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The Primary School Textbook and Its Role in the Educational Process

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Abstract

The textbook is a document of great importance from primary through secondary education, and it would not be an exaggeration to regard it as the written constitution of any country. It has been defined as "a printed and structured instrument intended to engage learners in a learning pathway with a view to improving its effectiveness and quality", and as "the principal and primary tool of the educational process, since it contains the teaching material in an organized manner that helps the pupil to remember that material or to return to it". The teacher should not treat the textbook as the sole reference of the educational process or as the only source of the knowledge the pupil acquires; rather, it is an organized tool that assists the pupil in this endeavour. The textbook is a cornerstone of the educational and teaching process, and without it pupils' knowledge would be lost. Textbooks vary according to level, subject and syllabus.

It follows that the textbook is indispensable, and that writing about it, and within it, requires the researcher to bring to bear the full weight of pedagogical, scientific, psychological and social knowledge in order to convey its importance and the issues surrounding it. In this paper we have sought to address several points, moving between the general and the specific and summarizing where appropriate.

Keywords: textbook; pedagogical and educational process; pupil.

We have chosen the primary-level textbook as our subject (reading, expression, texts, and grammatical and cognitive rules). The points of our paper are as follows:

- First: The textbook and its importance.
- Second: The textbook in the educational heritage.
- Third: The concept of the textbook and the course of its development.
- Fourth: Types of textbook (texts, reading, grammar and morphology, orthography).

Introduction

Achieving educational objectives in general, and the teaching process in particular, requires recourse to specific means that help carry out this process as fully as possible and bring the content closest to the learner's mind, so as to ensure sound understanding of the subject matter. The textbook is without doubt one of the most important of these means and one of the principal instruments of the curriculum for attaining the educational goals that society as a whole seeks to achieve through school education (1). For the teacher, the textbook is an indispensable working tool; for the learner, it is the primary source of learning. It is therefore prepared in accordance with a range of educational, pedagogical, scientific and aesthetic considerations, so that it may be commensurate with the new curricula and serve as an effective tool in learners' hands (2).

The textbook is among the most effective and efficient teaching aids for helping teacher and student perform their tasks at school, and it should therefore not be neglected in any educational programme: it is the basic guide to a programme's content, its teaching methods and its evaluation. It is oriented toward the aims of education and sets out the general boundaries, concepts and values that students and society alike require at any stage of their development. It is the operational form of the curriculum and generates the various patterns of topics, structures and formulations through which the curriculum's religious, national, social, behavioural and contemporary objectives can be achieved. Through it (3) students enrich their knowledge and experience, acquire a distinctive share of the culture of their society and nation, and are introduced to other cultures.

First: The Textbook and Its Importance

The Definition of the Textbook: Etymology

The Arabic word *kitāb* ("book") denotes anything in which writing is recorded; it derives from the verb *kataba*, *yaktubu*, *kitāban wa-kutban*, and its plural is *kutub*. In the Qur'an God says: "This is the Book about which there is no doubt". *Kitāb* also refers to the Torah and the Gospel, and to divine decree, obligation and appointed term, as in the verse "For every term there is a decree". It occurs, too, in the saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him: "I shall judge between you by the Book of God". "The Mother of the Book" (*Umm al-Kitāb*) is the opening chapter of the Qur'an, and "the People of the Book" are the Jews and the Christians.

The Definition of the Textbook: Terminology

According to Zaki Naguib Mahfouz, the book is the memory that preserves what has passed so that it may serve as the starting point for what is to come (4). The book is an important element of the educational process and one of the instruments most widely used in schools, since school subjects and their various teaching methods, as set out in the curriculum, depend upon it. It explains the broad outlines of a subject and the ways of teaching it, and it also contains the basic information, ideas and concepts of a given course. Since it offers considerable potential for the educational process, the textbook must be provided with a suitable climate that enables the school to use it in a manner that attracts pupils to its uses (5).

The book is also defined as the pupil's basic and trusted tool, because its words are printed or recorded and because a higher authority has placed it in pupils' hands and before their eyes (6). The textbook is further defined as the applied form of the educational content, which guides the teacher toward the way in which the general and specific aims of the curriculum can be accomplished. At the same time, it is the most trusted instrument in the pupil's hands, given the strict oversight to which its contents are subjected by the higher authorities (7). It is therefore worthy of confidence (8), because its authors are usually specialists in education and in the subject concerned. It has also been defined as a methodical collection of selected, classified and simplified data that is amenable to learning. The textbook appears to be the vessel that contains selected information and organized knowledge used by learners (9).

Others define the textbook on the basis of the importance of its content or of the material it presents, describing it as a fundamental pillar for the teacher in the educational process: it explains the broad outlines of the subject and the methods of teaching it, and it includes the information, ideas and basic concepts of a given course, as well as the values, skills and attitudes (10) that are meant to be conveyed to all pupils.

The textbook has also been defined in light of its elements and objectives: it is a comprehensive system that aims to assist teachers and comprises several elements, namely objectives, content, activities and evaluation. It thereby aims to help teachers and learners (11), in a given class and a given subject, to attain the intended objectives as defined by the curriculum. Robin Decourt defines the textbook as a book that covers all or a particular part of a given curriculum and is commonly used across several institutions. Abdel Hafez Salama, for his part, regards the textbook as a means available to every pupil that can be exploited to good effect, especially the modern textbooks for the primary stage, which are furnished with colour illustrations relevant to the subject of the lesson, all of which are images that (12) lead the pupil and guide him gradually toward recognizing letters, words and sentences.

Its Importance

It may be said that the textbook is the practical vessel of the curriculum and its objectives. It is the basic and important tool for teacher and learner alike, especially in Third World countries, Algeria included, and it is an indispensable element of the educational process.

The Algerian Textbook

The Algerian textbook is the printed educational document that embodies the official programme of the Ministry of National Education. Its purpose is to transmit knowledge and to help learners acquire certain skills, and to assist both teacher and learner in activating the learning process and its progression.

The Algerian textbook is, in general, of the closed type, by which is meant a book that centres on content and presents it in an organized manner in which the learner has no hand in its construction or discovery. The open book, by contrast, is based on the discovery and construction of knowledge through activities that bring out the learner's personal, manual and intellectual abilities, as in the mathematics textbook (13).

Status and Manner of Use of the Textbook

A common error among our teachers is total reliance on the textbook. It scarcely leaves their hands from the beginning of the lesson to its end: they depend on it for explanation, for questions and for setting exercises, and, strangely, even for framing examination questions. Yet the teacher can use the textbook in a variety of situations and ways.

In practice, one often encounters poor patterns of use. Some teachers of Islamic education, social studies, Arabic and science do not allow pupils to use the textbook in class, and its use at home is confined to copying out the lesson once or several times. Some teachers of social subjects, Islamic education and science take care to summarize the content of the book on the blackboard and require pupils to copy the summary into their notebooks. Some teachers ignore the graphs, drawings, pictures and maps that the textbooks contain, and when they do use them, they explain them themselves. Some teachers punish a pupil who tries to steal a glance at the book while the teacher is explaining, insisting that the pupil's attention remain fixed on the teacher and the blackboard. The teacher tries to cover the content of the book as far as possible, and rarely links the prescribed material to the library or to other sources of knowledge, such as the visual and

audio media. The teacher puts questions to pupils that require them to memorize the material exactly as it appears in the book, with no attempt to reorganize it, apply it or perform any mental operation upon it. Some teachers neglect the activities and questions at the end of a topic or unit as though they were superfluous. The teacher does not introduce the book to the pupils or familiarize them with it at the beginning of the school year, at the beginning of each stage or at the beginning of each term; teachers may recognize the importance of the textbook without regard for educational objectives and the philosophy of education; and they may attend to minor parts, details and isolated items of information at the expense of the main concepts, principles and generalizations.

These patterns of use should be consistent with the following approaches:

- (a) The traditional approach: This approach is bound up with the traditional curriculum, which is founded essentially on rote instruction and memorization. The teacher is the source of the information selected from the book, while the pupil plays a passive role, memorizing and recalling.
- (b) A second approach: The book is used together with certain other teaching aids, an approach that calls for diversification across fields of learning.
- (c) A third approach: This relies on enriching the textbook with a set of pictures, maps, statistics and other data that support, clarify and explain some of the ideas set out in the body of the book. In addition to these approaches, there is a further one that supplies the learner with explanatory and interpretive books on the content of the curriculum (14).

It is also necessary that the use of the textbook achieve the following educational objectives:

- It enriches and reinforces the student's learning.
- It helps the student to grasp the psychological, logical and conceptual structure of the subject.
- It provides and reinforces motivation to learn.
- It takes account of individual differences among pupils.
- It helps the student to acquire sound study habits.
- It develops the student's capacity for thinking of every kind and at every level.

Second: The Development of the Textbook

Definition of the Book

A book is a particular intellectual product printed on a set of sheets of paper that are fastened together to form a single unit. It is also defined as a non-periodical publication of no fewer than forty-nine pages, excluding the cover and the title page.

Another Definition of the Book

A book consists of written or printed leaves made of paper or another material and fastened together along one side so that they open easily. It may be enclosed in a covering that keeps it intact. The book is one of humankind's most important inventions. The first books appeared in the middle of the fourteenth century CE, and then developed and spread until they were published in all written languages and on all known subjects.

The Book from the Inside

The fastened side of a book is called the spine. The two edges of the cover are attached by the hinge. A book may be bound firmly or loosely, depending on its cover, and a protective jacket may be added. A loosely bound book is called a paperback. The front cover, the back cover and the spine bear the title of the book and any other information.

Inside the front cover lies the front matter, followed by a blank leaf and then the half-title page, on the face of which is printed the title of the book. The back of this page may be left blank or may carry an illustration, called the frontispiece, and the author's other books may be listed there. The following page is the title page, which gives the name of the author and the publisher together with copyright information; in the books of the past, such information appeared at the end of the book and was called the colophon.

The front matter may include a foreword, most often written by someone other than the author; a preface or introduction, in which the author discusses the content of the book; a table of contents; a list of illustrations or tables, if there are any; and then the acknowledgements. Next comes the text, which is the main part of the book and is usually divided into chapters or parts and also contains illustrations. Some books have footnotes or marginal notes for explanation and supplementary comment.

At the end of the text the author may add appendices containing important names, places and topics mentioned in the text. Some books also contain a bibliography of the works the author consulted in obtaining information.

The Care of Books

To preserve books, we must take care in handling their covers and pages when opening them correctly, so as to avoid damaging them. Water and humidity cause fungal mould in books. To mark a place in a book, an external marker should be used, and when one has finished with the book it should be placed upright on the shelf beside the other books.

Historical Overview

Historians have not been able to determine when the first books appeared, but the evidence indicates that this occurred in Egypt in about 2700 BCE, on papyrus, which grows on the banks of the Nile. The ancient Egyptian books consisted of papyrus scrolls. The inhabitants of Babylon then used the same method of writing. The Chinese made books by writing on tablets as well as on papyrus scrolls, and the Romans imitated them until parchment (vellum) came to be used in place of the other materials. In the third century CE the Romans introduced the codex, a system that proved more efficient than

the scroll. The Indians used palm leaves to write the Vedas, the sacred books of the Hindu religion. In the early period of Islam, the Arabs and Muslims wrote on palm fronds, leather scraps and likhāf (broad, thin white stones), among other materials.

The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, writing flourished among the clergy, who called the specialist in writing the scribe. They produced elegantly formed books, which developed into the illuminated manuscript. The Romans developed writing by using a system of numbering and capital letters, which produced a script resembling modern writing. As the need for books grew, people began to look for easier and less costly ways of producing them.

The Development of Printed Books

The Chinese produced the first printed book, the Diamond Sutra, in 868 CE. They printed the pages from carved wood, and this type of printing was called block printing. Printing with movable type was then invented in China at about the eleventh century CE, and it is from this that today's books descend. In the sixteenth century CE the whole of Europe became acquainted with printing, with the Germans taking the lead. The Frenchman Nicolas Jenson then established a publishing house and became famous for his mastery of the art of printing, and Paris was one of the places famous for book production in the same period. The form of the book had by now changed from that of the medieval book: it became smaller and cheaper, and it adopted the conventions of the title page, page numbering, the table of contents and the index. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries CE the number of readers increased and, consequently, so did book production. Among the well-known publishing houses were the Elzevir family of Leiden in the Netherlands, and, in the New World, the press in Mexico and that of Stephen Daye and his son Matthew. The finest American books also appeared in the cities of New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century CE, demand for books exceeded supply because of the slowness of the printing process, and new inventions emerged to resolve the crisis, among them the Linotype, which sets lines of type mechanically. Books became more numerous and cheaper, especially after paper-covered books, known as "cheap novels", became widespread.

Modern Books

Paper-covered books, or ordinary-bound books, declined at the beginning of the twentieth century and then regained their standing in the 1930s, when the Penguin publishing house began issuing its books. Publishing then developed into a huge industry, and the computer introduced the method known as offset printing, in addition to the introduction of colour in printing. New types of books include recorded audiobooks, microfilms and others.

The Arabic Book

From the earliest times, the inhabitants of the Middle East were keen to write, and recorded every feature of their lives and thoughts in various forms drawn from their environment, which they sought to adapt to inscription: stone, then clay among the Sumerians, papyrus among the ancient Egyptians, and thereafter leather among the Arabs. Clay tablets came to constitute a book, and several scrolls of papyrus or leather gathered around a single subject constituted a book.

After the advent of Islam, the Arabs expressed their love of writing in the conquered lands and took up the copying of scrolls. When paper appeared, they were likewise keen to use it, having adopted it from China, and went on to copy books made of paper in a splendid Arabic hand, which came to represent in their eyes a beauty and an art worthy of admiration. Arabic writing flourished at the end of the eighth century CE with the establishment of the first paper mill in Samarkand, and then in Baghdad and Damascus, whose paper surpassed all others to such an extent that it became known as "Damascus paper". Mills subsequently appeared in Egypt, which put a definitive end to the use of papyrus, and from there the paper industry spread to the Maghreb and then to Europe.

When printing was invented in Europe, some Arabs were not enthusiastic about it, feeling that it would destroy the beauty of the Arabic script they had cherished and loved for many centuries. They had turned it into something more than a means of expression and knowledge, making it a style of ornamentation and decoration in whose creation scribes and calligraphers competed. This may be the reason for the delay in the publication of printed Arabic books, except in Egypt, where, near al-Fayyum, the texts of fifty books were discovered that had been produced by woodblock printing between the tenth century and the middle of the fourteenth century CE. They were written in Arabic and deal with religious subjects, and they are preserved to this day in the National Library in Vienna and in some other European libraries.

The first printing press in the Arab world was the Bulaq Press, established in Egypt in 1822. It had been preceded by attempts to print the Gospel and the Psalms in Lebanon, but these relied on portable, non-fixed equipment, similar to the press that the French expedition brought with it to Egypt. The first press in Palestine is recorded in 1830, in Lebanon in 1834, in Yemen in 1877 and in the Hijaz in 1882.

Today the book enjoys great attention in all Arab countries as the easiest and cheapest route to knowledge. Private and state publishing houses have proliferated (15), and book fairs are held every year in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Libya and elsewhere. Methods of artistic production have developed, modern presses have been equipped with the latest machinery, and books are now printed on a splendid variety of paper.

The Importance of the Book

The book is culture and guidance, knowledge and education. Society is responsible for training children to keep company with books, because the book is nourishment for the mind. Equipping every home with a well-stocked library of useful books is the true nucleus for creating a generation of readers who love to read more when books are placed in their hands,

so that books become a reference for research, study and academic attainment. From their earliest years we accustom children to take care of books and to return them to their designated place, because the book is the skilled guide that helps them to freedom of thought, translating the aims of their life path into scientific inquiry and self-discovery through tangible, embodied facts.

Who does not wish the best for his children? Who does not wish them to be readers who appreciate what they read, who are engaged, reflective and thoughtful? For a better culture, children need the greatest effort to be devoted to building the home library and to choosing the best useful books consciously, so as to divert them from wasting their time on television serials, which give them no culture and leave no mark on their souls, because there is no depth in what they offer.

Culture comes from the book alone, and the crisis of thought arises only in the absence of the book. It is the book that confers culture and exerts the desired influence on the mind. Parents should make use of their children's desire to read, and since childhood makes the future, the book also makes childhood. A home library encourages children to read if books are available to them in their designated places; this depends essentially on how far children are encouraged and supported to acquire useful books and take care of them.

Reading opens the mind and develops thought, so that the reader feels that he is a person with a personality of his own and with rights of choice and taste. This feeling becomes a motive and incentive to seek more extensive reading. It is better for parents to ask their children about the content and subject of a book and to take their opinion of what they have read, for children need sufficient time to have their opinions and discussions heard. The exchange of views makes the child a successful, organized and thoughtful person who is useful to his country. The primary aim of reading is not merely to increase information and facts, but to develop the mental faculties, helping children to concentrate and attend, opening their minds and emotions to the matters of life, satisfying their imagination, instilling values and morals, educating their conscience (16) and developing their taste and their sense of beauty, the beauty of expression. It also creates the desire to keep abreast of everything new in a society that faces challenges in an age witnessing a scientific and technological renaissance on a wide scale.

Characteristics of the Arabic-Language Textbook and the Principles of Its Preparation (the Fifth-Year Textbook as a Model)

1. Characteristics of the Fifth-Year Arabic-Language Textbook

The pupil's book contains a set of themes and texts distinguished by diversity and openness, which make the text the axis of all instruction, in interaction, communication and coherence, in order to guide the acquisition of the core competencies. Exploited methodically and to good purpose, these texts help learners to represent and analyse linguistic phenomena and to master grammatical terminology in order to arrive at the abstract concepts underlying them. The texts are organized into cultural themes that branch into teaching units. Each unit contains a set of activities and lasts one week. It starts from reading, whose text, data and illustration enrich the activity of oral expression and communication. In the middle of the unit stands the "language station", with its three phenomena of grammar, morphology and orthography, and the unit concludes with the completion of a project and integration activities (17).

2. The Principles of Preparing the Textbook

The preparation and selection of teaching materials is among the most difficult matters facing those responsible for educational programmes, because each of the two processes requires a set of criteria, controls, conditions and specifications. The preparation of teaching materials is, at bottom, a scientific and educational process, and it therefore rests on a set of principles and foundations derived from the fields that the teaching materials must address. Those responsible for educational programmes usually face the very difficult task of preparing and writing scientific teaching materials, which most often take the form of a book. This difficulty is probably due to the fact that both preparation and authorship require controls without which the process ceases to be scientific (18). Authors and editors of textbooks for teaching Arabic must therefore, in preparing the book, take the following principles into account:

- The material should express the content of Arab and Islamic culture.
- It should give a truthful picture of life in the Arab and Islamic countries.
- It should reflect the cultural and intellectual interests of the learners.
- It should be varied so as to cover a number of cultural fields.
- It should accord not only with the pupils' cognitive purposes but also with the teachers' aims.
- Its content should reflect the life of the civilized Arab in the framework of the age in which he lives.
- Its cultural content should arouse the learner's interest and motivate him to learn Arabic.
- The content of the textbook should be presented at a level appropriate to the age and educational level of the learners, and should take account of the differences in learners' inclinations and interests in learning the language.
- The status of each language skill in the material presented should be defined, together with the appropriate amount of time to be allotted to each.
- It should be engaging and rich in content, cognitively and culturally, so as to give the learner enjoyment.
- It should take account of individual differences among learners in their abilities through variety in the level of the material.
- The material should always pose a problem that the learner tries to overcome by learning the language and practising it (19).

Also to be considered in composing the book are clarity and readability, by which we mean ease and effectiveness in the material to be learned; both are important in determining the speed of learning. Clarity is determined by several factors, chief among them:

- Type size: normally large and reasonably clear.
- Typeface: preferably the Naskh script used in printed Arabic.
- Line spacing: preferably wide and comfortable.
- Line length: normally determined by the age and level of the learners.
- Light reflection: in this case the paper should preferably have a low gloss.

Readability, for its part, is determined by many things, including the kind of vocabulary and syntactic structures, the length or brevity of sentences, the length and organization of paragraphs, the quality of the ideas, the illustrations and drawings, and the mode of treatment, such as narration, dialogue and the storytelling style (20). The content should be meaningful and significant, should start from what is familiar to learners and connect with what they know or wish to know, so that they can understand it, believe it and use it. In this context, knowledge must be presented clearly and precisely, since the manner and pattern of presentation are essential to clarity and to acceptance by the learner. In addition, the accuracy and currency of the information must be ensured.

Conclusion

The textbook is one of the most important means of clarifying the objectives of the educational curriculum, and it even plays the role of the pivotal link among the three components of the educational process (the pupil, society and the supervising authority). One point deserves mention, however: this book cannot perform the role assigned to it unless each member of this triad performs his part in the use of the book in the educational process. Moreover, the roles and tasks of this triad must be founded on the spiral strategy for attaining the objective.

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