



An Evaluative and Comparative Study of Civil Engineering ESP Textbooks: A Mixed-Methods Approach Using the Miekley's Checklist

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Abstract

Textbook evaluation serves as a practical tool for teachers, guiding their selection of suitable materials. The present study adopted a mixed-methods approach and aimed at comparing and evaluating two ESP textbooks: English for Students of Civil Engineering published by SAMT, along with English in Civil Engineering from Oxford University Press. To do so, the Textbook Evaluation Checklist (Miekley, 2005) was employed. A total number of 40 ESP instructors of Civil engineering from the two cities of Rasht and Tehran participated in the study. Although the questions of the checklist revealed existing weaknesses in these textbooks, it was found that, in the eyes of the teachers who filled out the checklists, the Oxford book came out as the better one of the pair with higher rankings (87% syllabus compatibility). Findings indicated while SAMT textbook prioritized authentic civil engineering content focused on translation and comprehension directed towards traditional formats, the Oxford textbook offered a more visually engaging experience with a wider variety of interactive and task-based activities (91%), which encouraged critical thinking and student cooperation through diverse tasks (81%). Ultimately, SAMT partially aligned with specific vocab goals (48%) despite its lack of aesthetic appeal (54%), whereas Oxford provided a more dynamic and engaging learning environment (85%). Based on the findings, the study concludes with some insightful comments for authors, instructors, and curriculum-developers to choose between the textbooks which meet both their academic needs as well as their interactive and higher-order objectives through more engaging and varied content.

Keywords: English for the specific purposes, civil engineering, textbook evaluation, materials development, Iranian teachers

1 Introduction

In any educational context, there might be a shortage of enough trained and experienced teaching squad. This is where textbooks can play a very crucial role in the education system. This does not mean that both teachers and syllabus designers should take a leap of faith in accepting the textbooks unconditionally. As posited by Williams (1983, p. 251), “it is ironical that those teachers who rely most heavily on the textbook are the ones least qualified to interpret its intentions or evaluate its content and method.” More recently conducted studies highlight this issue, accentuating that material evaluation needs to be carried out in a critical way as a vital for effective pedagogical process (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). Since there is no single textbook that can function as a panacea to match all the requirements of every single classroom setting, and to match the needs of all the students from different backgrounds, it is crucial that any textbook be evaluated prior to being assigned to a course in order to take into account the unique traits and needs of the learners as well as the classroom of the courses (Richards, 2015).

One aspect of this is the sub-category English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses which is in most cases assigned to a language teacher rather than a content teacher. This is because it is the language teacher who is qualified enough to pick the content and design the target tasks to accompany the course book. The same is true for a content teacher. Integrating a content teacher's perspective adds a vital layer of distinction, as their evaluation criteria typically shift from pedagogical form to technical utility (Assassi & Rouaghe, 2025). However, the million-dollar question is whether they are in a position to select the right language or grammar structures appropriate for the learners' needs. All of these thoughts matter when the textbook is in the materials development phase, but as soon as the content is chosen and published, the final decision is in the hands of the course teachers. They are left with two choices only: either to follow their instinct or common sense and prescribe a pre-fabricated formula or to be an iconoclast and prepare their own standards of material selection. This is when material evaluation comes under the spotlight (McGrath, 2016).

In the present climate, situational language education is very much in fashion and, as a result, the recommendation for the instructors is to comply with the pre-set features of their local context and consequently come up with those materials that can best match the specific needs of their own learners (Basturkmen, 2010; Kusumo et al., 2020). Material selection and evaluation can act as the first and foremost building block in the language teaching and learning process. That is why teachers need to have access to some measures and criteria to place this building block in the right place and gradually build up their career on firm grounds.

Overall, based on the evaluation of the textbooks for engineering students, it is indicated that the effectiveness of a textbook should be measured by its ability to simulate real-world professional communication as a metric where many traditional Iranian ESP books still struggle compared to interactive global series (Kausar, 2025). Based on their survey of Iranian ESP instructors to evaluate ready-made materials from SAMT, Asltaleb Maghferat et al. (2024) concluded that while instructors appreciate the textbooks for their alignment with course objectives and relevant content, they gave negative ratings to the layout, subject matter diversity, and specific linguistic issues. Kausar (2025) also explored the integration of ESP into engineering education, and argued that current materials must move beyond simple vocabulary lists to include context-specific functions.

The specific gap addressed in this study is the marked discrepancy between the theoretical alignment of ESP materials and their practical, communicative effectiveness in the classroom. While local SAMT textbooks for Civil Engineering are designed to fulfill academic reading requirements, they often fall short in providing the interactive, task-based, and visually engaging elements found in international series. As many are involved in this process, from armchair educational theorists and policymakers to textbook publishers and authors, all the way to administrators, and finally teachers, the possibility of conflicting views about what the appropriate textbook is could be high. There is also the question of who gets to decide and have the final say. In order to bring all these conflicting ideologies under some roof, academics have tried to come up with agreed-upon comparative checklists for the task of textbook evaluation (Miekley, 2005; Mukundan et al., 2011).

This succeeded at creating a balanced view regarding textbook selection and evaluation which sits on the fence between two extreme views. On the one hand, there are teachers who face a vast array of textbooks and out of confusion, may turn a blind eye on the quality of the book and go for the most readily available and commercially successful bestsellers. Turning to the other school of thought, the other group comprises those seeking to change the status quo and have a burning desire for novel materials devoid of any imperfections. The evaluative checklists come in handy in this situation where they can mediate between these two by striking a balance between both detailed evaluation and needed efficiency (Tomlinson, 2012).

The same pattern of thinking is what this study follows. We aimed to establish common ground for textbook evaluation. Due to the fact that research on this issue is scant in the context of Iran, a never-ending and ongoing need is felt to carry out more comparative studies on ESP textbooks developed both inside and outside of the local situation to determine which one is capable of addressing the specific needs of language learners of English specific purposes (Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2017). We strived to draw a convenient and comprehensive comparison of two different ESP books of the same discipline hoping to shed some more light on this for material developers and language instructors. By employing a mixed-methods approach and the Miekley's Checklist, this study specifically investigates how these pedagogical differences impact the balance between field-specific technical depth and the development of real-world communicative competence for future engineers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background

As early as 1970s, and with the gradual rise in the popularity of humanistic disciplines being introduced to the field of applied linguistics, learner-centered instruction has been garnering the attention of scholars and educators and textbooks playing a very central part in all this. Books are the first and foremost resource available to teachers and provided that they are selected meticulously, then with the proper evaluation, the educational program is most likely to succeed at what it originally intended to accomplish (Richards, 2001; McDonough et al., 2013). Having said that, course books do not and should not dictate the objectives or become the end, but rather serve as a means to an end (Brown, 1995).

ESP textbooks are not exempt from this general rule. While it is true that their quality has improved significantly in recent decades, they are still based on the classical, trusted criteria. Not only has this been posing a problem for many practitioners, but it also has presented challenges for

administrators. Cunningsworth (1995) emphasized that textbooks are to be carefully selected because they should truly reflect the needs of the learners along with the aims, principles and methods, and the ultimate purpose of the teaching program. Creating a diverse range of contextually relevant and appropriate criteria for textbook evaluation has to be the first priority of ESP practitioners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Tsou & Chen, 2019). Sheldon (1988) proposed that selecting ESP textbooks is a very critical administrative and educational decision, since it assists instructors when it comes to identifying the particular benefits and drawbacks of the books and contributes to finding the cure for the never-ending headache of choosing among myriad of alternatives.

It should be noted that mind textbook evaluation is a very subjective task as there can be no one-size-fits-all list of descriptors that can be used for all educational milieus with almost no modification at all. Checklist-based book evaluation needs to inform by a set of sound criteria. According to Brown (1995), evaluation checklists should, at first, have some criteria germane to physical appearance and appeal of textbooks such as layout, organizational and logistical features. Other additional yardsticks are to do with its scope and aim, approaches and methodology, and how compatible it is with the curriculum. Lastly, the selected criteria should scrutinize the formal, functional, and cultural contents of the textbooks (Sarem et al., 2013).

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) split textbook evaluation into a formative and a summative sub-type. The former denotes a dynamic process of evaluation whereas the latter stands for a mere end-of-the-course evaluation. They themselves preferred and recommended the formative one. Richards (2001) was the one who introduced another kind of evaluation, called “illuminative” evaluation. He described it as the process seeking to determine how each aspect of the program works or is implemented. McDonough and Shaw (2003) introduced a three-level framework for evaluating textbooks. The first level, called external evaluation, looks at how the book is organized and presented by the author or publisher. The second level, internal evaluation, focuses on what is inside the book, such as how language skills and components are presented, the order and progression of content, and whether the materials are appropriate and authentic. The third and final level is the overall evaluation, which considers broader issues like how practical the textbook is to use, whether it can be applied in different contexts, and how adaptable and flexible it is for various teaching situations.

2.2 Empirical Studies

Textbooks serve as critical pedagogical tools in civil engineering education, where they not only introduce technical vocabulary but also facilitate the mastery of communication skills necessary for professional practice. Miekley's (2005) checklist, noted for its comprehensive approach towards evaluating ESP materials, emphasizes key criteria such as the accuracy of information, appropriateness of language, and the alignment of content with the learners' needs and goals. Such evaluations help educators identify potential gaps in the materials and inform revisions to create more effective learning resources (Astuti, 2022; Azarnoosh, 2015; Istiqomah & Maunah, 2020).

For instance, Azarnoosh (2015) established that textbook evaluation is vital for improving educational materials used in ESP contexts, asserting that teachers often rely heavily on textbooks for instructional content. Similarly, Khoo and Knight (2015) underscore the importance of aligning textbook content with learners' needs and examination requirements, further reinforcing the necessity of systematic evaluation frameworks like Miekley's checklist.

Evaluations of other specialist textbooks reveal both similarities and differences in quality and approach. For instance, Istiqomah and Maunah (2020) conducted a similar evaluation for an ESP textbook tailored for Islamic Education, suggesting that the objectives of the ESP context can drastically influence the effectiveness of different textbooks. Their study, aligning with Miekley's criteria, pointed to the necessity of textbooks containing up-to-date and contextualized content that reflects actual teaching needs in those specific fields.

Furthermore, Gholami et al. (2017) highlighted that textbook evaluations across various curricula reveal the universal need for materials to be scrutinized for educational effectiveness. Their broad review indicates that despite the specific focus on Civil Engineering, the general principles of evaluation apply uniformly across different contexts, reaffirming the versatility of Miekley's checklist as a tool for assessing textbooks in varied ESP fields.

A focused study by Astuti (2022) specifically examines ESP textbooks prepared for Civil Engineering students using both Cunningsworth's and Miekley's checklists. This qualitative descriptive analysis revealed that while most aspects met the criteria for effectiveness—primarily due to a focus on vocabulary enrichment—the need for more comprehensive content addressing other language skills was evident (Astuti, 2022). The findings suggested that although these textbooks were sufficiently rated, they could benefit from enhancements that incorporate elements of real-world engineering situations and linguistic variety appropriate for professional contexts.

In contrast, Syahid et al. (2024) investigated English for Business textbook using a similar evaluative approach and found that the book effectively addressed the structural and content needs of learners through its organized format and engaging examples. This comparison highlights a potential shortfall in the Civil Engineering textbooks where practical application may lag behind business context texts, which actively engage learners in authentic communication practices.

In Iranian context, Asltaleb Maghferat et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of ESP textbooks published by SAMT. The participants were 35 Iranian ESP instructors with varying levels of experience in teaching technical English to university students. The findings indicated a significant split in perception: while the instructors generally accepted the books' alignment with official course objectives and basic technical content, they gave consistently negative ratings to the visual layout, the lack of diverse subject matter, and the presence of specific linguistic errors. This study implied that government-standardized textbooks often prioritize bureaucratic alignment over the aesthetic and functional needs of the modern classroom. This suggests a dire need for more engaging, multi-modal designs that go beyond a "one-size-fits-all" text structure.

Similarly, Kausar's (2025) research investigated the effectiveness of current ESP curricula in preparing students for professional workplace communication and involved a comprehensive survey of 50 engineering faculty members and 200 undergraduate students. The study found that students were often proficient in technical vocabulary but struggled significantly with context-specific functions, such as justifying design choices or participating in technical peer reviews. The findings argue that current materials are too focused on static word lists rather than the dynamic communicative acts required by engineers in the 2020s. This implies that ESP curriculum developers must shift their focus toward a task-based approach, where language is taught as a tool for solving engineering problems rather than just a set of definitions to be memorized.

3 Research Questions

To address the aim that our study pursues with regards to the potential existing similarities or differences between the two textbooks, the present study was an attempt to respond to the following research question that guided the study:

What differences are there between the two ESP textbooks for civil engineering students published by SAMT and the Oxford publications textbook?

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research adopts a comparative content analysis design to examine the pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural dimensions of two textbooks: An Iranian textbook from the domestic SAMT publications and an Oxford-published course book. Our study employs a mixed-methods approach based on Miekley's (2005) multidimensional checklist to systematically evaluate the pedagogical alignment and content validity of both Iranian SAMT publication and the international Oxford course book. Using this framework, the analysis investigated the divergence between the textbooks regarding the functional utility of the teachers' manuals within the Iranian EFL context. Quantitative content analysis was used based on the frequency counts of exercises, visuals, and thematic categories. The quantitative content analysis followed a systematic coding procedure to convert pedagogical observations into empirical data, allowing for a statistical comparison of frequency and distribution across both series. This numerical approach ensured an objective evaluation of the linguistic density and task variety inherent in the SAMT and Oxford instructional designs.

The design is structured so as to ensure systematic comparison across multiple levels of analysis. Our study is guided by the aim of identifying similarities and differences in general appeal, instructional philosophy, thematic coverage, and cultural representation. The unit of analysis is defined at the chapter and lesson level, allowing for both micro-level (individual exercises, visuals, and language use) and macro-level (overall structure and thematic orientation) comparisons.

4.1.1 Comparative Dimensions

The analysis is organized around six key dimensions: Initially, content coverage evaluated the breadth and depth of topics, specifically focusing on the inclusion or exclusion of themes. The pedagogical approach categorized activities to distinguish between teacher-centered and learner-centered strategies while measuring the presence of inquiry-based learning. Language and style were assessed through the register, complexity, and overall accessibility of the language employed in the texts. Furthermore, the analysis of visuals and layout examined the use of illustrations, diagrams, and design features intended to support learning. Cultural representation was quantified by identifying the portrayal of national identity, values, and global perspectives within each series. Finally, assessment methods were scrutinized by classifying the types of exercises to determine the emphasis placed on rote memorization versus critical thinking.

4.2 Participants

A total number of 40 participants took part in this study. They included both male (17) and female (23) teachers, with the age range of 32 years to 54 ($M = 40.5$), selected based on convenience

sampling from the engineering faculties of Guilan University, Islamic Azad University, and Payame-Noor University from the two cities of Rasht and Tehran. The teachers had at least 5 years of academic experience from the civil engineering field, who had the experience of teaching both SAMT and international textbooks.

4.3 Instruments

The ESL Textbook Evaluation Checklist developed by Miekley (2005) was used as the main tool for evaluation. According to Miekley, the questions included in this checklist are grounded either in recent research or in previously established evaluation checklists. For instance, studies on effective language learning and the development of learners' strategic awareness provided a foundation for designing the checklist (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997; Salataci & Akyel, 2002). In addition, Miekley drew on key elements from earlier checklists created by Byrd (2001) and Skierso (1991). The checklist consists of different questions and sections, which is attached to the Appendix.

Alongside Miekley's checklist, a proposal prepared by the SAMT organization was also used. This proposal outlines the structure of a model lesson that should be followed in all textbooks produced by the organization. The proposed lesson format includes the following components: Warm-up, Reading, Comprehension Check, Discussion, Grammar Focus, and Vocabulary in Context, Dictionary Work, Word Forms, Sentence Formation, Paragraph Formation, Paraphrasing, Writing, Translation, a Vocabulary List, and Review Section exercises. All of these sections were briefly scrutinized for this study.

Oxford's English for Civil Engineering is specialized for developing communicative competence by integrating technical accuracy with professional language functions. The textbook prioritizes the register and complexity of industry-specific language, with a vast breadth of topics from structural analysis to site management while utilizing authentic visuals and diagrams to support technical understanding with a learner-centered pedagogical approach that replaces rote memorization with inquiry-based tasks and critical thinking exercises. The textbooks were selected due to the fact that they are used in the same educational level and 4 lessons were adopted from each one for more exploration in this study.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

Participants were asked to fill out the checklists which were sent to them online, and evaluate the two textbooks they had used during their ESP courses. They also wrote down their opinions and comment on each section of the checklist, in addition to writing a short, final comment at the end of the checklist. The teachers had the experience of teaching both books of *English for Students of Civil Engineering* (SAMT) and *English in Civil Engineering* (Oxford), as their ESP textbook. What was carried out was that, in fact, the teachers evaluated both of the books. After they had filled out the checklists, the average of each response was calculated, and the average response of all the participants was marked as one final response, which is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Miekley's (2005) checklist categorizes textbook evaluation into three core areas to determine pedagogical effectiveness. It evaluates the logical sequence of content, the contextualization of grammar and vocabulary, and the variety of exercises. It specifically checks if activities accommodate different learning styles and prioritize meaningful communication. It also assesses the clarity of instructional guidance, the presence of answer keys and tape scripts, and the inclusion of

supplementary activities for diverse learner needs. Finally, it examines practical factors such as the quality of the physical binding, the functional use of illustrations, and the availability of ancillary materials like digital resources.

4.5 Data Analysis

Two independent coders analyzed the rating of the textbooks by the teachers to enhance reliability. Inter-coder agreement was computed to make sure there was consistency in the coding process with the Cohen's Kappa reaching the score of .82. Where differences emerged, coders (researchers) discussed the matter to reach common grounds. As regards to validity, the Miekley (2005) checklist was reviewed by two experts in the field of Applied Linguistics to confirm that the criteria accurately represented the pedagogical requirements of the Iranian educational context. The design prognosticates a comparison within a framework that could emphasize discrepancies in pedagogical philosophy (rote learning versus inquiry-based learning), cultural framing (national identity versus global orientation), and assessment practices.

5 Results

5.1 The general attributes of the text books

The following tables present the results of the content analysis conducted on the two textbooks. Each table is organized around five main themes: content, vocabulary and grammar, exercises and activities, attractiveness and physical design, and context. These themes include 2, 3, 4, 2, and 3 questions respectively based on the original data. For each question, the textbooks were evaluated based on both the presence and the quality of the relevant criteria. The responses were rated using five categories: excellent, good, adequate, poor, and totally lacking.

It should be noted that the percentages towards the full score (100%) in the tables show the positive rating rated as "excellent" and "good" ratings.

Table 1

Percentages of subparts of the general attributes of SAMT vs. Oxford textbooks (Teacher Ratings)

<i>I. General attributes</i>		
	<i>SAMT (%)</i>	<i>Oxford (%)</i>
A. The book in relation to syllabus and curriculum.		
1. It matches to the specifications of the syllabus.	42.5%	87%
B. Methodology	-	-
2. The activities can be exploited fully and can embrace the various methodologies in ELT.	18.5%	81%
3. Activities can work well with methodologies in ELT.	24%	79%
C. Suitability to learners	-	-
4. It is compatible to the age of the learners.	74%	88%
5. It is compatible to the needs of the learners.	39%	76%
6. It is compatible to the interests of the learners.	53.5%	82%
D. Physical and utilitarian attributes	-	-
7. Its layout is attractive.	93.5%	96%
8. It indicates efficient use of text and visuals.	54%	91%
9. It is durable.	89%	92%
10. It is cost-effective.	69%	35%
E. Efficient outlay of supplementary materials	-	-
11. The book is supported efficiently by essentials like audio-materials.	30%	94%

When looking at the data, the most striking takeaway is the fundamental difference in how these books approach the student. SAMT textbook is very much a product of a traditional academic environment, focusing heavily on the structural and grammatical side of language. While it is physically sturdy and incredibly affordable for the average Iranian student, it often feels a bit "static" in the classroom. Teachers tend to rate it lower on methodology because it does not always offer the flexibility required for a lively, communicative atmosphere. It carries out the task for reading and translation, but has not been exactly designed to incentivize a classroom full of students talking to one another.

From the point of view of the majority of the teachers, the SAMT textbook was not satisfying. In table one, the general characteristics of the book, judged by the teachers is shown. According to the results, the only factor that received attention was the physical attributes of the text book (average = 76.37%). Most teachers noted factors such as 'color', 'illustrations', and 'reasonable price of the book' amongst their comments. Hill and Thomas (1988) proved that the use of illustrations can be useful in supporting the text. The second general attribute was the suitability of the text book to the learners (average = 55.5%). Regarding this factor, many claimed that 'the book is appropriate for the age of the students but the other two factors, i.e. needs and interest, for suitability were graded lower since many teachers believed these two have not been considered. The book in relation to syllabus and curriculum (one item percentage = 42.5%) stood in the third place. Most teachers in their comments stated that they were not fully aware of the curriculum behind the text book, they believed that but the book is designed to gradually promote communicative competence of the students. Exactly 70% of the teachers believe that the efficient outlay of supplementary materials, e.g. the audio visual material supporting the book, is lacking and 78.75% of them believe that the activities have no relevance to the methodologies common in ELT. The average of the percentages of satisfaction with the general attributes of the text book is equal too (average = 45.12%). Table 1 shows the details of the percentages of the subparts of the general attributes.

On the other hand, Oxford textbook is built around the idea of engagement. It is clearly evident from the high ratings for learner interest and methodology—the book is designed to be "exploited" by teachers, meaning it offers various ways to use a single page of content, whether through role-play, listening exercises, or critical thinking tasks. The integration of high-quality audio and visual materials makes a world of difference in a modern setting. Instead of just looking at a decorative picture, students are often exposed to an illustration that is a core part of the lesson, which explains why the "efficient use of visuals" scores so much higher for the international series.

However, there is a very real, practical tension when choosing between the two. Even though Oxford is the clear winner in terms of pedagogical quality and learner needs, the cost-effectiveness factor is a major hurdle. SAMT books are accessible to everyone, which is why they remain a staple in the curriculum despite their limitations (e.g., limited authenticity and communicative objectives). The international books are essentially a premium product—they offer a superior experience with their multimedia support and authentic language data, but they come at a price that may not always be sustainable for every learner. Ultimately, it is a trade-off between the localized, budget-friendly reliability of SAMT and the high-energy, communicative richness of Oxford.

5.2 The Learning-Teaching Content of the Book

When looking at the learning and teaching content, the divide between the two series becomes even more apparent, especially regarding "authenticity." In the SAMT book, there is a noticeable struggle with providing natural language. The dialogs and reading passages often feel "sanitized" or overly academic, which explains why teachers rate them so low—around (30%)—for naturalness. They tend to prioritize grammatical correctness over how people actually speak. This means the language students are learning is not just limited to "textbook English," but the kind of phrases and idioms they would actually hear in a cafe in London or a business meeting in New York. The details of teacher ratings are outlined in Table 2.

As stated earlier, the percentages towards the full score (100%) in the tables show the positive rating rated as "excellent" and "good" ratings.

Table 2

Percentages of subparts of the learning-teaching content of SAMT vs. Oxford textbooks (Teacher Ratings)

<i>II. Learning-teaching content</i>		
	SAMT (%)	Oxford (%)
A. General		
1. Most of the tasks in the book are interesting.	37%	85%
2. Tasks move from simple to complex.	60%	82%
3. Task objectives are achievable.	41.5%	78%
4. Cultural sensitivities have been considered.	33%	70%
5. The language in the textbook is natural and real.	30.5%	92%
6. The situations created in the dialogues sound natural and real.	29%	89%
B. Listening		
7. The book has appropriate listening tasks with well-defined goals.	12.5%	88%
8. Tasks are efficiently graded according to complexity.	41%	80%
9. Tasks are authentic or close to real language situations.	10%	91%
C. Speaking		
10. Activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication.	19.5%	87%
11. Activities are balanced between individual response, pair work and group work.	14.5%	93%
D. Reading		
12. Texts are graded.	37.5%	84%
13. Texts are interesting.	41%	86%
E. Writing		
14. Tasks have achievable goals and take into consideration learner capabilities.	20%	76%
15. Tasks are interesting.	15%	79%
F. Vocabulary		
16. The load (number of new words in each lesson) is appropriate to the level.	39%	81%

17. There is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book.	45%	83%
18. Words are efficiently repeated and recycled across the book.	48.5%	88%
G. Grammar		
19. The spread of grammar is achievable.	34%	82%
20. The grammar is contextualized.	40%	90%
21. Examples are interesting.	48.5%	84%
22. Grammar is introduced explicitly and reworked incidentally throughout the book.	40.5%	81%
H. Pronunciation		
23. It is contextualized.	2.5%	78%
24. It is learner-friendly with no complex charts.	5%	85%
I. Exercises		
25. They are learner friendly.	40.5%	89%
26. They are adequate.	43%	86%
27. They help students who are under/over-achievers.	23%	74%

The most dramatic gap is found in the "productive" skills: listening and speaking. For SAMT, these sections are often treated as an afterthought, with scores for authentic listening tasks bottoming out at (10%). This is likely because those books rely so heavily on text that the audio components feel robotic or disconnected, or even worse: neglected. Oxford is essentially built on these skills, as they utilize a "scaffolding" technique where tasks move smoothly from simple recognition to complex production, making the objectives feel far more achievable. There also exists see a wide discrepancy in classroom dynamics; Oxford encourages pair and group work as a core requirement, whereas SAMT often leaves the student working in isolation with their own trusty pen and paper.

Regarding the participants' perception of the efficacy of SAMT textbooks, only (38.5%) of the teachers were satisfied with the general learning-teaching content. For example, when it comes to raising students' cultural sensitivity, only (33%) of the teachers was in favor of the text book. One of them had written: 'the book does not tap into the target language culture, and sporadically tries to provide the context of language using Persian culture'. It is interesting to see that (60%) of the teachers say that the tasks move from simple to complex. Further, concerning listening, (21.10%) of the teachers believe that the book effectively covers the listening skill, which is actually one of the lowest practiced skills according to them. One teacher commented that audio files are used for the sake of choral repetition or drilling only, as it is the case in ALM, and this trend goes on up to the higher levels.

It was also found that (83%) of the teachers showed dissatisfaction with the SAMT text book for underestimating the speaking skill. In the same vein, writing skill gained only (17.5%), and worst is pronunciation with only (3.75%). This is a matter of concern for the authors of the book and the curriculum designers. One comment reads: '...students only see minimal vowel difference charts with

phonetic symbols at the end of each lesson'. Grammar with (40.75%), vocabulary with (44.10%), reading with (39.25%), and the exercises with 35.5% have relatively high percentages.

Even in the areas where SAMT is traditionally "strong," including grammar and vocabulary, there is a clear difference in execution. SAMT introduces grammar quite explicitly—often through long rules and tables—which some teachers find useful for exam prep, but it lacks the "incidental reworking" that could assist a student actually remember the material. Oxford tends to weave vocabulary and grammar into the stories and tasks so that learners encounter the same words multiple times in different co-texts. It seems less like a list to be memorized and more of a tool to be used. While SAMT does manage a decent job of grading their texts, ranging from simple to complex, they often miss the mark on making those texts appealing to learners, which is where the international textbooks really take the lead by using topics that feel relevant to a 21st-century modern student.

Grant (1987) argues that grammatical points are to be repeated throughout the book, while this feature seems to be absent in this book. Although there are some review sections in the book, more than (60%) of the teachers believed that grammar is not recycled in this text book. The balance in teaching the 4 skills, which is a must according to Williams (1983), is not observed. One could easily perceive that, according to the teachers, grammar and vocabulary are overemphasized, and listening and speaking, on the other hand, are almost forgotten. Another shortcoming is the lack of adequate audio visual support. One teacher wrote: "there is little time dedicated to listening tasks, if any, and even that is very limited."

Widdowson (1990) distinguishes between artificial and authentic materials. The former is designed for the classroom setting and the latter, for natural one. Authentic materials are indispensable parts of language teaching, though not right from the beginning. Similarly, this textbook lacks, based upon teachers' perspectives, authentic materials even simple ones such as short stories, songs, books written for children and so on. Only do 30.5% (for authentic language) and 29% (for authentic situations) of the teachers agree that authentic materials are used in the text book.

What can be inferred from teachers' comments was the idea that their method of teaching vocabulary is circumscribed to a presentation of vocabulary items at the end of each lesson. They try to translate them into the students' mother tongue, in a GTM fashion. Although a relatively moderate degree of satisfaction was shown among teachers concerning vocabulary and the way the book presents it, merely knowing what a word means is not acquiring vocabulary (Nation 1990).

5.3 Evaluation of the SAMT Textbook

The first observation is that, among the elements proposed in the SAMT framework (including educational, curricular, and ideological alignment), only the following components are present in this textbook: Reading, Comprehension Check, Vocabulary in Context, Word Forms, Paragraph Formation, and Translation.

5.3.1 General Description

The book consists of 15 units, all following a similar structure. Each unit contains three reading passages focused on topics related to Civil Engineering. The first reading passage is followed by true/false or multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and paragraph formation tasks. The second passage includes nearly the same types of exercises. The third

passage, which serves as a translation text, is accompanied by a list of specialized terms for which students are required to provide appropriate Persian equivalents.

5.3.2 Evaluative Aspects

Content: The units are organized in a logical and topic-based manner. The reading texts appear realistic and relatively authentic, reflecting the kinds of tasks that future civil engineers may encounter in professional contexts. In terms of relevance, such field-specific texts are generally more effective and motivating than artificial materials and can have a positive influence on learners (Tomlinson, 2012).

Vocabulary and Grammar: The book does not include explicit explanations of grammatical rules, nor does it follow a clear sequence for presenting grammar. This may reflect a shift in focus from grammatical accuracy to meaning-based learning. In addition, new vocabulary items are not clearly highlighted or presented in a separate section. Although students are exposed to new terminology, these words are neither emphasized nor systematically reviewed.

Exercises and Activities: The range of exercises is somewhat limited. Most tasks consist of multiple-choice questions, true/false items, and fill-in-the-blank activities. They do not strongly promote interaction or communicative use of language in the sense suggested by communicative language teaching (Nunan, 2004). However, since the primary aim of the book appears to be reading comprehension, it does provide a considerable number of comprehension-based exercises.

Attractiveness: Similar to other SAMT publications, the design of the book is simple and minimalistic. It lacks color and contains very few illustrations, which are presented in black and white.

Context: Inferred from the content and given that the main objective seems to be improving reading comprehension in a specialized field; the book aligns reasonably well with the course goals. The use of texts directly related to students' academic discipline makes the material relevant and potentially motivating.

5.4 Evaluation of the OXFORD Textbook

With regard to the components listed in the SAMT proposal, this textbook includes the following sections: Reading, Comprehension Check, Grammar Focus, Vocabulary in Context, Dictionary Work, Sentence Formation, Paragraph Formation, Paraphrasing, Writing, and Review Section exercises. All of these sections were briefly scrutinized for this study.

5.4.1 General Description

This textbook contains 8 units, each divided into five main parts: Reading and Comprehension, Use of Language, Information Transfer, Guided Writing, and Free Reading. Unlike the SAMT textbook, it offers a wider variety of activities within each section. For example, the Use of Language section includes diverse tasks such as classification, writing definitions, following instructions, and completing diagrams. The Information Transfer section involves describing measurements and converting diagrams into written descriptions.

5.4.2 Evaluative Aspects

Content: The book begins with basic concepts and gradually moves on to topics such as vectors, force, and friction. However, the language of the reading passages does not appear fully authentic. The

texts seem to have been written primarily for instructional purposes rather than reflecting naturally occurring language in real-world contexts. The language is expected to follow educational purposes, which sacrificed authenticity for the sake of academic purposes.

Vocabulary and Grammar: Grammar is not presented in a clearly separate section; instead, grammatical points are addressed mainly within the Free Writing section. New vocabulary items are introduced implicitly through various activities. Although there is no dedicated vocabulary section, repeated exposure to key terms throughout the units may support vocabulary retention.

Exercises and Activities: One of the strengths of this book is the variety of tasks it provides. Many activities require student interaction and cooperation, making the textbook more consistent with recent developments in task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). Additionally, many comprehension questions are designed to encourage critical thinking.

Attractiveness: The book has a visually appealing cover with an eye-catching image, and the paper quality is relatively high. Compared to the SAMT textbook, it includes more illustrations, which help convey meaning and support understanding.

Context: The content of the texts appears generally aligned with the course objectives. The presence of varied tasks and activities enhances student engagement, creates a more enjoyable learning environment, and contributes to learners' sense of achievement and competence.

6 Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, the main differences between the studied textbooks was that SAMT textbook, which was directed towards traditional formats like fill-in-the-blanks, prioritized authentic civil engineering content focused on translation and comprehension, while the Oxford textbook, which encouraged critical thinking and student cooperation, offered a more visually engaging experience with a wider variety of interactive and task-based activities. Moreover, SAMT aligned with specific academic reading goals despite its lack of aesthetic appeal, while Oxford provided a more dynamic and engaging learning environment. When comparing the SAMT and Oxford textbooks, we see two fundamentally different approaches to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Recent research emphasizes that the effectiveness of an ESP textbook is no longer measured just by content, but by its ability to bridge the gap between classroom theory and workplace performance (Hyland, 2022; Takrousta et al., 2020).

As for the trade-off between authenticity and variety, the SAMT textbook takes a "content-first" approach. While content topics seem to be authentic to civil engineering in the SAMT textbook, the language used needs to be improved to become more authentic. Authenticity of the texts is a main component in Tomlinson's (2012) principles. However, modern studies suggest that while authentic materials significantly boost motivation, they can also impose a heavy cognitive load on learners if not balanced with proper scaffolding (Kulakhmetova & Daulbaeva, 2025). Since SAMT lacks these supportive features, students may find the "real-world" texts overwhelming rather than empowering.

The Oxford textbook, while more natural and real language in its language, follows what researchers now call a "pedagogical bridge" approach (Alfar, 2025). Despite all this, critics of engineering ESP materials highlight the fact that foundational topics (such as vectors and force) should be supplemented with a "dynamic layer" of emerging areas—such as sustainable materials and

nanotechnology—to remain relevant in the 2020s (Alfar, 2025). Both textbooks could potentially benefit from updating their content to reflect these state-of-the-art technologies.

Methodology is where drills go head-to-head with real interaction. SAMT's reliance on repetitive, non-interactive drills (multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks) is increasingly viewed as a case to ponder more in contemporary ESP settings. Recent findings by Talib et al. (2026) indicate that reliance on such traditional designs often leads to a failure in meeting the practical communication needs of the industry.

In contrast, Oxford's "*Information Transfer*" tasks align with recent empirical evidence. A case study on first-year engineering students found that task-based activities significantly improved communication proficiency and technical writing fluency compared to traditional methods (Usulu et al., 2025). This confirms that Oxford's interactive approach is better suited for developing the "soft skills"—like problem-solving and critical thinking—that 21st-century employers demand (Musrina et al., 2026).

Low levels of visual appeal, multimodality, and engagement along with the "simplicity" of the SAMT book (black and white, infrequent imagery) is a major drawback in the modern era. Recent studies on textbook layout (Alfar, 2025; Talib et al., 2026; Usulu et al., 2025) show that students are significantly more engaged and perform better when materials incorporate multimodal elements such as mind-maps, diagrams, and high-quality figures. The Oxford book's use of visuals acts as a "convivial" tool that reduces the foreign-language anxiety often associated with complex engineering concepts.

The SAMT textbook remains a solid resource for technical translation and reading, but it risks becoming obsolete due to its lack of interactive variety and visual engagement. The Oxford textbook provides a superior pedagogical framework that aligns with the latest research on TBLT and student engagement. For a modern engineering curriculum, a hybrid approach—using SAMT's authentic texts within Oxford's interactive framework—would be the ideal solution.

The sharp contrast in teacher ratings reflects a shift in what modern educators value in a textbook. While SAMT textbooks perform well in "Physical and Utilitarian Attributes" (89–93%), their low scores in "Methodology" (18.5%) and "Meaningful Communication" (19.5%) suggest a design philosophy rooted in teacher-centered or the Grammar-Translation Method. According to Sadeghi and Richards (2025), localized textbooks in Iran often emphasize accuracy and reading over fluency and interaction and their lack of interactive variety and visual engagement. This creates a classroom environment that teachers describe as "static," where the book acts as a lecture guide rather than a tool for engagement.

Conversely, the high ratings for Oxford's content (reaching above 90% for natural language and visuals) illustrate the success of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. Research by Dabbagh and Safaei (2019) confirms that international textbooks are more effective at promoting Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Oxford textbooks do not just provide information; they provide "affordances"—opportunities for students to interact with the text and each other (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). The "efficient use of visuals" (91%) noted in our data is a hallmark of this approach, where imagery is used to provoke thought and discussion rather than simply filling white space.

However, the "practical tension" mentioned in the findings regarding cost-effectiveness (69% for SAMT vs. 35% for Oxford) remains the most significant barrier to reform. As suggested by Maghsoudi and Khodamoradi (2023), the economic reality of the Iranian EFL context often dictates the choice of teaching materials. Even if a teacher does recognize the methodological superiority of an Oxford publication textbook, the lack of digital infrastructure and the high cost of import often make the "budget-friendly reliability" of SAMT the only viable option. This means that for local publishers to bridge the gap, they need to find a way to integrate the high-energy and communicative elements of international books while maintaining their price-wise accessibility.

The comparative analysis revealed a significant disparity between SAMT and Oxford textbooks, particularly in the realms of authenticity, communicative competence, and multimedia support. Our results show that while SAMT textbooks are perceived as physically durable and layout-attractive (93.5%), they struggle with methodological integration (18.5%). This aligns with what Sattarpour et al. (2024) noted. They stated that localized Iranian textbooks often fall short in expanding students' worldviews by failing to foster real-world cultural awareness, often prioritizing structural accuracy of forms over communicative utility of the content.

The most critical gap identified in the study is the lack of natural and authentic language in SAMT books (30.5%) compared to the high scores projected for Oxford (92%). This "artificiality" in local materials is a recurring theme in recent literature. To support the findings of the study on choosing a balanced approach towards maintaining authenticity while focusing on educational objectives, Dabbagh and Safaei (2019) contended that international series such Four Corners or Oxford publications provide a more balanced representation of both Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) and Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), whereas local series tend to remain stuck in rote memorization and grammar-based tasks. This explains why the participants rated SAMT so low in "meaningful communication" (19.5%) and "natural dialogues" (29%).

In addition to this, the data regarding listening and pronunciation—where SAMT scored as low as (2.5%) for contextualization—reflects a broader systemic issue in Iranian tertiary ELT. As an explanation to the lack of contextualization in Iranian series, Sadeghi and Richards (2025) stated, university-level English in Iran generally centers around written skills over spoken ones due to a severe shortage of resources and trained teachers. While Oxford textbooks do provide a rich environment of audio-visual interaction, SAMT relies almost entirely on text-heavy formats without integrating digital tools, hence significantly hindering the development of the oral-aural skills.

Lastly, the high rating for SAMT's cost-effectiveness (69%) highlights the pragmatic reality for Iranian students. Despite the pedagogical superiority of internationally renowned books, economic constraints often necessitate the use of localized materials that are pocket-friendly. Notwithstanding, as Maghsoudi and Khodamoradi (2023) stated, unless local publishers (such as SAMT) adopt more Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches and incorporate 21st century modern multimedia elements, the gap in learner motivation and real-world proficiency will continue to widen more.

As a limitation of the study, our study was limited to only 40 participants. More investigations can be carried out considering larger sample size from both domestic and international institutes of further or higher education. What is missing is contextualization, collocations, frequency of use, level of appropriateness, and many other factors which are beyond the limitations of this study.

7 Conclusion and Implications

In the previous sections, two ESP textbooks were examined: one published by the SAMT Organization and the other by Oxford University Press. The evaluation findings indicate that both books can reasonably serve as ESP course materials; however, the Oxford textbook received more favorable overall ratings.

The findings indicated that while SAMT textbook prioritized authentic civil engineering content focused on translation and comprehension, the Oxford textbook offered a more visually engaging experience with a wider variety of interactive and task-based activities. Moreover, SAMT was directed towards traditional formats like fill-in-the-blanks, whereas Oxford encouraged critical thinking and student cooperation through diverse tasks. Ultimately, SAMT aligned with specific academic reading goals despite its lack of aesthetic appeal, while Oxford provided a more dynamic and engaging learning environment. This conclusion is based on a detailed comparison of the two books. With the exception of the content section, where both textbooks followed a relatively similar approach, clear differences were observed in other areas. In terms of physical design and appearance, the Oxford textbook was superior to the SAMT version. It also offered a greater variety of activities and exercises. Moreover, regarding contextual relevance, the Oxford textbook demonstrated stronger alignment due to its use of more authentic materials, which help make the learning experience closer to learners' future professional contexts (Hyland, 2006).

The findings of this study have several implications, particularly for materials development in general and ESP materials development in particular. The content analysis highlighted specific strengths and weaknesses in both textbooks. Awareness of these features can help ESP material developers avoid common shortcomings identified in earlier publications. Additionally, ESP practitioners may use these results as a guide when selecting textbooks, treating them as screening criteria before adopting a course book.

Regarding future avenues for research, we suggest more longitudinal studies to delve deeper into long term effects of teaching each one of the selected textbook. Finally, more light can be shed on different branches of ESP studies by examining the textbooks of, newly emerging, and therefore less investigated majors. Larger scale studies, such as meta analyses or systematic reviews can also help in synthesizing the scattered studies that have individually targeted a specific field or discipline.

Based on the findings, the present study concludes with some insightful comments for authors, instructors, and curriculum-developers to choose between the textbooks which meet both their academic needs as well as their interactive and higher-order objectives through more engaging and diverse content. Because this study adopts a comparative perspective, it can also assist Iranian ESP teachers in evaluating available options and deciding whether locally produced materials or internationally published textbooks better meet their instructional needs. Iranian ESP students can also select from more appropriate resources to study more authentic, interactive and contextualized materials, based on their present and future needs. Finally, the findings may contribute to broader discussions on curriculum development and offer useful insights for translation studies and cross-cultural educational planning, especially in the design of ESP syllabi.

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Artificial Intelligence Statement

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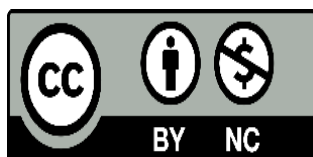
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Appendix: The Checklist for Textbook Evaluation

I. General attributes
<i>A. The book in relation to syllabus and curriculum</i>
1. It matches to the specifications of the syllabus.
<i>B. Methodology</i>
2. The activities can be exploited fully and can embrace the various methodologies in ELT.
3. Activities can work well with methodologies in ELT.
<i>C. Suitability to learners</i>
4. It is compatible to the age of the learners.
5. It is compatible to the needs of the learners.
6. It is compatible to the interests of the learners.
<i>D. Physical and utilitarian attributes</i>
7. Its layout is attractive.
8. It indicates efficient use of text and visuals.
9. It is durable.
10. It is cost-effective.
<i>E. Efficient outlay of supplementary materials</i>
11. The book is supported efficiently by essentials like audio-materials.
II. Learning-teaching content
<i>A. General</i>
1. Most of the tasks in the book are interesting.
2. Tasks move from simple to complex.
3. Task objectives are achievable.
4. Cultural sensitivities have been considered.
5. The language in the textbook is natural and real.
6. The situations created in the dialogues sound natural and real.
<i>B. Listening</i>
7. The book has appropriate listening tasks with well-defined goals.
8. Tasks are efficiently graded according to complexity.
9. Tasks are authentic or close to real language situations.
<i>C. Speaking</i>
10. Activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication.
11. Activities are balanced between individual response, pair work and group work.
<i>D. Reading</i>
12. Texts are graded.
13. Texts are interesting.
<i>E. Writing</i>
14. Tasks have achievable goals and take into consideration learner capabilities.
15. Tasks are interesting.
<i>F. Vocabulary</i>
16. The load (number of new words in each lesson) is appropriate to the level.
17. There is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book.
18. Words are efficiently repeated and recycled across the book.
<i>G. Grammar</i>
19. The spread of grammar is achievable.
20. The grammar is contextualized.
21. Examples are interesting.

22. Grammar is introduced explicitly and reworked incidentally throughout the book.
H. <i>Pronunciation</i>
23. It is contextualized.
24. It is learner-friendly with no complex charts.
I. <i>Exercises</i>
25. They are learner friendly.
26. They are adequate.
27. They help students who are under/over-achievers.



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