton & Graves, 2013; Gray, 2013; McGrath, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013, as noted in Harwood, 2014, p. 30) propose theoretical understandings of the textbook. The reflection on this case study, considering the textbook framed within the dimensions of content, consumption, and production, led to the conclusion that the three dimensions are interrelated and that consumption influences both the evaluation of content and production features. Future work should present additional empirical data that make visible the relations among these textbook dimensions.

CONCLUSION

This case study demonstrates a six-step collaborative textbook selection process. These steps, created, implemented, and evaluated by a collaborative team of teachers, were 1) team building, 2) generating evaluation criteria, 3) formulating a meaningful rubric, 4) selecting

prospective textbooks, 5) calculating rubric results, and 6) reflectively reviewing results. This textbook selection process guides teachers and program directors to consider goals, ideals, and perspectives that are important to them and their programs. It also places value on the experiences and knowledge of teachers. Teachers involved in the textbook selection process were satisfied with the outcome. Future work should address long-term satisfaction with the textbook selection process, students' textbook satisfaction related to their understanding of the approach to teaching, and analysis of empirical data to shed light on the theoretical underpinnings of the textbook in educational arenas.

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² The second author was not affiliated with the university but served to offer suggestions about the process considering her experience with collaborative teacher teams.

³ Without time or schedule constraints, all teachers should participate in order to increase the sample size and representation of all teachers' perspectives.

⁴ Likert scales contain many items. In this case, there were 19 items or criteria being evaluated. Likert scales use the same scale to measure the same attitude for each of the items. In this case, the attitude measured was the degree to which each criterion for each textbook was *appropriate for our particular program*.

⁵ The 1-5 scale assumes an underlying, continuous scale that measures appropriateness for our program. The five options are assumed to be equidistant from one another. These assumptions allow for the data points to be treated as continuous data, thereby allowing parametric statistical analyses such as calculating the mean. This understanding of rating scales is common in second language research and classroom assessments (e.g., A, B, C, D, F grading scale).

⁶ Adding 1 was done to avoid multiplying by zero, as the Likert scale ratings were later multiplied by the criterion weights.

⁷ This process was similar to McGrath's (2002) suggestion to do a first-glance evaluation, considering practical considerations, support for teaching and learning, and likelihood of learner appeal.

⁸ These were *¡Arriba! Comunicación y Cultura* (Zayas-Bazán, Bacon, & Nibert, 2012), *Dicho y Hecho: Beginning Spanish* (Potowski, Sobral, & Dawson, 2012), *Experience Spanish* (Amores, Suárez Garcia, & Morris, 2012), *Exploraciones* (Blitt & Casas, 2012), *Vistas: Introducción a la lengua española* (Blanco & Donley, 2012).