

Teachers' Perceptions on Adaptation of Sunrise Coursebook at Sulaymaniyah Governorate in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine if teachers employ any adaptations during their classes, and if so, what kind of adaptations are employed and how these are employed. This study sought to determine if adaptations are employed in correct and authentic ways. For this study, a qualitative method was used. The tool used in this study was a semi-structured interview. The questions of the semi-structured interview were adapted from Nguyen (2015). The study cohort was made up of teachers who were using or had used the *Sunrise* course books (levels 7, 8, and 9) in their teaching in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The findings of this study showed that all the teachers employ adaptations in the classroom but to different degrees; some of them use only 1 or 2 types of adaptations because of the limited time they have available in their classes, whereas others apply most of the types of adaptations. Finally, the results showed that there is a positive relationship between experience and adaptation, with those teachers who had more experience employing more methods of adaptations during their classes.

Keywords: Coursebook adaptation, Sunrise coursebook, Teacher's perceptions, Textbook, Evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The importance of the English language in the global community has placed a lot of emphasis on the study thereof, especially because English has arguably become the lingua franca of global communications. It is, therefore, not surprising that English is being taught as a foreign language in many

countries. It has become one of the major subjects in many educational systems in the world, especially in private schools. Throughout the world, instructors attempt to help students keep up to date with the progress of science and technology through the medium of English. Because of the importance of the language, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has given special importance to English as a subject at public and private schools. The focus of this study is on the teaching of English in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Knowing the importance of coursebooks in the field of language teaching and learning, most specialists have asserted that textbooks are useful and should be used in English language teaching (ELT). Tomlinson (1998) noted that some people are against the use of textbooks

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for teaching English because the content and applications are limited and do not necessarily meet the needs of the students. In contrast, some people have a more positive perception about the use of textbooks for teaching English because they feel it guides them to have a more structured approach and practical sequence of teaching the language. Although the views on the use of textbooks are multidimensional, most of the teachers prefer to have their textbooks when teaching or planning to teach. In addition, textbooks are necessary for the daily practical exercises that students need to complete during the learning process. Therefore, textbooks have become a common component of ELT (Torres & Hutchinson, 1994; Tomlinson, 1998).

1.2. Problems Statement

As mentioned in the previous section, textbooks play a vital role in the process of teaching. Every textbook, however, has its limitations, and through evaluation, researchers can identify the key areas for improvement. Hassan and Ghafor (2014) investigated the suitability of the Sunrise course at the seventh level in schools in Kurdistan's context and they found that the Sunrise course is well designed and suitable for teaching a foreign language and for the training programs at this specific level. However, the teaching and learning environment in the KRI is not well suited for the implementation of this coursebook. Sofi-Karim (2015) focused on ELT in Kurdistan in general and noted in his study that this coursebook has a few problems because it has been redeveloped based on the communicative approach but it did not develop the students' communicative skills. According to those studies, teaching from the Sunrise course for the teacher and learning from it for the students present with some difficulties.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate the problems with the Sunrise course. This study aimed to discover if teachers employ methods of adaptation during their classes. If so, the study aimed to determine what kind of adaptation methods are used and how they are employed. The main motivation for this study was to address the problems with and deficiencies of the *Sunrise*

course, as reported by some researchers (Hassan & Ghafor 2014; Sofi-Karim, 2015). Vernez et al. (2014), in their books, asserted that students' answers in national English language tests were lower than expected. For example, in 2008, the national tests for grade 9 students showed that about one-third of the students did not pass English, with grades lower than 50%. Less than 5% of the students scored higher than 85% in English language examinations. In addition, there is no study on the adaptation used for teaching using the *Sunrise* course materials.

1.4. Research Questions

This study investigated if teachers employ any adaptation methods during their classes. If they do so, it aimed to identify what kinds of adaptations they employ and how these are employed. It sought to determine if teachers employ adaptations in the correct and authentic ways. According to these aims, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

- (1) How do the teachers adapt *Sunrise*?
- (2) Is there any correlation between the participants' teaching experience and the textbook adaptations practiced?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study investigated the perceptions of teachers on the adaptation of the *Sunrise* course. More specifically, this study was conducted with English teachers who taught or who are currently teaching English at levels 7, 8, and 9 using the *Sunrise* course.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. A Brief History of the English Language in Kurdistan

The Kurdistan Region gained autonomy in 1991, but the same Iraqi English Syllabi have been used until 2007 when the Ministry of Education in the KRI designed a new coursebook with local and international experts called *Sunrise*, but, as Sofi-Karim (2015) mentioned in his study, this new coursebook had several problems

because it was designed based on approaches that could not develop students' communicative competence. The socioeconomic and political problems in Iraq and Kurdistan did not allow the new coursebook to be an effective means of teaching English language syllabi. *Sunrise* also failed to meet the requirements of English learners in Kurdish (Sofi-Karim, 2015).

The main objective of *Sunrise* is to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) in public schools in the Regional Government of Kurdistan and to improve Kurdish students' communicative competence to a high level of accuracy and fluency. This is to ensure the success of the students in their future academic careers and to ensure their development in a wide range of areas of global interest and for employment. In the educational system in Kurdistan and Iraq, English is considered an essential subject.

2.2. Adaptation of ELT Materials and Reasons for Adaptation

According to McDonough and Shaw (2012), there is a direct and strong relationship between adapting and evaluating. This relationship can be noticed in reasons for employing adaptations and the criteria for using them. According to Rodrigues (2015), adaptation means "setting" something like a text or activity to make it more applicable and acceptable. "Adaptation cannot be totally denied of the manual and teachers must follow the curriculum offered by the institution for academic purposes" (p.115). Moreover, Allwright (1990) noted that materials should help learners to learn how to use books as resources for ideas and guide teachers to explain the purpose of the various teaching and learning activities. Allwright's perception of textbooks is that they are too rigid to be used directly as teaching material. In addition, Tomlinson (2006) said the following:

"Most materials, whether they are written for a global market, for an institution or even for a class, aim to satisfy the needs and wants of an idealized group of target learners who share similar needs and levels of proficiency No matter how good the materials are, they will not by themselves manage to cater to the different needs, wants, learning styles, attitudes, cultural norms and

experiences of individual learners." (p.1)

Researchers define adaptation in different ways. Mısırlı (2010) said that, "when instructional materials set a barrier to student learning, the teacher can adapt it to allow the learners to reach greater success. This can be seen as changing the level, context or additions of activity in order to cover the needs" (p. 5). Teachers have an important role in adaptation. Thus, they have to be aware of what they are doing and how to do it because it is vital for the process of learning as Madsen and Bowen (1978) pointed out:

"The good teacher is constantly adapting. He adapts when he adds an example not found in the book or when he telescopes an assignment by having students prepare 'only the even-numbered items.' He adapts even when he refers to an exercise covered earlier, or when he introduces a supplementary picture While a conscientious author tries to anticipate questions that may be raised by his readers, the teacher can respond not merely to verbal questions . . . but even to the raised eyebrows of his students." (p. vii)

Accordingly, Sikorova (2011) identified the following 3 approaches that are applied in the use of textbooks: adhering, elaborating, and creating. Adhering considers the textbook and concludes that there will be few or no chance for adaptation. Elaborating adds more resources to the textbook lessons, whereas creating refers to the development of the units of the textbook by the teachers.

Adaptation is necessary to make textbooks suitable in different contexts. Textbooks can rarely be used without adaptation because different contexts require changes in the textbook. With regards to that, McDonough and Shaw (2003) mentioned that the purpose of adaptation is to personalize, individualize, or localize the context. Personalizing is related to the enhancement of the relevance of the content according to learners' involvement and needs. Individualizing refers to the consideration of the individual learning styles of students and when working in groups. Localizing considers the geographical location of the group that is being taught because a textbook that can be used effectively in one country like Iran, for example, might not be effective when used in the teaching of groups in a different country like Russia. Furthermore, modernizing was added to the

list of adaptations by Madsen and Bowen (1987, cited in McDonough & Shaw, 2003), which refers to the updating of textbooks because outdated materials may be misleading and contain incorrect information. When adapting textbooks, the needs and interests of the learners should be considered. In light of that, learners should also be consulted to specify what they want to be added or to know what is lacking during the process of designing the curriculum (Allwright, 1981).

There are different reasons offered for adaptation as investigated by several scholars. Nation and Macalister (2010), for instance, considered adaptation as a conservative top-down pedagogy and mentioned some reasons for adaptations:

- (1) The coursebook does not include all the activities that the teacher has used successfully before.
- (2) The coursebook material does not fit comfortably into the time available for the course.
- (3) The coursebook contains content that is unsuitable for the learners' level of proficiency or age.
- (4) The coursebook does not include all the language items, skills, ideas, discourse, or strategies that the learners need.
- (5) The coursebook does not apply principles that the teacher feels should be applied (p. 161).

Two important factors for the success of the learning process were suggested by Sheikhzadeh Marand (2011), which are the effectiveness in accomplishing the purpose of the course and the suitability of the materials for the learners' comfort with and knowledge of the materials. Therefore, teachers should not simply be at the service of the content of textbooks; that is, the role of the teacher is not just to present the content of printed materials, but to transform the materials so as to enhance the understanding of the subject matter. Cunningsworth (1984) warned teachers that textbooks are good servants but poor masters. Cunningsworth (1984) asserted that teachers whose objectives are enshrined in finishing the textbook are servants of the textbook. Therefore, Sheikhzadeh Marand (2001) maintained that the teachers' aim should be to focus on "what students need to learn" (p. 553). Teachers need to free themselves from the confines of the classroom to recognize the purpose for which the students will use the language after they have learned it (Sheikhzade Marand, 2001).

There is a need to have well-defined adaptation objectives for adoption or adaptation of materials that can motivate students to learn (Islam & Mares, 2003). In order to obtain appropriate criteria, materials should be adapted according to McDonough and Shaw's (2003) list of objectives: personalize, individualize, localize, and modernize. This list was further expanded by Islam and Mares (2003) to include the following: adding real choice, accommodating all sensory styles of learners, providing more learner autonomy, promoting a higher level of cognitive skills, and making the input of language more accessible and engaging.

Finding a mismatch between the teaching materials and the needs and objectives of the students and curriculum promotes a need for the adaptation of existing materials (McDonough and Shaw, 1993; Cunningsworth, 1995). Classroom materials require adaptation in a structured way to express the needs within certain contexts of teaching, to enhance the acquisition of skills required for a second language, and to adapt to teaching practices. Regardless of the above-mentioned conditions, selecting materials may result in failure. A careful study should be carried out before changing the existing programs that are employed. Whenever information can be collected, program designers should utilize it.

There are a lot of reasons for adaptation as proposed by McDonough and Shaw (2012), which are listed below:

- Not enough grammar coverage in general.
- Not enough practice of grammar points of particular difficulty for these learners.
- The communicative focus means that grammar is presented unsystematically.
- Reading passages contain too much unknown vocabulary.
- Comprehension questions are too easy because the answers can be lifted directly from the text with no real understanding.
- Listening passages are not authentic because they sound too much like written material being read out.
- Not enough guidance on pronunciation.
- Subject matter inappropriate for learners of a specific age and intellectual level.
- Photographs and other illustrative material are not culturally acceptable.

- The amount of material is too much or too little to cover in the time allocated to lessons.
- No guidance for teachers on handling group work and role-play activities with a large class.
- Dialogs too formal and not representative of everyday speech.
- Audio material difficult to use because of problems related to the room size and technical equipment.
- Too much or too little variety in the activities.
- Vocabulary list and a key to the exercises would be helpful.
- Accompanying tests needed.

2.3. Types of Adaptation in ELT materials

Five different types of adaptations are suggested by McDonough and Shaw (2012).

2.3.1. Addition

Addition means adding something to the coursebook. It could be done in 2 ways, namely qualitatively or quantitatively. Teachers can add an entirely different exercise to the book, or they can just expand what is already in the coursebook.

Quantitative addition is achieved by the technique of extending. For example, the materials contain exercises in pronunciation of minimal pairs (bit/ bet, hat/hate, ship/chip) but do not contain enough examples of the difficulties for learners with a particular pronunciation. Japanese speakers may need more “l/r” exercises, Arabic speakers more “p/b”, Spanish speakers more “b/v”, Kurdish speakers more “s/θ” or “z/ ð”, and so forth.

Qualitative addition is achieved by the technique of expanding. For example, if there is insufficient coverage of the skill of listening, the reading passage provided may also be paralleled by the provision of listening comprehension material, using the same vocabulary and ideas, but presented through a different medium, making sure that it is authentic in terms of the spoken language.

It is worth pointing out that additions do not always have to be made at the end of something. A new facet of material or methodology can be introduced before it appears in the framework of the coursebook. For example, a teacher may prepare the ground for an exercise

in an aspect of grammar or communicative function as required by the syllabus through a “warm-up” exercise that encourages the learners to talk about themselves and their everyday lives.

2.3.2. Deletion/Omission

Deletion is the complete opposite of addition. Teachers or instructors can delete qualitatively or quantitatively. The teacher may eliminate the whole part of an exercise or just delete some of them.

Subtracting is to reduce the length of material, as in subtracting from it. For example, in the example used for pronunciation exercises about minimal pairs, the exercises contain too much general material. Because the students all have the same mother tongue and do not make certain errors, many of the exercises are inappropriate. Arabic speakers, for example, will be unlikely to have much difficulty with the “l/r” distinction.

The changes are greater if the material is not only subtracted but also, what we shall term, abridged. For example, some section materials contain a discussion section at the end of each unit. However, our learners are not really proficient enough to attempt this adequately, because they are not fluent in the use of the language structures that they have been taught. The syllabus and its subsequent examination do not leave room for this kind of training.

2.3.3. Modification/Changing

Modification simply means making some changes in different areas of the materials such as in the linguistics, assessment system, exercises, and so forth. "It can be subdivided under two related headings. The first of these is rewriting, when some of the linguistic content needs modification; the second is restructuring, which applies to classroom management" (p.73).

Rewriting: Currently, the most frequently stated reason for changing the focus of the study materials is for it to be made “more communicative.” This challenge is voiced in many teaching situations in which the textbooks are deemed insufficient for catering to the students' linguistic and learning needs.

Restructuring: For many teachers who are required to

follow a coursebook, changes in the structuring of the class are sometimes the only kind of adaptation possible. For example, the materials may contain role-play activities for groups of a certain size. The logistics of managing a large class (especially if they all have the same L1) are complex from many points of view, and it will probably be necessary to assign 1 role to a number of pupils at the same time.

2.3.4. Simplification

Simplification implies making materials more comprehensible and less complicated. If the material seems to be too difficult or complex for the learner to comprehend, the material can be simplified to better suit the needs of the learners and to help them to achieve their goal more readily. McDonough and Shaw (2012,) mentioned some examples for simplification:

- (1) Sentence structure: sentence length is reduced, or a complex sentence is rewritten as a number of simpler ones, for example, by the replacement of relative pronouns by nouns and pronouns followed by the main verb.
- (2) Lexical content: to control the number of new vocabulary items according to previous concepts, which have already been learned.
- (3) Grammatical structures: for instance, passives are converted to actives, simple past tense to simple present, and reported speech to direct speech.

2.3.5. Rearrangement or Reordering

Rearrangement refers to rearranging the sequence or order of some parts of a textbook. The teacher may reorder something in the textbook to match the learner's aims or to provide them with some information before the introduction of new information to increase understanding. Reordering of material is appropriate in the following kinds of situations: materials typically present "the future" by terms such as "will" and "going to." However, for many learners, certainly at the intermediate level and above, it is helpful to show the relationship between the time reference and the grammatical tense in a more accurate way. In this example, we would probably wish to include the simple

present and the present continuous as part of the notion of "futurity," perhaps by using a sentence such as, "Next term begins on 9 September" or "She retires in 2015" as illustrations.

In addition, reordering can include separating items of content from each other as well as regrouping these and putting different items together. An obvious example is a lesson on a particular language function believed to contain too many new grammar points for the current proficiency level of the learners.

Adaptation can be employed in external or internal sources; it can include changes to the coursebook or the addition of some parts from other sources. Adaptation is necessary for the following reasons: localizing, personalizing, or individualizing the textbook. As mentioned previously, adaptation can be done by using some techniques like adding, deleting, modifying, simplifying, or reordering. In addition, adaptation can be done in any part of the textbook such as for language practice, texts, skills, and classroom management.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

An interview was used in this study to collect data from participants as part of survey. Brown and Rodgers (2002) said that, "Surveys are any procedures used to gather and describe the characteristics, attitudes, views, opinions and so forth of students, teachers, administrators or any other people who are important to a study" (p. 142).

3.2. The Context of the Study

For this study, the *Sunrise* coursebook was used. It was designed specifically for KRI students and published by Macmillan. This coursebook has been in use in Kurdistan since 2007. It contains 12 different levels of books, namely level 1 to level 12. For each level there is a student book, activity book, teachers' book, and a CD for audio; for the first few levels, flashcards are also included. Three *Sunrise* course levels in the basic school were chosen for this study. These levels were chosen because the researcher had taught these levels and was fully aware of what the levels are about.

3.3. Participants

The participants of this study were teachers who have taught or who are presently teaching from the *Sunrise* coursebooks (levels 7, 8, and 9). The participants were from the Sulaymaniyah Governorate in KRI. Teachers from the Sulaymaniyah Governorate were chosen for this study because it is the most populated Governorate in Kurdistan. During the time the data were collected, the country was going through some economic and political problems, and because of this, the students were not at schools and were not able to participate in the study.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

3.4.1. Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview was adapted from Nguyen (2015) (Appendix A). Some questions were deleted from the original interview questions because they were not applicable to the *Sunrise* coursebook. A semi-structured interview method was chosen because, in this kind of interview, the questions are more open and new ideas are allowed to be added during the interviews. The interview consisted of the following 9 categories: the first one was the overall evaluation of the course, the second one was about the organization and structure, the third was on the activities, the fourth was on the vocabulary and grammar, the fifth was on the language level, the sixth one was on the supporting resources, the seventh one was on the practical considerations, the eighth one was on the physical appearance and content pages, and the last one was on adaptation. For each category, there were some different questions.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect the data, a permission letter was received from the general Directorate of Sulaymaniyah education. Then the interviews with the 20 teachers were done online. In the first step, they signed a consent form (Appendix B) and sent it back to the researcher. A Skype call was then used and it was explained to them that it was an audio-recorded interview. The questions were asked one by one to the teachers. The audio-recorded interview was done by using the Camtasia studio 9 program for recording.

3.6. Data Analysis

The qualitative data were collected from the interviews with the English teachers. Content analysis was used. First, the interviews were transcribed, and then the data from the interviews were analyzed. Similar answers that were given by different people, which represented the most common responses, were grouped.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Adaptation

The questions started with general questions, which was then transformed into specific questions. This was followed by some general questions about the *Sunrise* coursebook and then the adaptation methods used in the classroom. The questions were as follows: "Do you do any adaptation in your classes?", "What do you usually adapt?", "How do you do those adaptations?". Based on the answers to those questions, the teachers were divided into 3 groups. Group 1 comprised teachers who had 1 and 2 years of experience, group 2 comprised those who had 3 to 6 years of experience, and group 3 comprised those who had more than 6 years of experience. Four of the teachers had 1 or 2 years of experience. These 4 teachers did not adapt very often, and they only deleted some parts because of time constraints that did not allow them to finish on time.

The second group were those teachers who had between 3 and 6 years of experience; there were 8 teachers. They employed almost all the types of adaptation, they focused on important parts first and simplified them, and they added some more examples or exercises whenever their students needed these. As they explained during the interview, they had done some modifications just to allow their students to understand better. Teacher 10 said that, "Sometime I simplify the activities to let my students understand them better." The last group, who had more than 6 years of experience, included 8 teachers. Their teaching experiences ranged between 6 and 18 years. They only employed 2 types of adaptations. The first one was reordering because they started with explaining grammar parts before continuing to other parts. In addition, they deleted some parts because of time, and from their experience, they have learned that those parts are not important for their students.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research, by utilizing some specific criteria, attempted to identify if teachers employ any methods of adaptation during their classes when they teach from the *Sunrise* course (levels of 7, 8, and 9). If they do, the aim was to identify what kind of adaptations are employed and how they are employed. It sought to investigate if teachers employ adaptation in correct and authentic ways. This study was based on 2 research questions.

Based on the results, it can be deduced that the teachers employ adaptation during teaching but to different degrees, with some of them only employing 1 or 2 types of adaptations mostly because of the limited time they have in their class. However, other more experienced teachers employ almost all kinds of adaptations. The results show that teachers who have less than 2 years of experience, did not employ adaptation to any significant extent, but when they did, they only deleted some parts because of time constraints. Furthermore, teachers who have 3 to 6 years of experience focus on the important parts first and simplify it if it is needed before continuing to other parts, and they add some more examples or exercises whenever their students need it. However, teachers who have more than 6 years of experience only employ 2 types of adaptations. The first one is reordering because they start with explaining the grammar parts first before continuing with the other parts. Also, they delete some parts because of time constraints, and, as a part of their experiences, they have learned that those parts are not important for their students. It shows that there is a correlation between experiences and adaptation.

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Appendix A: Teacher's Semi-Structured Interview

Appendix B: Teacher's Consent Form for Interview

Semi-structured Interview

Background information

Gender: Female Male

Age:

Years of experience:

Levels you have taught or you are teaching: 7 8 9

Degree: Masters Where _____ Bachelors Where _____

Diplomas Where _____ Other _____

I. Overall evaluation

1. What do you think about *Sunrise* course book?
2. What problems do you have when you use this textbook?
3. Does it encourage your students to study English more? Does it suit the learning and teaching context in your school?
4. To what extent does it help you fulfill your duty and save time to prepare lessons?

II. Organization and structure

1. Are the organization of each lesson and the linkage among lessons good to help you introduce the lesson to your students and get them to review language knowledge easily?
2. Is there any suggestions for improvements of its organization and linkage?

III. Activities

1. What do you think about activities and tasks in the textbook? Is there a diversity of activities and tasks? Are they closely related to real life? Do they tend to develop all language skills? How about the instructions? Are they clear enough for learners to understand?
2. Do you think anything needs to be improved?

IV. Vocabulary and Grammar

1. What do you think about vocabulary and grammar introduced in the textbook? Are they suitable and familiar to learners?
2. Do you think anything needs to be improved?

V. Language level

1. what do you think about language introduced in the textbook? Is it suitable at this level? Is it authentic and close to real life?
2. Do you think anything needs to be improved?

VI. Supporting resources

1. What do you think about the supporting materials? Do you think they adequately support the teacher in the preparation, instruction and evaluation processes? Why?
2. Does the teacher's book help the teachers in preparing the lesson planning?
3. Do you think anything needs to be improved?

VII. Practical considerations, physical appearance and content pages

1. What are your opinions about the physical appearance of the textbook? This includes the attractiveness of the cover sheets, size, paper quality, and artwork.
2. Are the topics interesting and suitable for your pupils?
3. Do you think anything needs to be improved?

VIII. Adaptation

- 1- Do you do any adaptation in your classes? What do you usually adapt? How do you do those adaptations?

Appendix B: Teacher's Consent Form for Interview

Consent form for interview

Research Title: Teachers' Perspective towards Evaluation and Adaptation of *Sunrise coursebook* at Sulaymaniyah Governorate in Iraqi Kurdistan

Researcher: Kochar Ali Saeed, Foreign Language Education Department, *Eastern Mediterranean University*

Instructions:

I am a master's student, I am conducting a study on evaluation and adaptation of *Sunrise coursebook (levels 7, 8, and 9)*.

Dear participants,

This interview is designed to collect your opinions about *Sunrise coursebook (levels 7, 8, and 9)*. The textbook will be evaluated in terms of its physical appearance, content and impacts on users.

It is absolutely essential that you express your views realistically. Participation in this interview is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage in this study without giving any reason. Your interview will be audio-recorded. The data collected from you will be very valuable in recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook.

Your identity and individual responses in this interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be used for purposes of the study only.

Signature:

Date:

If you have any queries or wish to know more, please feel free to contact me or my Supervisor:

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