

IN THE NAME OF GOD

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IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
(TEFL)

**A textbook evaluation on the ILI pre-intermediate and
High-intermediate series**

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THESIS

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Dedication

**Dedicated to my family, Dr Sahragard, Dr Rashidi and
Dr Razmjoo.**

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Abstract

A textbook evaluation on the ILI pre-intermediate and High-intermediate series

By:
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ELT materials (textbooks) play a very important role in many language classrooms but in recent years there has been a lot of debate throughout the ELT profession on the actual role of materials in teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL). Arguments have encompassed both the potential and the limitations of materials for 'guiding' students through the learning process and curriculum as well as the needs and preferences of teachers who are using textbooks. Other issues that have arisen in recent years include textbook design and practicality, methodological validity, the role of textbooks in innovation, the authenticity of materials in terms of their representation of language, and the appropriateness of gender representation, subject matter, and cultural components.

Whether or not one accepts the value of textbooks, it must surely be with the qualification that they are of an acceptable standard or level of quality and appropriate to the learners for whom they are being used. It is absolutely essential, therefore, that we establish and apply a wide variety of relevant and contextually appropriate criteria for the evaluation of the textbooks that we use in our language classrooms. Given the importance of textbooks in enhancing learners' proficiency, the general purpose of this study was to investigate instructors' views on the present and ideal condition of the ILI pre and high intermediate books published by organization. A questionnaire was distributed among 60 instructors at the ILI institute to gather their viewpoints on the mentioned issues. The instructors were asked to evaluate 6 selected textbooks designed for the different levels of language proficiency. This questionnaire by Tahriri, Shahini and Riazi adopted by the researcher was applied to evaluate the materials regarding their internal and external aspects. Then the data was gathered and was then analyzed and compared using SPSS. The results of the analysis reveal that the mean differences for the necessity or the ideal situation regarding the general information, the theoretical consideration, organizational features and practical consideration, content of the textbooks, skills, vocabulary, activities and structure of these textbooks were all much more than the mean for the present condition according to the instructors' viewpoints. Furthermore, there were significant differences between the ideal situation and the present condition of the responses. This difference shows that the books do not meet the expectations of the instructors.

Key words: textbook, evaluation.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter first presents a background and a rationale for textbook evaluation in the preliminary. This is then followed by the objectives of the study, research questions, and the significance.

1.1 Preliminaries

The English Language teaching practiced in Iran has been assuming importance within the last decade. The need for English proficiency is growing rapidly due to an increasing awareness of globalization and also the impact of new information technology. Money, energy, and time are all being invested in an effort to better prepare students in a constantly growing, competitive environment. However, several obvious problems still exist within the current educational framework, specifically, the choosing and evaluation of course books continues to be fraught with confusion. Most private and state schools choose course books based on what publishers offer and make available; in some cases, the donation of a computer becomes more of a determining factor than a suitable procedure for evaluating and selecting course books.

A countless number of English textbooks are available on the market today. The eye can easily be deceived by colorful covers, a

beautiful layout and attractive artwork. As an inexperienced teacher it can be particularly difficult to know what to look for in an English textbook. We have heard of incidents when teachers have made rash decisions concerning English textbooks which led to useless working materials, frustrated teachers or learners and wasted money. The decision to purchase a textbook should therefore be carefully considered. The content of English textbooks influences what teachers teach and learners learn. If the textbook is too advanced or too simple for the students the teacher will inevitably be faced with problems. Local cultural taboos could force the teacher to leave out certain parts.

The English Language teaching practices in Iran are currently based heavily upon course books. In most schools, course books are viewed as the only source necessary for an effective language-teaching program. A poor selection in the course books, often results in the unsuccessful implementation of the course. The field of language teaching has faced very crucial changes that have had a great effect on methods and approaches. Every year different course books are chosen to make a course more effective in terms of learning strategies. Most problems in teaching a foreign language are linked to the course book selection process. Once a course book is chosen, few efforts are made to evaluate the effectiveness of the book.

The role and the purpose of the course book are still unclear for many teachers because they have traditionally been taught to view course books as the curriculum instead of as a reference to assist in the development of a comprehensive approach. These books are seen as an end product, not a starting point, and few attempts have yet been made to discern how appropriate they are for the students. The students have also had little or no participating role or involvement in the selection process. There has been inadequate collaboration among teachers, administrators, parents, and students. A wide gap continues to exist between theory and practice. This is most evident in the institutions, language schools, and colleges that focus primarily on teaching English. Within the public school system, teachers are not

properly trained on how to choose, adapt, evaluate and use their course books.

Teachers need to be trained in a way that promotes effective teaching techniques so that students may benefit from their own learning experiences. Suggested guidelines on choosing course books should cover all possibilities and problems, and the teachers should understand the solutions emphasized in the guidelines. The function of the course books must not be overemphasized or de-emphasized; rather they need to be chosen after a detailed analysis by an institution and ongoing evaluation ought to be done during the implementation of the curriculum development process. The selection and implementation process is one of the most important steps in designing a course and is simply not a one-sided process. All those who are involved in learning and teaching need to collaborate and cooperate during the selection.

Each course book has its own strengths and weaknesses. Choosing the appropriate course book is one of the most challenging tasks for teachers. However, this fact is not an obstacle for many teachers who perceive the course books as vital and inevitable tool for their course and teaching purposes. "Course books are perceived by many to be the route map for any ELT program, laying bare its shape, structure, and destination, with progress, program, and even teacher quality being assessed by learners in terms of sequential, unit-by-unit coverage" (Sheldon, 1998, p. 237).

As a key area in English Language Teaching (ELT), the significance of material design and evaluation has grown steadily. Evaluation is basically a matching process, which concerns matching learners' needs with available solutions (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 97). Low (1987, p. 21) reminds us that "teachers generally need to screen materials, in order to predict their suitability for particular classes". Thus, we should use material evaluation to question and develop our own ideas as to what is required. Another benefit is through identifying strengths and weaknesses in textbooks, optimum

use can be made of strong points, and weaker points can be adapted or substituted from other books (Cunningsworth, 1995).

Certain criteria must be considered in the evaluation. Since every school setting is unique in the sense that students have different backgrounds, abilities and needs, the criteria will inevitably vary. Other criteria such as teachers' perspectives as well as the syllabus should also be taken into account in the evaluation. It is important that teachers have a critical approach towards the potential material.

1.1.1 The Role of Textbooks in the EFL/ESL Classroom

It is often stated that most teachers tend to follow at least one textbook as their main source of guidance in the process of language teaching. They feel that it is very difficult for them to teach systematically without a textbook. Indeed, textbooks play a crucial role in providing a base of materials for both teachers and students. Most educators signal the effective use of textbooks by teachers and students. O' Neill (1982), for example, points out that most teachers are inclined to follow the text's methodology, vocabulary and sequence to the letter. In addition, as Ariew (1982) and Macian (1986) argue, both teachers and students tend to use the written and grammatical exercises and the oral work of the textbook in hand as their main source of information. Ariew also regards the textbook as a means of motivating students to pursue language for their purposes (Ariew, 1982).

There are, indeed, a number of advantages of using a textbook. Ur (1996) provides a summary of the criteria in favor of using a course book as follows:

1. Framework: A course book provides a clear framework: Teachers and learners know what they are going to learn and teach next.
2. Syllabus: The course book serves as a syllabus: The carefully planned and balanced selection of language content enables teachers and students to follow the subjects systematically.

3.Guidance: The course book can provide useful guidance and support particularly for teachers who are inexperienced.

4.Autonomy: The learner can use the course book to learn new material, review and monitor progress with some degree of autonomy. So, he becomes less teacher dependent

In this context, the importance ascribed to the textbook comes to make the evaluation and selection process much more crucial. This is because textbooks abound for all levels and purposes today, which eventually makes the task of selection and evaluation process challenging for teachers. Then, teachers enjoying a great selection of textbooks have to devise particular ways not to choose a textbook, but rather to find creative use for the textbook in line with their individual needs and purposes.

Of course, on the other hand, in some countries, it is not the responsibility of teachers to select the textbook they will use in their classes. They might think that their opinion as to the worthiness of the textbook in use is of no value. However, this is not always the case. Teachers might well be asked to reflect their own experience in the process of selecting the textbook.

More importantly, teachers need to gain the ability to evaluate the course book which they are supposed to use on some principled basis. Furthermore, they need to come to terms with the procedural steps necessary for evaluating the textbook in order to make the very best use of its assets and also compensate for its possible limitations. In doing so, priority should be placed on determining the principal objectives of the class on the basis of student needs.

Considering these central concerns, the fact remains that teachers should not be reliant exclusively on the textbook but rather be selective in matching it to the particular needs of students and the defined purposes of the course.

Teachers may have different reactions to the same course book depending on their background, teaching styles and their student's

needs. Graves (2000, p.175) states that "What one teacher considers an advantage in a textbook, another teacher may consider a disadvantage." Edge and Wharton (cited in Tomlinson 2002:299) state that,

New teachers may approach books in the first instance looking for practical guidance, but their interaction with the book also provides an opportunity for them to take on board some of the methodology behind the suggested activities and to apply it in other circumstances. Experienced teachers may recognize a book's theoretical position more quickly and interact with it more critically.

Skierso (1991, p. 432) states that "textbooks evoke a variety of emotions in their users. No teacher is entirely satisfied with the text used, yet very few manage to teach without one." and further adds that,

The importance of the textbook in an English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) class makes the selection process crucial. Sometimes, it is the responsibility of teachers to select the textbook they will be using in a given class. On the other hand, even in countries and school systems where the responsibility for the adaptation of the textbook lies with the school board or the state, teachers still need to know on a daily basis how to evaluate in order to utilize its assets and compensate for its limitations in applying it to the needs of the students and the objectives of the class.

As mentioned before English language instruction has many important components but the essential constituents to many ESL/EFL classrooms and programs are the textbooks and instruction materials that are often used by language instructors. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest:

The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in [various] countries...No teaching-learning

situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook.

Other theorists such as Sheldon (1988) agree with this observation and suggest that textbooks not only "represent the visible heart of any ELT program" (p. 237) but also offer considerable advantages - for both the student and the teacher - when they are being used in the ESL/EFL classroom. Haycroft (1998), for example, suggests that first of the primary advantages of using textbooks is that they are psychologically essential for students since their progress and achievement can be measured concretely when we use them. Second, as Sheldon (1988) has pointed out, students often harbor expectations about using a textbook in their particular language classroom and program and believe that published materials have more credibility than teacher-generated or "in-house" materials. Third, as O'Neill (1982) has indicated, textbooks are generally sensitive to students' needs, even if they are not designed specifically for them, they are efficient in terms of time and money, and they can and should allow for adaptation and improvisation. Fourth, textbooks yield a respectable return on investment, are relatively inexpensive and involve low lesson preparation time, whereas teacher-generated materials can be time, cost and quality defective. In this way, textbooks can reduce potential occupational overload and allow teachers the opportunity to spend their time undertaking more worthwhile pursuits (O'Neill, 1982; Sheldon, 1988). A fifth advantage identified by Cunningsworth (1995) is the potential which textbooks have for serving several additional roles in the ELT curriculum. He argues that they are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presentation material, a source of ideas and activities, and a reference source for students, a syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence. Although some theorists have alluded to the inherent danger of the

inexperienced teacher who may use a textbook as a pedagogic crutch, such an over reliance may actually have the opposite effect of saving students from a teacher's deficiencies (O'Neill, 1982; Williams, 1983; Kitao & Kitao, 1997). Finally, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) have pointed out that textbooks may play a pivotal role in innovation. They suggest that textbooks can support teachers through potentially disturbing and threatening change processes, demonstrate new and/or untried methodologies, introduce change gradually, and create scaffolding upon which teachers can build a more creative methodology of their own.

While many of the aforementioned theorists are quick to point out the extensive benefits of using ESL/EFL textbooks, there are many other researchers and practitioners who do not necessarily accept this view and retain some well-founded reservations on the subject. Allwright (1982), for instance, has written a scathing commentary on the use of textbooks in the ELT classroom. He suggests that textbooks are too inflexible and generally reflect the pedagogic, psychological, and linguistic preferences and biases of their authors. Subsequently, the educational methodology that a textbook promotes will influence the classroom setting by indirectly imposing external language objectives and learning constituents on students as well as potentially incongruent instructional paradigms on the teachers who use them. In this fashion, therefore, textbooks essentially determine and control the methods, processes and procedures of language teaching and learning. Moreover, the pedagogic principles that are often displayed in many textbooks may also be conflicting, contradictory or even out-dated depending on the capitalizing interests and exploitations of the sponsoring agent.

More recent authors have criticized textbooks for their inherent social and cultural biases. Researchers such as Porreca (1984), Florent and Walter (1989), Clarke and Clarke (1990), Carrell and Korwitz (1994), and Renner (1997) have demonstrated that many EFL/ESL textbooks still contain rampant examples of gender bias, sexism, and

stereotyping. They describe such gender-related inequities as: the relative invisibility of female characters, the unrealistic and sexist portrayals of both men and women, stereotypes involving social roles, occupations, relationships and actions as well as linguistic biases such as 'gendered' English and sexist language. Findings such as these have led researchers to believe that the continuing prevalence of sexism and gender stereotypes in many EFL/ESL textbooks may reflect the unequal power relationships that still exist between the sexes in many cultures, the prolonged marginalization of females, and the misrepresentations of writers with social attitudes that are incongruent with the present-day realities of the target language culture (Sunderland, 1992; Renner, 1997).

Other theorists such as Prodromou (1988) and Alptekin (1993) have focused on the use of the target language culture as a vehicle for teaching the language in textbooks and suggest that it is not really possible to teach a language without embedding it in its cultural base. They argue that such a process inevitably forces learners to express themselves within a culture of which they have scarcely any experience and this may result in alienation, stereotyping, or even reluctance or resistance to learning. Phillipson (1992) is also wary of the complex relationship between language textbooks and the target language culture but he sees the promotion of 'Western' (British) global textbooks as government-backed enterprises with both an economic as well as an ideological agenda. Gray (2000), on the other hand, has defended the socio-cultural components of many textbooks. He suggests that English language textbooks are actually ambassadorial cultural artifacts and those students should not only critically engage their textbooks but also view them as more than mere linguistic objects. In this way, he argues, learners will improve their language skills by using their textbooks as useful instruments for provoking discussion, cultural debate, and a two-way flow of information. Clearly there is no consensus on this issue at this particular time and this would seem to warrant some degree of caution