

The Evaluation of Iranian High School English Textbook from the Prospective of Students

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ABSTRACT

Decisions related to textbook selection and evaluation are of great importance. The purpose of this study is to evaluate English language textbooks currently taught at Iranian first grade high school from the students' perspective. For this purpose, a 40 items questionnaire based on eight criteria namely content, physical appearance, exercises and activities, clarity of instructions, level of textbooks, vocabulary, grammar, consideration of learning style differences in the textbooks were developed. This study was conducted at four high schools in Tonekabon in Mazandaran Province. A total of 273 students participated in the study. The subjects were all female with the same age.

The researcher investigated the students' attitude toward this textbooks to see whether they have positive or negative attitude toward them. The statistical computation of the results revealed that the students felt positive about the textbooks.

KEY WORDS: Textbook evaluation, Prospective, Attitude

INTRODUCTION

A textbook has always been the most preferred instructional material in ELT. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) stated the text book has a very important and a positive role to play in teaching and learning English. They also argued that textbooks contain the necessary input for classroom lessons through different activities.

According to Cunningsworth (1995) textbooks play a prominent role in the teaching and learning process and they are primary agent of conveying the knowledge to the learners. But in recent years there has been a lot of debate in ELT on the actual role of material in teaching English. According to Ansari (2007) English teaching objectives are not well-defined and most of the students do not overcome language learning problems and are not proficient enough to communicate in the foreign language. These students are not motivated enough to study English and look at the course just as a subject matter which should be passed and do not understand its importance as a means of communication with which they can adapt themselves to new improvements in technology and other sciences. It is said that to acquire the target language effectively, learners need to engage actively in processing the meanings of whatever they hear and read. An important problem in language teaching which our students encounter is that the tasks included in their textbooks do not give them enough practice in the skills they will need. In short, the textbooks somehow lack various communicative tasks which can motivate and give learners a purpose for doing them.

According to Jahangard (2006) evaluation of EFL materials currently taught at Iran public school requires a deeper and more exhaustive analysis and scrutiny by a group of experienced teachers.

In this study, the present researcher attempts to obtain the students' views about the all aspects of the textbook including content, physical appearance, exercises and activities, vocabulary and grammar, clarity of instruction in the process of teaching and learning.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Textbooks play an important role in language classrooms in all educational institutions - state schools, colleges, language schools – all over the world. Lamie (1999) stated that is why despite the development of new technologies that allow for higher quality teacher-generated materials, demand for textbooks continues to grow, and the publishing industry responds with new series and textbooks every year. According to what Razmjoo (2007) said many students working with a textbook feel secure and have a sense of progress and achievement. Cunningsworth (1995) also discusses that textbooks are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presenting materials by the teachers, a source of ideas and activities, a reference source for students, a syllabus that reflects pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in

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confidence.

Based on Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979), information on textbook selection is useful since it is sometimes part of the ESL/EFL teacher's responsibility to select the textbook she/he will use in a given class. This decision should be made carefully and systematically, not arbitrarily. They also added that even in countries where the choice of the textbook does not directly involve the teacher, teachers may be asked to submit reports on the usefulness of the textbooks they are already making use of. Several possible criteria and procedures for carrying out a sound selection of appropriate textbooks have been suggested. However, selecting an appropriate textbook is not a wholly objective process. While many guidelines are suggested, the individual subjective judgments of the teachers are central to it.

Textbooks are evaluated in order to examine their effectiveness. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) have argued that there are three different types of material evaluation. They said that the most common form is the predictive or pre-use evaluation that is designed to examine the future or potential performance of a textbook. The other types of textbook evaluation are the in-use evaluation designed to examine material that is currently being used and the retrospective or post-use evaluation of a textbook that has been used in any respective institution.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Iran, there are a lot of debates about the high school English books. According to Jahangard (2007) students' aural and oral skills are not emphasized in Iranian prescribed EFL textbooks. They are not tested in the university entrance examination, as well as in the final exams during the three years of senior high school and one year of pre-university education. Teachers put much less emphasis, if any, on oral drills, pronunciation listening and speaking abilities than on reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. The main focus is to make students pass tests and exams.

Jahangard (2007) evaluated four EFL textbooks that have been used in the Iranian high schools by the Ministry of Education. He discussed the merits and demerits of the textbooks with reference to 13 common criteria extracted from different materials evaluation checklists. The criteria were as follows: explicitness of objectives, good vocabulary explanation and practice, educationally and socially acceptable approaches to the target community, periodic review and test sections, clear attractive layout, print easy to read, appropriate visual materials, interesting topics and tasks, clear instructions, clearly organized and graded content, plenty of authentic language, good grammar presentation and practice, fluency practice in all four skills, and independent learning situations. The results of the study indicated that book four had better features in comparison with the three other textbooks (which needed huge revisions and modifications). The present study wants to investigate high school students' attitude toward textbooks for that levels to see whether they are satisfied with them based on the criteria mentioned or not.

Research Question

Do Iranian high school students have a positive attitude towards the textbooks for those levels?

Null hypothesis: Iranian high school students have a negative attitude towards the textbooks for those levels?

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Participants

The sample of this survey study consisted of high school students. This study was conducted at four high schools in Tonekabon in Mazandaran Province. A total of 273 students participated in the study. The subjects were all female with the same age.

Material

This study employed a 40 items questionnaire to collect data on the points of views of students' about the mentioned textbooks.

Procedures

First four schools were selected. Then the students in selected schools participated in the study. A total of 273 students (females) participated in the study. There were approximately 30 students in each class.

In this study quantitative data were obtained through students' questionnaires. Data collection procedures were carried out between April and May 2012. 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.

To the best knowledge of the researcher the participants' final scores are not affected by the results of this study. The researcher stated that: All your data would be kept confidential and no one would have access to them except the researcher.

RESULTS

Findings

The evaluation carried out at macro level focuses on eight criteria namely, content, physical appearance, exercises and activities, clarity of instruction, level, vocabulary, grammar, consideration of learning style differences.

For presenting the result of the study, means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages of each item were calculated to describe and summarize the responses of students. The results of items related to each evaluation criteria were presented in tables and explanation were provided accordingly. Students were also asked to state if they have any additional comments on their textbook that no one had any special suggestion.

Table1. Descriptive static of items and their percentages

| Item no | Item | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---------|---|------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | The topics of the units are interesting for me. | 2.03 | .675 | 48(17.9) | 173(64.4) | 38(14.2) | 9(3.4) |
| 2 | Reading passages and examples in the textbooks are related to our daily lives. | 2.19 | .825 | 55(20.2) | 125(46.0) | 76(27.9) | 16(5.9) |
| 3 | The reading passages in the textbooks are quite long. | 2.39 | .931 | 55(20.2) | 85(31.3) | 102(37.5) | 30(11.0) |
| 4 | The units in the textbooks provide sufficient coverage of skills. | 2.30 | .771 | 36(13.5) | 130(48.7) | 86(32.2) | 15(5.6) |
| 5 | Multiple choice tests involved in the texts would facilitate our English. | 1.94 | .881 | 98(36.3) | 104(38.5) | 54(20.0) | 14(5.2) |
| 6 | The units in the textbooks include topics which are up to date. | 2.29 | .806 | 42(15.4) | 127(46.7) | 85(31.3) | 18(6.6) |
| 7 | There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbooks. | 2.11 | .865 | 69(25.7) | 119(44.2) | 63(23.4) | 18(6.7) |
| 8 | The cover of the textbooks is attractive. | 2.58 | .958 | 40(14.8) | 85(31.4) | 95(35.1) | 51(18.8) |
| 9 | The layouts of a page is quite attractive. | 2.38 | .825 | 29(10.7) | 142(52.4) | 69(25.5) | 31(11.4) |
| 10 | The weight of the textbooks is appropriate for me. | 1.84 | .844 | 103(38.6) | 119(44.6) | 29(10.9) | 16(6.0) |
| 11 | Following the layout of a page is easy. | 2.15 | .798 | 50(18.5) | 150(55.4) | 52(19.2) | 19(7.0) |
| 12 | The layout in the textbook encourages me to do the activities. | 2.51 | .862 | 32(12.1) | 100(37.7) | 100(37.7) | 33(12.5) |
| 13 | The artworks (picture-illustrations-graphs-tables- etc) in the textbooks are helpful to me to understand. | 2.14 | .894 | 70(25.7) | 116(42.6) | 64(23.5) | 22(8.1) |
| 14 | The font type in the textbooks helps me to follow up the units easily. | 2.04 | .847 | 75(28.0) | 121(45.1) | 57(21.3) | 15(5.6) |
| 15 | The font size in the textbook helps me to follow up the units easily. | 2.10 | .821 | 63(23.3) | 131(48.5) | 61(22.6) | 15(5.6) |
| 16 | The colors in the textbooks look attractive. | 2.92 | 1.048 | 35(12.9) | 55(20.2) | 78(28.7) | 104(38.2) |
| 17 | The textbooks are organized effectively | 2.34 | .824 | 36(13.5) | 127(47.7) | 79(29.7) | 24(9.0) |
| 18 | The exercises and activities in the textbooks are interesting. | 2.25 | .939 | 61(22.7) | 112(41.6) | 64(23.8) | 32(11.9) |
| 19 | The activities and exercises in the textbooks are appropriate for our levels. | 2.80 | .840 | 20(7.4) | 67(24.9) | 129(48.0) | 53(19.7) |
| 20 | The activities and exercises in the textbooks increase my desire to learn English. | 2.19 | .925 | 63(23.3) | 123(45.6) | 53(19.6) | 31(11.5) |
| 21 | The activities in the textbooks sufficiently encourage collaborative work. | 2.57 | .945 | 40(14.7) | 85(31.1) | 100(36.6) | 48(17.6) |
| 22 | The reading activities and exercises in the textbooks help me improve my reading skills. | 2.03 | .835 | 73(26.7) | 137(50.2) | 45(16.5) | 18(6.6) |
| 23 | The activities in the textbooks help me improve my writing skills. | 1.92 | .851 | 93(34.2) | 125(46.0) | 37(13.6) | 17(6.3) |
| 24 | The speaking activities in the textbooks encourage me use English in the classroom. | 2.10 | .805 | 59(21.8) | 141(52.0) | 55(20.3) | 16(5.9) |
| 25 | The speaking activities in the textbook provide me use English outside the classroom in daily life. | 2.06 | .875 | 79(29.3) | 114(42.2) | 60(22.2) | 17(6.3) |
| 26 | I understand the instructions in the textbooks easily. | 2.13 | .951 | 77(28.3) | 112(41.2) | 53(19.5) | 30(11.0) |
| 27 | The textbooks are above the level of first grade high school students. | 2.84 | .978 | 35(13.0) | 48(17.8) | 111(41.1) | 76(28.1) |
| 28 | The reading passages in the textbooks are difficult for me. | 2.95 | .881 | 21(7.8) | 48(17.9) | 123(45.9) | 76(28.4) |
| 29 | The writing activities in the textbooks are difficult for me. | 2.89 | .942 | 30(11.3) | 43(16.2) | 118(44.4) | 75(28.2) |
| 30 | The speaking activities in the textbooks are difficult for me. | 2.90 | .930 | 25(9.4) | 54(20.4) | 109(41.1) | 77(29.1) |
| 31 | The new vocabulary words repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning use. | 1.63 | .762 | 137(50.4) | 108(39.7) | 17(6.3) | 10(3.7) |

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|----|--|------|------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| 32 | The new vocabulary words presented in a variety of ways. | 1.97 | .883 | 94(34.8) | 105(38.9) | 56(20.7) | 15(5.6) |
| 33 | There are too many unknown words in the textbooks. | 2.29 | .990 | 69(25.7) | 85(31.7) | 80(29.9) | 34(12.7) |
| 34 | The textbooks includes adequate number of exercises and activities to revise the new vocabulary. | 2.18 | .869 | 54(20.3) | 135(50.8) | 51(19.2) | 26(9.8) |
| 35 | The vocabulary exercises in the textbooks make vocabulary learning easier for me. | 1.88 | .733 | 80(29.9) | 148(55.2) | 31(11.6) | 9(3.4) |
| 36 | The Grammar points in the textbooks are presented in a clear and understandable way. | 2.08 | .988 | 91(33.6) | 99(36.5) | 50(18.5) | 31(11.4) |
| 37 | The Grammar exercises in the textbooks are organized effectively. | 2.10 | .782 | 58(21.9) | 134(50.6) | 62(23.4) | 11(4.2) |
| 38 | The units in the textbooks include sufficient number of visuals (Graphs – diagram- tables- picture- etc.) | 2.26 | .981 | 69(25.5) | 98(36.2) | 69(25.5) | 35(12.9) |
| 39 | The units in the textbook include sufficient number of activities that allow us learn through moving in the classroom. | 2.16 | .884 | 60(22.1) | 134(49.4) | 50(18.5) | 27(10.0) |
| 40 | The units in the textbooks include sufficient number of activities that allow us learn through listening. | 2.21 | .944 | 70(25.8) | 103(38.0) | 70(25.8) | 28(10.3) |

As the tables show the questionnaire contains 40 items each as an indicator of students' attitude toward these books. (1= I strongly agree, 2= I agree, 3= I disagree, and 4= I strongly disagree). The mean and standard deviation for each item is estimated. The table presented that item 2 has the highest percentage and most of the students agree with these criteria involved in this textbooks and the students seemed positive about the textbooks. And the null hypothesis that students have a negative attitude about toward high school textbooks is rejected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study offer convincing evidence that the English language textbooks that are currently taught at high schools in Iran meet the students' expectations. As the statistical calculations shows, they are satisfied with their English textbooks and agree with the criteria. However, in order to be able to make more sound judgments about different characteristics of these textbooks, more research of this kind needs to be conducted. Other studies can be done by researchers to evaluate other high school grades' textbooks to investigate their effectiveness and quality. The finding can be practical for improving the quality of learning. This study can also be done on male students to see whether they have the same idea or not. Teachers attitudes toward these books can also be investigated. Curriculum designers can also benefit from these findings in their planning and designing of future textbooks.

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