

Original Paper

An Evaluation of Mastering English Series within the CBA Classroom in Cameroonian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Textbooks provide an indispensable framework on which teachers and students build upon. Evaluation on its part, is a dynamic process which investigates the suitability and appropriateness of an existing practice. It is a useful device for both teachers and material writers as an underlying element in the development of innovations and modifications within the teaching/learning context. Therefore, it is obvious that textbook evaluation constitutes a crucial factor in addressing cumulative deficiencies associated with our teaching/learning institution in general and in our English Language Teaching endeavours. It has been observed that Mastering English series pose several problems to both teachers and learners of English language in Cameroon. This article sets out to investigate the Mastering English series with a focus on the students' book 5 to find out the extent to which the book aligns with the stipulations of the CBA in Cameroon. The analysis in this study was predicated on the hypothesis that Mastering English book 5 needs great improvement to really meet both the needs of learners and the requirement of the CBA. Both the theoretical and empirical findings reveal general misgivings about Mastering English book 5 and the implementation of the CBA in the context of Cameroon.

Keywords

textbook evaluation, English language, teaching learning approach, CBA (Competence Based Approach)

1. Introduction

Given the importance of textbooks to the language classroom, the type of textbook accepted into the curriculum should be considered—and this is best done through textbook evaluation. This article is an attempt at evaluating the students' book V of the Mastering English series using an adaptation of Tomlinson's (2003) Textbook Evaluation Model and Zhang's (2017) adaptation of the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics to textbook evaluation. This adaptation will be used in the context of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) to language teaching being applied in Cameroon secondary schools. It investigates the extent to which the students' book V of the Mastering English series reflects the needs of the form five learners facing the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level English Language in Cameroon, the calibration of the activities of the students' book V to reflect the dictates of the CBA, and the calibration of the enabling skills with regards to the macro skills as required of a language learner in form five. Since this study is hinged on the CBA, its theoretical underpinnings will be Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, which holds that, language is primarily used for communication and does not exist without language users (Van Patten & Williams, 2015).

Teachers, students, and textbooks are among the main elements of foreign or second language classrooms. For many years, the two elements, teachers and students and their roles has been investigated thoroughly, but less attention has been given to the issues regarding textbooks (Aytug, 2007). However, in most cases, textbooks represent the hidden curriculum of the language studies in a certain program or country. For this reason, they play an important role for obtaining information about the likely teaching and learning practices of a particular school, program or institution (Richards, 1998).

Since the language teacher in the Cameroonian context has little or no influence at all over which textbook is appropriate for a given setting, textbook evaluation within the confines of academic enquiry does not seem to cross the line. It is in this vein that this study investigates the compatibility of the Mastering English series with the Competency-Based Approach (CBA), through the analysis of the students' book 5 of the series.

1.1 Problem Statement

As English language teachers, the researchers noticed that many colleagues complained of many problems in dealing with the students' book 5 of the Mastering English series. Some of them believed that this textbook is beneath learners' level. Furthermore, the researchers noticed that many students were not able to use the language properly and this may be due to the nature of the textbook. So, this study will adopt a critical analysis into the students' book 5 to find out its points of strength and weaknesses. Therefore, this textbook will be studied in terms of its quality as an educational material to give real recommendations for improvement and development. The findings of this study will be useful and beneficial for further studies and research in this field.

1.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

- a) To what extent does the students' book 5 of the Mastering English series reflect the needs of the form five learners facing the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level in Cameroon?
- b) How do the activities in the students' book 5 of the Mastering English series align with the stipulations of the official CBA Syllabus?
- c) To what extent are the enabling skills scaled to the level of learners in form five to sharpen the macro language skills?
- d) What challenges are faced in implementing the CBA by both teachers and learners in their exploitation of this course book?

The answers to the above questions will be predicated on the following assumptions:

H1: The course book does reflect the needs of the learners to a lesser extent in terms of language proficiency.

H2: The activities in the Students' book 5 could better sharpen the macro skills in Form Five learners if their proficiency level better reflected the GCE syllabus.

H3: The enabling skills, known within Competency-based terminology as "Essential Knowledge" need a little calibration to meet the proficiency level of the learners in Form Five.

H4: If teachers faced challenges implementing the CBA even before the institution of the "one textbook policy", they still face certain challenges in their exploitation of the course book used here as case study.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Regarding the efficacy of language learning theory, researchers (e.g., Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Locker, 1996; Schleppegrell, 2001) claimed that language learning is a meaning-making process in context. That is, first, second, or foreign language learners, in order to communicate effectively with other speakers or writers of the new language, have to learn grammar, vocabulary, and meaning in different context of social interaction. Indeed, students' knowledge of meaning making (using contextually appropriate language form, such as grammar and vocabulary, to achieve meaning) has been empirically proven to be helpful for language learners' academic literacy development, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening (e.g., Gibbons, 2002, 2006; Rose & Martin, 2012; Swami, 2008). In other words, when evaluating textbooks' impact on learners' academic literacy development (the most important evaluation purpose), textbook evaluation must give attention to how textbooks (or textbook-based teaching activities) link language meaning and contextually appropriate linguistic resources (i.e., grammar and vocabulary).

Halliday (1994)'s Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereinafter SFL)—a theory grounded in a meaning-making perspective—meets all the requirements as a powerful language learning theory that can be applied in the three types of ELT textbook evaluation (pre-use, in-use and post-use). SFL provides clear and categorized macro-constructs (e.g., context of situation/register, context of

culture/genre) related to learners' academic literacy development and at the same time attends to what linguistic choices need to realize meanings in response to these macro-constructs. Indeed, teaching SFL-based resources has also been empirically proven to be effective for English language learners' academic literacy development (e.g., Achugar et al., 2007; Gibbons, 2002; Harman, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2010; Rose & Martin, 2012), thus it is not the worst idea to integrate it with the CBA.

It is observed in particular that, SFL holds that language is shaped by two levels of context: the context of situation and the context of culture (Halliday, 1994; Rose & Martin, 2012). The context of situation includes three variables: (1) field, which describes what a discourse is about; (2) tenor, which identifies the interpersonal relationship and evaluative stance between discourse participants; and (3) mode, which is the channel of a discourse (Halliday, 1994). These three variables are known semantically as the register of a discourse. Depending on the three variables, language users, by making choices from socially and culturally endorsed vocabulary/grammar, simultaneously convey three meta-meanings: (1) ideation meaning, representing language users' inner experience and outside experience; (2) interpersonal meaning, enacting social relationships; and (3) textual meaning, creating the texture of a discourse (Halliday, 1994). More specifically, SFL also explains how to select vocabulary and grammar to achieve the three meta-meanings through the system of transitivity (e.g., the choice of nominalization in academic discourse), mood (e.g., the choice of subject-verb-object order), and theme/rhyme and cohesion (e.g., the choice of conjunction words).

The underlying approach behind this study is the Competency-Based Approach. Also known as Competency-Based Language Teaching, its major basis the "functional and interaction perspective" on the nature of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143) which means that language learning always needs to be connected to the social context it is used in. Therefore, language is seen as "a medium of interaction and communication between people" who want to achieve "specific goals and purposes" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143). This especially applies to situations in which the learner has to fulfil a particular role with language skills which can be predicted or determined for the relevant context (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143). In connection to this, Competency-Based Language Teaching shares the behaviourist view of learning that "certain life encounters call for certain kinds of language" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143). Another key aspect of both language and learning theory is the so called "mosaic approach to language learning" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143), which assumes that language can be divided into appropriate parts and sub parts. Communicative competence is then constructed from these sub parts put together in the correct order (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143). All these aspects together show that CBLT is in some respects similar to Communicative Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143), and both in turn could be linked to the basic tenets of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Competency-based Approach

The domain of textbook evaluation in the context of Cameroon has not really been explored within academic circles, and so, no major literature on the field. However, from the inception of the CBA in Cameroon, quite a lot has been written about it.

Since its introduction to the Cameroonian system of education in 2012, the Competency Based Approach has received burgeoning literature within the academic circles in Cameroon. The academic circles have made appraisals of its usefulness in the Cameroonian context, as well as the evaluation of some challenges in its implementation, but there seems to be no studies on this approach in line with the course books that purport to work in tandem with its stipulations.

Nkwentisama (2012) examined the competency-based education model and then sought how it could be used to remedy the English language learning quagmire among Francophone Cameroonian learners. After a critical examination of the syllabus he opined that it spells out laudable learning outcomes or expectations. He also examined the affective components of the Cameroonian learners and literature in this domain and maintained that the learners were affectively predisposed to learn the language.

However, current literature on the implementation of CBLT in Cameroon clearly indicates that teachers do not particularly fancy the new approach. Nforbi & Siewoue (2015), for instance, investigated the application of CBA by teachers of English in Menoua division, an administrative unit in the West region of Cameroon. Using a multiple methods research design consisting of a questionnaire administered to 22 teachers, document analysis and analysis of teaching, the study revealed, among other things, that 45.45% of teachers had never attended a seminar on CBLT, that 63.64% found the new approach difficult to understand, that 68.18% thought that CBA made lesson planning more difficult for teachers, while 54.55% claimed that CBA made lesson delivery more difficult. Also, only 18.18% of respondents were confident that they understood what CBA entails, whereas 45.45% claimed they knew it to an extent. Looking at some key features of CBLT, 65% of teachers claimed that it was almost impossible to personalize instruction due to large classes and insufficient allocation of teaching time, 72.72% said it was almost impossible to avoid paper-and-pencil tests, and 86.36% did not evaluate their students at the end of a module.

Using data obtained via a questionnaire administered to 91 teachers selected from 32 schools (both public and private) spread across the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, Njwe (2016) investigated teachers' perspectives on the implementation of CBA in Cameroon secondary schools, and came up with findings similar to those obtained by Nforbi & Siewoue. For instance, while 93.4% of teachers were aware of the paradigm shift, only 17.6% believed they understood what CBA entails. In the same vein, only 25.7% of teachers felt ready to implement CBA, while about 82.4% did not feel confident implementing the new approach at that time. The study further hinted that teacher training CBA is deficient, given that about 42.9% of teachers claimed they had not received training on the application of CBA, while about 15.4% of teachers had never attended any seminar or workshop on the

application of CBA.

Belibi (2018) explored the implementation of competency-based English language teaching in a low-resource context, namely the Cameroon Francophone secondary education sub-system. Focus was placed on the challenges and possible solutions for a better implementation of CBLT. He highlighted inconsistencies between the Cameroonian model of CBLT and Western models in the domains of assessment and instructional approach, deficiencies in teacher education and the professional development of teachers, inadequate education infrastructure and teaching resources, a different school culture, the weak role of school leadership, the non-integration of technology in English language teaching and the continuous rejection of the L1 in the EFL classroom.

The above works indicate that the implementation of CBLT in the Cameroon secondary education context is hardly successful from the teachers' perspective. Then, the main aim of this study is to investigate challenges to the successful implementation of the new approach, following the Mastering English series, and to propose solutions for those challenges.

2.1.1 In-use Textbook Evaluation

Pre-use evaluation is when a textbook is evaluated before adoption into the syllabus. The purpose of this type of evaluation is to determine the suitability of the course-book in line with the curriculum. In-use evaluation is the one that this research is concerned with. It is aimed at finding out the strengths and weaknesses of a course-book while it is currently being used. The last type of evaluation is the post-use evaluation which is concerned with examining the impact of the textbook on learners through analysis of their performance in comparison to other books. Since this investigation attempts to evaluate a textbook that is currently being used, it becomes necessary to get acquainted with what researchers have said in relation to this type of evaluation.

Different from pre-use evaluation, in-use evaluation measures the effect of an ELT textbook already in use by observing how it is actually being used in a classroom (McDough & Shaw, 1993; Tomlinson, 2003). This means that in-use evaluation is "more objective and reliable than pre-use evaluation as it makes use of measurement rather than predication" (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 24). In other words, in-use evaluation is able to provide a lens into the actual effect of how teachers use an ELT textbook on learners' academic literacy.

Indeed, ELT textbooks themselves may not differ markedly, but there is a marked difference in how they are used (Jakubiak & Harklau, 2010). Thus, the value of a textbook is contingent on a teacher's role in de-constructing textbook knowledge with students in class that might facilitate or constrain students' learning through textbook (Donato & McCormic, 1994; Newton, 1990). Anton (1999), for example reported the impact of teachers' role on learners' language learning by comparing and analysing a learner-centred and a traditional teacher-centred language teaching class. In her study, Anton concluded that a teachers' role is crucial to learners' success as she found that L2 learners had more opportunities to make progress in language learning through a collaborative environment than through the teacher centred teaching approach. In other words, a teacher's role is crucial to language

learners' success in the textbook-based classroom. As Nunan (1991) further pointed out, the value of a textbook can be revealed "with reference to their actual use" (p. 211). Summer (2011) also noted that evaluating a textbook while teaching can help instructors "notice areas of neglect and supplement or modify the instructional options presented as to make EFL teaching more effective" (p. 89). This points to the importance of in-use evaluation that explores the triadic relationship between the teacher, student, and textbook.

Nonetheless, limited research has been conducted on the effect of in-use ELT textbook on learners' academic literacy (Santos, 2008; Sunderland et al., 2000; Tomlinson, 2003). In one of the very few studies in this area, Nahrkhalaji (2012) implemented an in-use evaluation of a textbook used in two EFL classrooms within the same school in Iran. Based on the observation of interactions of students and teachers in the two classrooms, Nahrkhalaji found that dialogues in the textbook enabled teachers to effectively encourage students' participation in classroom learning. At the same time, by using graphics from the textbook, teachers in one classroom helped students better understand the meaning of new words in the textbook. Nahrkhalaji concluded that in-use evaluation is helpful for ELT textbook adaptation and is also useful for teachers to change the way they use ELT textbooks and better facilitate learners' academic literacy. Similarly, Santos (2008) conducted a study of textbook use in an elementary school in Brazil. Through revealing interactions among teacher, student, and textbook Santos highlighted that the value of the textbook content is dynamically de-constructed, depending on the teacher's teaching style. Mantero (2002) also investigated a textbook-centred Spanish literature course in an American college with the purpose of revealing the triadic relationship between the teacher, textbook, and students' learning of Spanish as a foreign language. Based on nine full weeks of observation, Mantero, by means of conversational analysis (Drew & Heritage, 1992; see also Sacks et al., 1974), analysed and evaluated the textbook-centred classroom interactions and concluded that the instructor in this foreign language class initiated most of the dialogues in the textbook-centred classroom and did not take full advantage of opportunities to help learners develop topic-based discourse, which was in the language textbook they were using. These *in-use* evaluation studies demonstrate that the content of the textbook and the teacher using the textbook affect learners' actual academic literacy development in the textbook-centred classroom. As can also be seen from these studies, in-use evaluation, through analysis of student-teacher interaction, is thus able to reveal learners' academic literacy development by connecting the value of the textbook (what is embedded in a textbook) in relation to its users (i.e., the teacher and student), providing a dynamic and empirical evaluation of textbook content.

However, in-use evaluation is not without limitations. First, the dynamic nature of in-use evaluation also makes the evaluative process complex as it involves the interaction between students, teachers, and textbooks in a variety of forms, such as dialogue and task-based activities. As mentioned earlier, textbook analysis (i.e., textbook description) is the basis of textbook evaluation. In terms of in-use evaluation, this means it is necessary to describe textbook-based classroom practices before measuring

the effect of a textbook on learners' understanding of contextually motivated knowledge. However, previous research either relies on pure observation, resulting in a lack of empirical analysis of textbook-centred classroom practices before evaluation (e.g., Nahrkhalaji, 2012), or uses a conversational analysis that only can reveal such interaction features as "extensive use of display questions, form-focused feedback, corrective repair, and the use of scaffolding the interaction patterns of classroom discourse" (Sert & Seedhouse, 2011, p. 8). In other words, little attention is given to how a textbook and the teacher using the textbook develops learners' academic literacy through raising their awareness of the comprehensive relationship between vocabulary/grammar and contextual meaning, such as generic patterns, genre-specific linguistic resources, and meanings through texts of a textbook. Thus, an improved framework should be able to dynamically represent linguistic resources taught in a textbook-based classroom.

3. Methodology

The work follows mixed methods for data collection and analysis. The first part of the evaluation is theoretical based on the observations of the researchers and wide research from authorities in the field of textbook evaluation. The second part of the analysis is empirical and employs quantitative methods to examine the opinions of 41 participants from WhatsApp English forums. The 41 teachers participated in an Online survey through Google forms to answer 25 questionnaire items that were both open-ended and close ended. This helped to get an overview of what teachers think about the textbook under study.

3.1 Data Analysis

3.1.1 Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of Mastering English Students' Book 5

On the theoretical evaluation, the aspects of Content, Preface, Authors, Organization and Structure, Physical Appearance, Needs to O/Level English Language GCE Candidates, Compatibility of Activities and the overall SFL based Appraisal of the Enabling Skills in the book will be analysed. The Empirical aspect on the other hand, essentially handles the quantitative contribution of the study whereby an analysis of an Online survey designed to get teachers' opinions was undertaken.

On the aspect of content, the textbook is 324 pages with five modules as proposed in the CBA syllabus. Modules one to three are divided into five lessons each, giving a total of fifteen lessons for the first three modules. Module four, has four lessons and module five, has three lessons, giving a total of seven lessons for the two modules. The overall number of lessons for the entire book is twenty-two which raises eyebrows to the notion of lesson. In fact, it is recommended that a CBA lesson should last between 45-55 minutes, however, the lengths of lessons in the textbook are much longer to fit within the desired time frame of 45-55 minutes. Therefore, for a book of 324 pages to contain just a total of twenty-two lessons is quite indicative of a wrong or faulty understanding of the notion of a lesson within the CBA paradigm. On the preface of the book, the reviewer lavished praises on the content, needs of the students in general as well as in relation the CBA, and physical presentation of the text.

However, the position of the reviewer of the Preface of this book is highly contested by opinions of respondents to questionnaire used in this investigation. We also observed that, no information is provided within the book about the formal education and experience of the authors of the book which to us is a significant omission. On organization and structure, textbooks are generally divided into units that develop topical constructs with activities for the learners to carry out. In this case however, the book is simply divided into the five modules of the CBA syllabus and as indicated earlier, each module is divided into lessons, rather than units. The entire book comprises twenty-two lessons which corresponds to what one could call units, if we wanted to avoid terminological incongruity-since in the CBA paradigm, a lesson is generally understood as a section of teaching or learning into which a wider learning content is divided, and should last for at most 55 minutes. The book on page V of the preliminaries, presents a summarized table of contents. The pages 1-14 present an introduction to the GCE ORDINARY LEVEL 530 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER, with details on the structure and requirements of English Language papers 1 and 2. In this section, the authors give some pretty great tips to GCE candidates despite the repertory of grammatical errors in the space of 14 pages. Then from pages 15-324, each module begins with a synoptic table of contents outlining the activities into which the module is divided. The activities are presented under each lesson, and the number of activities depend on the number of lessons per module, thus the uneven distribution of activities per module. With regards to the physical appearance of the book, it is colour and pictures are attractive, however, the pages are quite fragile and lack durability. Quite some work is undertaken in this text to meet the needs for candidates sitting for the O/Level English Language 530 paper needs and the teachers only require employing the appropriate knowhow to exploit the contents. On the aspect of compatibility of activities, the learning activities used in CBLT can be described as systematically designed activities to achieve a certain competence. These activities are real world tasks which may be related to any domain of life (Richards & Rogers, 2001) Typical areas for which such competency-based activities have been developed, include, Job Application, Job Interview, or Work schedules (Mrowicki, 1986). All these areas, “can be described as a collection of units of competencies” which consists of “specific knowledge, thinking processes, attitudes, and perceptual and physical skills” (Docking, 1994). While a great deal of of the activities in Mastering English students’ book 5 seem to match the CBA criteria to some extent, all the pronunciation activities (Speech Work) in the book fail to meet the criteria. Research has indicated that many L2 teachers have received little or no specific training in pronunciation pedagogy (Breitkreutz, Derwing, & Rossiter, 2001; Derwing, 2010; Derwing and Munro, 2005; Murphy, 1997) and that teachers can be reluctant to teach pronunciation due to lack of training in pronunciation pedagogy and/or access to appropriate material (Macdonald, 2002). This calls for an arduous task on the part of material developers (textbook writers) to be meticulous on their design of pronunciation activities that can even serve as self-study aid to learners before the intervention of the language teacher. Finally, on qualitative analysis we undertake the Overall SFL based Appraisal of the Enabling Skills of the book. On this aspect, the enabling skills are generally used to rate performance in

the macro-skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The enabling skills are grammar, oral fluency, pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary. These skills are so called because they enable the learners to use language appropriately. Systemic Functional Linguistics treats grammar as meaning-making resource and insists on the interrelation of form and meaning (Nordquist, 2020) and by extension the other enabling skills. In contrast to most other approaches, SFL explicitly attempts to combine purely functionally information, with overtly social factors in a single integrated description. Like other Functionalist frameworks, SFL is deeply concerned with the purposes of Language use. Systemicists constantly investigate the linguistic devices available to help language users communicate effectively and the basis on which language users make their choices (Lawrence & Stockwell, 2007). The available choices in this sense will refer to enabling skills, especially grammar. In section “A” below, we present a sample grammar topic treated in Module One of the Students’ book 5-The Simple Present Tense:

Section A: Sample Grammar Topic in Mastering English Book 5

Essential Knowledge

Grammar

Revision:

Study the sentences below and underline the verbs used in the Simple Present Tense

1) USES.

This tense is used:

I.) To express habitual or repeated actions.

- The student sleeps in class every day.
- John eats with his left hand always.

2) To express a future action about which a decision has already been taken:

- The school bus leaves the village at 9:30 pm.
- We attack at dawn.

3) To express facts.

- The sun rises in the East and sets in the West.
- The earth moves round the sun.

4) For a general statement where no particular time is thought of:

- Actions speak louder than words.
- Hamidou’s family comes from the Northern part of Cameroon.
- The Wouri River separates Deido and Bonaberi.

5) To express abilities:

- Mr Ngwa plays the xylophone whenever he visits his friend.
- Monica cooks very well.

6) In time expressions after when, until etc.

- Don’t eat until I tell you to.

- When you drink, don't drive.

From section A above, it is evident that the sample sentences could be said to meet the criteria for genre of situation within the Framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Although within the framework of SLF, Halliday himself has considered LEXICOGRAMMAR to be just a branch of grammar and vocabulary not to be as significant as syntax and he gave it a new name. "The heart of Language is the abstract level of coding that is the Lexicogrammar. [He] see[s] no reason why we should not retain the term 'grammar' in this it's traditional sense; the purpose of introducing the more cumbersome term LEXICOGRAMMAR is simply to make explicit the point that vocabulary is also part of it, along with syntax and morphology" (Halliday, 2006). Within the CBA paradigm, grammar is essentially an enabling skill that fosters the proper use of macro-skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The sample sentences in section A above can foster the speaking and writing skills to some extent, but at the same time, they seem more of generic platitudes or cliches than original sentences that expose the learners to creativity in their literacy development. If for instance, we take the sample sentence "The sun rises in the East and sets in the West" we realise that this sentence seems ridiculously commonplace for form five learners, as it features in most textbooks. In the Graded English series by ANUCAM Educational publishers, previously used in secondary schools in Cameroon before the one-textbook policy of 2016, the same sentence above was used in the students' book One to explain the factual aspect of the Simple Present Tense to Form One learners. Since there have been multiple textbooks in the syllabus up until 2016, it is fair to assume that Form Five Learners of the academic year (2019/2020) should still remember that sentence from their form One, four years earlier. As far as grammar is concerned, therefore, the textbook needs some major improvement at the level of originality of sample sentences-more mature ones rather than cliches. Thus, while the sample sentences in the textbook (under the grammatical points) do achieve the ideational meta-function criterion of SFL, they need intensive revision to align with the tenets of the CBA more adequately. Another aspect of the textbook that will be of concern in this section is the writing activities. Within the SFL Context of culture, refers to staged structured ways (Eggins, 2004) in which people use language to achieve culturally appropriate goals. It is the way in which people organise texts through language choices with an aim to achieve a social purpose. According to Martin (2009, p. 159) it is "the system of staged goal- oriented social processes through which social subjects in a given culture live their lives". Some examples of staged goal-oriented activities are booking appointments, inviting someone to a wedding, giving a lecture, applying for a job etc. These staged-oriented activities, the different types of texts that enact various types of social contexts, are termed "genres". In the context of the CBA, these goal-oriented activities are obviously the writing activities-especially Directed Writing activities where learners get to assume different real-life roles to present a given piece of writing. Section "B" below presents a sample Directed Writing activity in Mastering English book 5.

Section B: Sample Directed Writing in Mastering English book 5

CATEGORY OF ACTION:

Writing

DIRECTED WRITING (30 MARKS)

MARK DISTRIBUTION

Content (14 Marks)

Expression and Accuracy (12 MARKS)

Slanting (04 MARKS)

As the coordinator of the different social groups and associations of your area, read the passage below carefully. Selecting relevant material from the text, write an article of 150 words in one paragraph that will be published in a local newspaper of your area on the objectives and different activities in the pipeline to be carried out by the Dynamic Women Association.

3.1.1.1 The Dynamic Women Association

The name of the association is Dynamic Women Association. It was created on the 31st of May 2014 in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. It had twenty participants who were later considered as the founding members of the association. Today it counts over one hundred members. The main objective of this association was to create a forum which could involve women of all walks of life, no matter their status, and who had something to contribute to the growth of the women and the association as a whole. The founding members viewed this association from a Christian perspective, giving the women the opportunity to learn or teach one another from the different talents they are endowed with.

Many women appreciated this initiative since it had Degree holders, First School Leaving Certificate holders, businesswomen, married and unmarried members. However, gaining membership into the association was not that easy for it was done under strict scrutiny, taking into consideration the moral upbringing, respect, and the commitment of the individual. During monthly meetings, members were encouraged to express themselves in the vernacular. Thanks to this policy, many women have been able to speak and understand their mother tongue; they can also dance traditional dances as cultural development formed an essential part of each monthly meeting.

Section B above can be said to meet the SFL criterion of macro-construct of ideational meta-function to some extent, as well as the interpersonal meta-function. The ideational meta-function is about the natural world in the broadest sense, including our own consciousness, and is concerned with clauses as representations. The interpersonal meta-function is about the social world, especially the relationship between speaker and hearer, and is concerned with clauses as exchanges. That said, the activity in Section B requires the learners to place themselves in a real-world situation where they play the role of coordinator of the women's association groups in their area. Also, the context is clearly Cameroon-an environment with which the learners are familiar. It could thus be said that the Directed Writing activities in the book do meet the requirements of SFL cum the CBA paradigm, which makes for one of the strengths in the textbook.

On the Empirical evaluation of the textbook, in other words on the quantitative analysis, we examine teachers' opinion on the application of the CBA using the book. In this connection, Questionnaire were designed and answered by 41 participant teachers selected randomly since any teacher could follow the link and answer the questions online. However, to avoid any intruders responding to the survey, the link was only sent to WhatsApp forums made up of teachers of English Language and Literature.

3.1.2 Challenges in Implementing the CBA Using the Mastering English Series

According to the poll, 82.9% of participants did a vow to facing challenges in their implementation of the CBA using the Mastering English series. Only 17.1% of respondents declined facing any challenges with the Mastering English series. Some of those who confessed to facing challenges in using the Mastering English series made some guiding statements, some of which are analysed below.

Some respondents stated that "At times the material isn't enough to prepare a good CBA lesson". By this statement, it is clear that the structural organization of the textbook should be a problem to some teachers, as there is no equitable distribution of material. Other teachers think that "It doesn't handle all the real-life situations as stipulated by the syllabus". This means that the publishers still need to revisit the tenets of the CBA in order to better present materials that rhyme with the stipulations of this paradigm.

Some participants face problems that are common to all CBA classrooms—class size. One participant confirms: "Some activities suggested and/or presented in Mastering English Book 5 require small class sizes; my Form 5 class is large". This is a common problem with the implementation of the CBA (Tambwe, 2017). So, this particular pitfall is not a negative on the part of the publishers, but on the prevalent situation in the field.

Other common complaints such as that there is "No ample time to complete a lesson" or that "The lessons do not reflect the duration of CBA LESSONS" are commonplace. This is because the notion of lesson as understood by the publishers of the Mastering English series does not align with the tenets of the CBA. The publishers take the idea of lesson to mean unit, and so the lessons are ridiculously long, and jam packed with activities that extend to the duration of a whole unit.

Finally, some participants have claimed that "Some exercises are ambiguous" and "It's mostly theoretical". This does imply that some of the activities do not respect the principle of "real life situations", and that is what renders them theoretical—according to the teachers' opinions. Those who claim that the activities are ambiguous did not give more information as to what registers as "ambiguous".

This item on the challenges was both close and open-ended. However, most participants simply chose to indicate that they faced challenges but did not specify the type of challenges that they faced.

4. Summary of Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which the Mastering English series reflects the needs of the form five learners facing the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level examination in Cameroon. The work was also aimed at evaluating the Students' Book 5 of the series to find out the extent to which the activities in it align with the stipulations of the official CBA Syllabus, as well as the extent to which the enabling skills are scaled to the level of learners in form five to sharpen the macro language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Finally, it was also within the limit of this work to investigate the challenges faced by English Language teachers in Cameroon in implementing the CBA through their exploitation of this course book.

Both the theoretical and empirical evaluations of the book revealed that general opinion regarding the physical appeal of the textbook and ancillary materials is negative. A great many teachers have disapproved of the paper quality and durability of the textbook in terms of physical appeal.

As far as the needs of learners are concerned, it was revealed through the theoretical analysis that the book does meet the needs of the learners to some extent, such that a lot of improvement is still needed to foster the originality of sample sentences for the grammar points treated in the book. Also, the pronunciation activities which foster the speaking skills, are found really lacking. The pronunciation activities need to be more varied with sample sentences that employ words used for the representation of each phonetic sound treated. As far as the speaking and writing activities are concerned, it was found that they do meet the needs of learners to some extent as well, but a lot of improvement is still needed.

When it comes to empirical evaluation of the book, it was equally noticed that a majority of teachers agree with the theoretical findings and are of the opinion that the book just barely meets the needs of learners—not even to some extent, but just barely—thus, a general note of disapproval on the part of teachers.

With regards to the alignment of activities in the book to the stipulations of the CBA, the theoretical evaluation also yielded similar findings to the empirical evaluation. However, the theoretical evaluation focused on the observations of the researchers and so were tilted towards a closer look at the pronunciation activities but the empirical aspect was more general and the results of both still show that the book rated as meeting the requirements of the CBA only to some extent.

Furthermore, the empirical findings regarding the enabling skills in general reveal that some 39% of participants think that the activities do not foster student-student interaction at all, and 43% think that the activities do foster student-student interaction to some extent. So, the proficiency level of the enabling skills in the book need to be raised to the level of the learners.

Finally, an overall impression of the book based on the empirical evaluation is negative and the overwhelming majority of participants have asserted that the book needs some improvement. These impressions are similar to those expressed about the implementation of the CBA itself in the context of Cameroon. A great many teachers of English Language in Cameroon still feel that CBA in the Cameroonian context is inapplicable, despite the length of time that the ministry of secondary

education has imposed it.

5. Recommendations

The findings have proven beyond doubt that the Mastering English series, despite their enjoyed monopoly of the English textbook market, have to work hard at improving the entire series in order to bring it up to the standards of the candidates. The areas that need great improvement are the following:

- **Physical presentation:** the paper quality of the back cover, the attractiveness of the ancillary material and the overall appeal of the series need to be improved upon to ensure greater durability and consumer-delight.
- **Intellectual content:** The activities in the book need to be greatly revised so as to meet the requirements of the CBA and the needs of the learners. In this vein, the pronunciation activities of the Form Five need special attention, as well as all the activities on the enabling skills.
- **Rethinking the notion of lesson:** The publisher might want to rethink their notion of lesson and use the more conventional appellation of “unit” to better capture the idea of what the word really stands for. This could go a long way to clear the doubts of teachers who think that the lessons are too long to be taught in durations of a normal period—45-55 minutes.
- **Grammar points:** To render the grammar exercises more CBA-like, the sample sentences could be more original and context-bound than the clichés and platitudes common in most of the exercises.

5.1 Suggestions for Further Investigation

It is the researchers’ hope that this study will contribute to a better understanding of the repercussions of the one-textbook policy in Cameroon because monopoly of a given market makes for less care in production processes. In this vein:

- a) Investigation into the teachers’ opinion regarding the impact of the one-textbook policy on the language classroom in Cameroon.
- b) Also, another investigation into teachers’ opinion on the CBA syllabus being implemented in Cameroon could go a long way to reveal the public opinion on the national syllabus.

An evaluation of the entire Mastering English series, not just the book 5, could go a long way to reveal all the lapses in the series and improve the quality of language pedagogy nationwide.

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