

# Textbook Analysis Based on Teachers Perspectives: Iranian High School Textbook

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## Abstract

The present study analyzes Iranian English textbooks which are taught in high schools from the teachers' perspective. The benefits and disadvantages of the textbooks are explained in detail with regard to six common criteria taken from various material assessment checklists. This research was conducted at three high schools in Mazandaran, Iran. The quantitative approach was applied in this study. The data was gathered from a total of 10 English instructors, both male and female. It was gathered through a questionnaire with 40 items which were associated with the six criteria; Content, Physical appearance, Exercises and Activities, Clarity of instruction, Grammar, and vocabulary in the textbooks. Quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS. The findings indicated that the instructors appeared happy with the textbooks and had positive attitudes towards the textbooks.

**Keywords:** Textbook analysis; Teachers Perspectives; High school.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the history, teaching second or foreign language was a fundamental process and a lot of studies have been performed in this field; because language is as a tool for communicating. This is an effective tool for expressing our thoughts, emotions and attitudes with others. Thus, teaching and learning languages play an inevitable role in our life. To many professional teachers, ELT textbooks are basic elements in ELT teaching and they are the most extensively used instructional materials in schools at present. Sheldon (1988) contends that "textbooks are visible heart of any ELT program". In explaining the vital role of textbook in ELT teaching, Benevento (1984) states that whenever foreign language teachers meet each other, the first words after "How do you do" is usually what course books do you use (p.6). In addition, Dubin and Olsten (1986) state that the tangible element that gives a language course face validity to many learners and teachers is textbook.

Regarding the role of ELT textbooks in the process of language teaching and learning most of English language teaching professionals share a wide range of opinions about the use and usefulness of ELT textbooks in classes. According to Tomlinson (1998), some people are against ELT textbooks because they are limited in content and application in meeting the needs of the students. On the other hand, some people are more positive about the use of ELT textbooks because for them textbook provide a structure and cohesion to the learning process.

No matter which views one holds, it is a fact that ELT textbooks are applied in numerous language classes and they are the most basic section of teaching. Moreover, the textbook has a vital and a positive section to play in the everyday job of teachers and students in teaching and learning English. Moreover, textbooks became a universal element of ELT teaching (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

Textbook evaluation can be very useful in teacher development and professional growth. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) suggest that Textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it helps them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material. Textbook evaluation, therefore, can potentially be a particularly worthwhile means of conducting action research as well as a form of professional empowerment and improvement. Similarly, textbook evaluation can also be a valuable component of teacher training programs for it serves the dual purpose of making student teachers aware of important features to look for in textbook while familiarizing them with a wide range of published language instruction materials. The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of textbooks titled "English Book for high school" which was prepared by Ministry of Education as an instructional material for high school students from the perspective of the teachers.

This study answers the following research question by evaluating the textbook according to these eight criteria: Content, Physical appearance, Exercises and Activities, Clarity of instruction, Level of Textbook, Vocabulary, Grammar, Consideration of learning style differences in the Textbook. Based on the purpose of the present study, the following research question was formulated: RQ: Do Iranian teachers have a positive attitude towards the textbooks for those levels?

### TEXTBOOK

According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), the textbook has a vital and positive role to play in the teaching and learning process (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). In The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000), 'Textbook' is defined as a 'course-book' is the British synonym for textbook. It refers to Published materials that facilitate English language learning are considered under the general category of 'English language textbooks' (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2000).

Richards and Schmidt (2002) define textbook as a book on a specific subject used as guidance in the teaching learning process, especially in a college or school. The foreign language textbooks are often parts of a graded series covering multiple skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking, and grammar) or deal with a single skill.

There are many types of textbooks. Grant (1987) refers to the term textbook as both to course-books and supplementary textbooks. The distinguishing part between these two types of textbooks is that a course-book should cover all aspects of the language and a supplementary textbook is emphasized only on particular topics. Nevertheless, it can be difficult to generalize them because they can be varied. Grant (1987) categorized textbooks in two very broad classifications. However, not every textbook can be always included in the following categories. Traditional textbook is a type of book that wants the students to learn the language as a system and after that they should be able to use the language. On one hand, this kind of textbook is a great help for teachers because they are easy to use but on the other hand, it may be a problem at the end of the student's studies when he or she can manage grammar but cannot communicate. They rather emphasize on reading and writing activities and are very common at schools.

Communicative textbooks stresses on the communicative functions of language, not just the forms, skills in utilizing language, stresses on pupils' interests, encourage work in groups and furthermore emphasize fluency, not only accuracy. Communicative textbooks prepare children to use their language knowledge in a real situation. Textbook has always been the most preferred instructional material in ELT. They are as a best resource in achieving aims and objectives that have already been set concerning learner needs (Cunningsworth, 1995). Textbooks play a prominent role in the teaching /learning process and they are the primary agents of conveying the knowledge to the learners. Moreover, one of the significant functions of textbooks is to make the existence knowledge available and apparent to the learner in a selected, easy and organized way. According to Sheldon (1988), the textbook can be as a published book designed to help language learners to improve their linguistic and communicative abilities (Sheldon, 1988). Moreover, O'Neil (1982) and Ur (1996) believed that textbooks as learning instruments are used as supporting teaching instruments (O'Neil, 1982 & Ur, 1996).

Masuhara (2003) believed that the textbooks are designed to give cohesion to the language teaching and learning processes by providing direction, support, and specific language-based activities aimed at offering classroom practice for students. The wide spread use of textbooks in different ELT contexts require little further explanation. It continues to play an essential role in ELT classrooms all over the world (Williams, 1983). As was mentioned in the previous part, the importance of textbooks in the ELT classroom is so extensive that it is almost a universal element in ELT teaching (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). The most important point in evaluating textbooks is to regard learners' needs. Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2014) mention that the evaluation of textbooks is an effective way for teacher development and presents helpful perception to the teachers. They also point out teachers' perceptions and observations play an inevitable role in the process of evaluating book.

### DESCRIBING THE APPLIED CRITERIA

Content is the first criterion to be utilized in the present study. Based on the checklist that Skierso (1991) proposed, what subject matter (topics, content) is covered, whether the topics are amazing for the students or not and also how (if at all) culture is presented are all questioned and what is more, what text kinds such as, dialogs, notes, songs, poems, essays, biographies, letters, newspaper articles, jokes, folktales. Another criterion is the physical appearance. It concentrated on the appropriateness of the materials in relation to their physical appearance. It is pointed out in the literature that materials should achieve impact, which is realized when materials have a remarkable impact on students. Therefore, when the students' and curiosity, interests and attention are attracted through attractive presentation, such as use of color, drawings, photographs, cartoons, charts, tables and so on. It is extremely significant for the students to perform the exercises and activities and do the tasks so as to be able to have sufficient practice in the classroom context. Clarity of instruction is another important criterion to be used in this study. All instructions to the exercises, activities and tasks should be clear and appropriate to the level of the students so that they can understand and perform such activities, tasks and exercises easily. Grammar is another important criterion to be used in this study. It is one of the major components of any language course. It is through effective teaching of grammar that learners are equipped with the ability to create their own utterances and use

language for their own purpose. The next criterion is vocabulary. This criterion is regarded important for the course book assessment. As well as teaching as many words as probable, one of the targets of course books should be to equip students with strategies for handling the unfamiliar vocabulary they unavoidably will meet and also they can assist students to improve their own vocabulary-learning strategies. Nearly in all modern course books, there are vocabularies learning activities, although whether they aim at assisting students to extend and enhance their vocabulary in a purposeful and structured way or not is the matter to be regarded.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

The sample of this survey study consisted of high school teachers. This study was conducted at several high schools in Mazandaran Province. A total of 10 teachers participated in the study half of them were males and half females whose teaching experiences have been placed somewhere on the continuum of 6-20 years.

### **MATERIALS**

This study employed questionnaire and interview to collect data on the points of views of teachers about the mentioned textbooks. The questionnaires were used to obtain quantitative data and the interviews were used to obtain qualitative data that supported and enriched the quantitative data.

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

For the purpose of developing the questionnaire, the literature related to materials evaluation was reviewed. The review of literature revealed that there were some commonly used criteria in textbook and material evaluation process. The questionnaire was examined by two specialists, one from Tonekabon Azad University and the other from Azad University of Chalus. This helped to eliminate the ambiguities, to complete lacking topics and issues, and to examine the face validity. The questionnaire consisted of 40 items related to eight criteria determined through literature review to conduct a macro level material evaluation.

### **PROCEDURES**

In this study quantitative and qualitative data were obtained through questionnaires and teachers were interviewed for the macro level evaluation of the textbooks. Data collection procedures were carried out between April and May 2013. Prior to the implementation of the instruments, the course teachers were informed about the textbook evaluation study and data collection procedures by means of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were given to teachers by the researcher. The researcher stated that: All your data would be kept confidential and no one would have access to them except the researcher.

## **RESULTS**

### **CONTENT**

The first criteria "content" was measured through seven items in students' questionnaire and the responses are presented in Table 1. As table indicated most of the teachers (64.4% strongly agreed or agreed) believe that the topics in the units are interesting for them. (37.5% agreed or strongly agreed with the related item) think that the reading passages in the textbook are quite long. Most of the teachers believed that the reading passages related to their daily life. 38.5 % of the teachers are satisfied with that multiple choice tests and they believed that multiple choice tests involved in the text would facilitate their English. (48.7% strongly agreed or agreed) stated that the units in the textbook cover all skills.

### **PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF THE TEXTBOOKS**

The second criteria "Physical appearance" was measured through ten items in students' Questionnaire. As table indicated that (35.1% Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed) and did not think that the covers of textbooks are attractive. And also the teachers (37.7%) think that the layout in the textbook encouraged them to do the tasks and activities. Moreover, the teachers (38.2%) think that the colors in the textbooks are not attractive. The additional comments that teachers made support the above findings. To begin with, more than half of the teachers (55.4% strongly agreed or agreed) reported that the layout of the page is attractive. Most of them (44.6% agreed or agreed) believed that the weight of the textbook is appropriate for them. About 42.6% agreed that the artworks (picture illustrations-graphs-etc.) are helpful to them to understand the lessons better. About 45.1% believe that the font type helps them to follow up the units easily. Similarly, about 48.5% believe that the font size font type helps them to follow up the units easily. More than half of the teachers stated that the textbooks are organized effectively. 41.6% agreed that the exercises and activities in the textbooks are interesting. But 48% disagreed and think that the activities and exercises in the textbook were not appropriate for their level. 45.6% agreed expressed that the activities and exercises in the textbooks increased students desire to learn English.

### CLARITY OF INSTRUCTIONS

The fourth criteria "clarity of instruction" was measured through only one item in the Questionnaire. 41.2 % of the teachers agreed that the instructions in the textbooks were comprehensible.

### GRAMMAR IN THE TEXTBOOKS

The seventh criteria "grammar" was measured through two items in the questionnaire. 36.5% of teachers agreed that the grammar points in the textbook were presented in a clear and understandable way and about the second item, more than 50% of the teachers believed that the grammar exercises in the textbooks are organized effectively.

### VOCABULARY IN THE TEXTBOOKS

The sixth criteria "vocabulary" was measured through five items in the questionnaire and the responses are presented in table 6. As the table indicated, half of the respondents (50.1%) believed that the new vocabulary words repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning use, 38.9 % agreed) believed that the new vocabulary words is presented in a variety of ways 31.7% stated the textbooks are not consisted of too many unknown words. The additional comments that they made supported the above finding. More than 50% disagreed that the textbooks include adequate number of exercises and activities to revise the new vocabulary. About the last item "the vocabulary exercises in the textbook make vocabulary learning easier for me" Most of them (55.2%) were strongly disagreed.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article revealed that teachers have a positive feeling toward the content, physical appearance, exercises and activities, clarity of instructions, level of the textbooks, vocabulary, grammar and learning style differences of high school textbooks in Iran. Finding of this study may offer insights for those involved in educational administrations, syllabus design, curriculum planning and material development. Different sections of the textbooks can be modified by the committee of text book developers of the Iranian high schools in order to improve their quality. The books' task should be written in a way that the students can use them to learn language and for the purpose of helping the teachers to teach effectively and successfully. In order to enhance the amount of learning, the application of language teaching tools such as film, DVDs and computer are suggested. This study is limited to public high schools in Babol. Therefore, conclusions need to be verified by conducting similar studies across different cities in Iran. It is assumed that Students answered the questions honestly and seriously. Based on the results and the limitations of the current research, recommendations can be made for future research in order to have more effective text books for high schools.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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