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Designing and Validating a Textbook Evaluation Questionnaire for Reading Comprehension II and Exploring its Relationship with Achievement

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List of Abbreviations

ELT: English Language Teaching

ICC: Inter correlation coefficients

KMO: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

LATEX: Language Teaching Expertise Research

MCIT: Schema-based cloze multiple choice item test

MNE: Ministry of National Education

MONE: Ministry of National Education

SAC: Self-Access Centre

SRT: Schema-based Reading Test

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TEQ: Textbook Evaluation Questionnaire

TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language

Abstract

In any instructional program, the most influential factor influencing the students' achievement is the textbook (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). Indeed, the textbook is regarded as the ELT program heart (Sheldon, 1988); because of such an importance, essential constituent to many EFL classrooms, i.e., textbooks, should be evaluated and selected as carefully as possible to avoid any negative effects on students (Litz, n. d.). This study through developing and designing a textbook evaluation questionnaire, which gives professors the opportunity to conduct a reliable evaluation, intends to examine the factors that professors keep in mind in reading textbook evaluation and the relationship of those factors with achievement. In order to achieve the goals, the researcher conducted this study in quantitative phase. Eighty Iranian teachers teaching in Reading Comprehension II were given the questionnaire and were asked to select among the factors which were gained from the pilot study. Having administered the questionnaire, the researcher computed the frequency to find out the 10 mainly used textbooks to design an achievement test. The schema-based reading test was given to 150 Iranian students of 10 classes studying one of the mainly used textbooks in Reading Comprehension II. Having run the descriptive statistics through SPSS and factor analysis, thirteen factors were extracted: textbook shortcomings, development of learner autonomy, subject matters including sociocultural matters in a logical manner, supplementary materials for innovative individual, group and pair work, authentic motivating texts to address broader educational concerns, readability level, user-friendliness, activities in allocated time, course goals, tests, adaptation, critical thinking, and teacher's book. Moreover, the results revealed that the textbook evaluation questionnaire and the extracted factors do not significantly correlate with the achievement of students. The results offer implications and suggestions for pedagogical consideration within the higher education context.

Key terms: Textbook, evaluation, reading comprehension II, schema-based reading test

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

In this section, a brief background of the textbook's role and evaluation in the educational context will be discussed. Moreover, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions will be mentioned. Finally, the limitations of the study and the definitions of the key terms will be provided.

1.1. Background

For a long time there has been a debate among ELT professionals on whether or not to use textbooks in teaching English. However, even with the development of technologies that allow for higher quality teacher-made material, the demand for textbooks increasingly grows, and the publishing industry supplies such a demand with new series and textbooks each year (Garinger, 2002)

Similarly, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is flourishing in Iran, and many universities are presently offering undergraduate and graduate programs in the field. For this reason, many TEFL textbooks are available in the market. Due to the availability of several textbooks dealing with the same topic, teachers must be able to differentiate effectively between them (McDonough & Shaw, 2003)

There is a great relationship between the textbook and what happens in the class. To put it in other words, in many teaching situations, textbooks as "the core of a particular program" are "the most visible representative" of classroom events (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p. 60). Patrick (1988) argued that textbooks provide the huge amount of context knowledge got by students (nearly 80%), the huge amount of student's classroom time (75%), and also homework time (90%) (cited in Yildirim, 2006).

The over-reliance on the textbook is more obvious in the case of non-native contexts and untrained teachers. In the case of the former, White (n. d.) claimed that there is no difference between syllabus, methodology, and the textbook used. In the case of lacking trained teachers, language learning is strongly tied to the textbook (Williams, 1983).

Many other researchers (e.g., White, n. d.; Rubdy, 2003) also came up with the idea that since textbooks are the major source of contact with target language and communicate

the course content to the teacher, textbook selection remains as one of the most important decisions a teacher has to make.

Since materials are not presented in isolation, they must be considered within a broader educational context (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). The selection of appropriate materials, therefore, "involves matching the given materials against the context in which they are going to be used and the needs and interests of teachers and learners who work within it, and finding the best possible fit between them" (Rubdy, 2003, p.37).

Because of the importance of textbook evaluation, a great deal of literature on material development has focused on material evaluation. Some examples of evaluative criteria and checklists can be found in Byrd (2001), Ellis (n. d.), McDonough and Shaw (2003), and Williams (1983). They include comments for pre-use evaluation. Tomlinson (2003) claimed that "any pre-use evaluation is subjective, both in its selection of criteria and its judgment made by evaluators" (p.27).

Not only pre evaluations are basically subjective decisions, but there is no empirical study specifying or outlining criteria to follow in evaluating *reading comprehension* textbooks, so this study aimed to design a reading comprehension textbook evaluation questionnaire, which investigates the factors involved in evaluating reading comprehension textbook selections, especially those considered important by Iranian TEFL university teachers. The study also focused on textbooks shortcomings and validated the questionnaire. Ultimately, through designing a test, the study investigated how university teachers' textbook evaluation correlates with classroom reality, i.e., students' achievement.

1.2. Statement of the problem

According to Litz (n. d.), "English Language instruction has many important components but the essential constituent to many ESL/ EFL classrooms and programs are the textbooks and instructional materials that are often used by language instructors" (p. 5). The factors involved in the evaluation of current materials, therefore, merit serious considerations, as an inappropriate choice may waste funds and time, and affect not only students but also teachers.

Within the four skills, *reading* is *the most important foreign language skill,* especially in cases where students have to read English material in their own field and may never speak in the language; McDonough and Shaw (2003) called such cases as "English as library language" (p. 89), which captures its being independent from speaking.

The present study was to design and validate a textbook evaluation questionnaire to help teachers, publishers, and administrators to have an empirically validated and reliable questionnaire based on the basis of which they can choose appropriate reading comprehension textbooks. Additionally, a test was designed to know whether teachers' perception of textbooks come true.

1.3. Significance of the study

Although there are a large number of studies on textbook evaluation (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2002; Byrd, 2001; Garinger, 2002; Litz, n. d.; McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Zabawa, 2001), there is only one study (Rubdy, 2003) trying to give some criteria for all three kinds of evaluation (pre-use, whilst-use, and post-use). This study took into account designing a textbook evaluation questionnaire for *reading* textbooks which gives the opportunity to conduct pre-use, whilst-use, and post-use evaluation.

There are some studies (e.g., Ampiah, 2008; Lockheed, & Hanushek, 1987) confirming the positive effect of textbook on students' academic achievement; however, no study has taken into account the relationship between teachers' attitudes toward textbooks and the effects of textbooks on students.

Since teaching materials are often evaluated unsystematically in favor of materials with face validity (Tomlinson, 2003), the validated evaluation questionnaire will be highly useful for English university teachers to ensure that their selected textbooks are devised, revised, selected, and adapted in reliable and valid ways.

The results taken from the questionnaire have the potentiality to help teachers who are supposed to follow materials given to them by a the Ministry of Education or similar body to make essential adaptation.

Nowadays that there is a wealth of EFL materials available with literally hundreds of new, commercially available course books on the market, the results obtained by administering the prepared questionnaire will give language university teachers the ability to assess the effectiveness of available textbooks on the market.

The designed questionnaire can be a valuable part of teacher training programs "for dual purpose of making student teachers aware of important features to look for in textbooks while familiarizing them with a wide range of published language instruction material" (Litz, n. d., p. 9).

Finally, there are some implications in the present study for authors and publishers, who should satisfy university teachers' expectations as to what a textbook at a certain level should contain, by informing them of factors considered important in textbook selection. They will become familiar with the shortcomings of current textbooks available in market and may avoid them in designing and publishing future materials. In the case of significant relationship between university teachers' evaluation of textbooks and students' achievement, publishers, primarily motivated by financial success, by certainty can invest on textbooks with excellent qualities.

1.4. Purpose of the study

This study aimed at developing and validating a textbook evaluation questionnaire for reading textbooks. The questionnaire developed in this study can be employed to find out the textbooks currently used for reading comprehension course, and the factors that are considered by university teachers in the selection of reading textbook. The results of designed questionnaire have also some implications for university teachers, textbook writers, and publishers.

A test of textbooks taught in classroom is also designed and validated to find out whether textbooks are as effective as they are evaluated, so we gain clearer picture of how textbooks really work.

1.4.1. Research questions

Three research questions will be investigated in the study:

1. Does the textbook evaluation questionnaire (TEQ) significantly correlate with the participants' scores on the schema-based reading test (SRT)?
2. What factors are considered important in textbook selection by Iranian university teachers?

3. Do extracted factors of TEQ significantly correlate with the participants' scores on the SRT?

1.4.2. Research hypotheses

To answer research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H01. There is no relationship between the TEQ and the participants' scores on the SRT.

H03. There is no relationship between factors of the TEQ and the participants' scores on the SRT.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms:

Some concepts used in this research are defined to make them liable to empirical investigation.

Evaluation: Evaluation is a process involving the analysis of the "value" of course book. It deals with "making judgment" about the textbook effects on people using it, i.e., teachers and learners (Tomlinson, 2003). Hrehovcik (2002) defined textbook evaluation as a systematic analysis to identify textbook effectiveness through objective criteria.

L2 Reading: L2 reading is a combination of skills and abilities that individuals bring to bear as they begin to read. To put it in other words, L2 reading is considered as: a rapid and automatic process, an interacting process, a flexible and strategic process, a purposeful process, and a linguistic process (Garbe, 1996, cited in Garbe, 2002).

Textbook: Richards and Schmit (2002) defined textbook as follows:

> A book on a specific subject used as a teaching learning guide, especially in a school or college. Textbooks for foreign language are often part of a graded series covering multiple skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) or deal with a single skill (e. g. reading). (p.550)

1.6. Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited in several ways: first, although it was strived to include a large and representative sample of university teachers , i.e. 530 or 10 cases for each item of a given questionnaire (Khodadady, & Hashemi, 2010), only 80 instructors took part in the study. Therefore, a larger sample size would definitely be more favorable and representative in future projects. Second, University teachers of various universities were encouraged to take part in this study; however, because of voluntarily nature of study it was impossible to achieve random sampling. Third, since university teachers did not cooperate with researcher, the achievement test was only administered at the end of course, it is so desirable to administer it both at the beginning and end of course to control the background knowledge of students. Finally, in this study the researcher has approached the relationship between textbook evaluation and students' achievement; however, other related issues such as students' interest can also be explored in related projects.

Chapter Two

Review of

Literature

2.0. Introduction

In this section, attitudes toward textbook will be explored. Moreover, proposed evaluation checklists and criteria, will be investigated both theoretically and empirically. Finally, functions and types of textbook evaluation, and also reading approaches which influenced reading textbooks, will be reviewed.

2.1. Textbook

2.1.1. Attitudes toward Textbook

Textbook as "a book that teaches a particular subject and that is used especially in schools and colleges" (Wehmeier, 2000) is regarded as "the visible heart of any ELT program" by Sheldon (1988, p.237). Kim and Hall (2002) also signified the fatal role of textbook in English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom where it provides the primary form of linguistic input (as cited in Vellenga, 2004). Richards (n. d.) mentioned the following advantages for textbooks:

> In some situations they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. They may provide the basis for the content of lessons, the balance of skills taught and kinds of language practice the students take part in. In other situations they serve primarily to supplement the teacher′s instructions. For learners the textbook may provide the major source of contact they have with the language apart from input provided by the teacher. In the case of inexperienced teacher, textbooks may also serve as a form of teacher training – they provide ideas on how to plan and teach lessons as well as formats that teachers can use. (p.1)

One of the studies which specified the constructive role of textbook in the language classroom is "Textbook Materials and Foreign Language Teaching: Perspectives from the Classroom" by Allen (2008). The findings of this research in FL learning supported the notion that textbooks function as important tools mediating FL teaching and classroom learning activity. The following three variables framed the study: (1) teachers′ attitudes toward textbook in FL learning, (2) the way teachers use textbooks, and (3) the limitation of textbook in FL instruction. It was a case study over a ten-week period and comprised 12 teachers of elementary level French and Italian language courses. Analyzing data,

collected through interview and a questionnaire, indicated that textbooks are regarded as "common point of reference for teachers and students, a source of material for activities and contexts for framing instruction, and a tool for the teaching and learning of FL vocabulary and grammar" (p.7). As an answer to the second question, 10 participants mentioned textbooks as the main source of activity used after presentation of new material. Finally, not being effective for student activities was considered as the most significant limitation of textbooks.

Although ELT textbooks play a very important role in many language classrooms, recently there have been lots of controversies throughout the ELT profession on the actual role of textbooks in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL).

Some researchers believe that textbooks destructively deskill teachers, and rob them of their capacity to think professionally and respond to their students. Similarly, several researchers (e. g., Leiskin, n. d.; Mustafa & Cullingford, 2008; Wallace, 2006) found negative results about textbooks.

One study which seriously attacked textbook use, for example, is "The Text, Dead or Alive: Expanding Textual Repertoires in the Adult ESOL Classroom" by Wallace (2006). He argued that ESL students could be encouraged to be as expert interpreters of the classroom texts rather than passive consumers. To emphasize the cultural-based nature of text Wallace (2006) referred to a highly controversial cartoon depicting Prophet Mohammad, published in a Denmark Journal in 2005, which in Islamic countries "was judged in part on the basis of authorial intention to cause offence" (p.4) while it did not arouse any demonstration in European countries .Therefore, Wallace (2006) recommended that the context of text must be explored by ethnographic approaches investigating familiar settings as a measure of detachment from situation in which they were immersed. He also criticized textbooks of being content-less as well as context-less, that is, since textbooks are designed for anonymous global readership, readers of FL textbooks are frequently puzzled in a cultural no man's land. Finally it was concluded that everyday texts of contemporary social life "permeated by diverse cultural histories & complex intertexuality" (p.16), so critical artifacts which are brought to class by students can propose an alternative to avoid stiffness of textbooks.

Another negative point leveled at textbooks is that textbooks are time-consuming, and they limit teachers' use of different teaching styles and equipment in the class. In

"Teacher Autonomy and Centralized Control: The Case of Textbooks", Mustafa and Cullingford (2008) studied "teachers' attitude toward using textbook as a means of understanding" (p.1), and investigated whether teachers had freedom in choosing different teaching methods in the classroom or not. Questionnaire and semi-structural interviews were used to collect data. The questionnaire sample was 1242 students, 98 Islamic education teachers, 46 head teachers, and the interview sample was 138 students, 46 Islamic teachers, 46 Head teachers and 3 principales. A number of factors such as shortage of material needed, lack of training to use equipment, class size, excessive workload of teachers and the pressure of getting through textbook, as the most important one, were cited as hindering the use of different methods in classroom. The majority of teachers being interviewed expressed that employing "any equipment side by side with textbook (overloaded with topics)" (p.6) was impossible. The researchers recommended decreasing amount of content of textbook, providing equipment, and training teachers to use equipment.

The findings of Leiskin (n. d.) on textbook in the paper entitled "Potential Student Decision Making in Academic ESL Grammar Textbooks" are less radical. He investigated the relationship between textbook features and students' decision making. The study was (1) to understand the potential control ESL students have over their learning process, (2) to interpret data, and (3) to suggest textbook features influencing ESL teachers' decision. Leiskin (n. d.) selected four grammar textbooks (*Fundamental of English Grammar*, *Grammar in Use*, *Focus on Grammar*, and *Mosaic One*) as material of his study. It was found that while the control of students over learning condition was insignificant in all textbooks (mean 20%), textbook was the primary controller of learning condition, for example, in choosing a task, initiating, and terminating a task (average mean of 65-80%). The tasks used in all books (e. g. 70% of tasks in Mosaic One) asked students to give correct answers to questions like robots, so there was no opportunity for creative guessing. Interpreting the results was limited because it was not obvious whether teachers and students tactically accepted the controlling features in the textbook or not. He recommended that "teachers need to mediate a textbook's potential to control if the goal is to create learners who have some control over their own learning" (p.1).

Because of such deficiencies of textbooks, certain textbooks are recommended, for example, *Big Books* are recommended by Al-Hooqani (n. d.) to improve students' reading

competency. In "Survey of Teachers: Attitude toward Big Books", Al-Hooqani (n. d.) examined "the extent to which the use of textbooks to promote shared reading was a practice used by a group of teachers of Oman", and also "teachers' attitude to this instructional strategy (using *Big Books*)" (p.1). Data were collected through questionnaire which was administered to 158 teachers, who had all studied a module on teaching English through stories, teaching the full range of secondary classes in Oman. The findings showed that 43% of the teachers designed big books, and 34% of the male teachers who designed big books used them, while the corresponding figure for females was 50%. Interestingly, answers of all teachers, even teachers who did not use big books, when they were asked whether they felt big books were useful in reading or not were yes due to the benefits of big books such as variety, enhancing learners' vocabulary, awareness of language features, and motivation. Those teachers who had not used big books mentioned time constraint, language level, lack of big books and large classes as obstacles to use them.

A new product, *Electronic Textbook*, has also been introduced to the realm of TEFL to compensate deficiencies of textbook. To test the efficiency of electronic textbooks, Luik and Mikk (2008) conducted a research to investigate the relationship between different characteristics of electronic textbooks and achievement of high- and low-achieving students of four Estonian schools. Firstly, students filled pretest, then they were given instructions to read, and after reading, they filled posttest. While 12 studied features (such as number and type of analogies, graphics and variability in navigation…) had positive correlation coefficient with the achievement of high achieving students, 25 features (such as examples, self-assessment…) had high correlation coefficient with achievement of low-achieving ones, for example, large number of graphics only hindered the learning of low-achieving students, while increased learning of high-achieving ones. He explained the findings by "different learning orientation of low and high achieving students" (p.8), to put in other words, low- achievers tried to cram the material, while high- achievers tried to understand the material.

Whether or not a teacher accepts the value of textbooks, we think since textbooks serve as the foundation of classroom instruction and are still in demand, the selection of accurate, factual, and up-to-date science textbooks is essential. Significance of accurate selection is well reflected in the conclusion reached by Kitao (n. d.):

Since teachers and learners tend to rely heavily on them, materials often control the instruction. Materials which are appropriate for a particular class need to have an underlying instructional philosophy, approach, method and technique which suit the students and their needs. They should have correct, natural, current and Standard English. (p. 5)

2.1.2. Textbook and Language Achievement

Textbooks are ubiquitous part of the classroom; without textbooks, "students and teachers are like slaves to absolute knowledge and methodology". Because of the heavy use of and dependence on textbooks, positive relationship between the provision and quality of textbooks and students' achievement is suggested. Some studies (e.g., Ampiah, 2008; Lockheed, & Hanushek, 1987) prove such a positive relationship.

Ampiah (2008) studied how good performing schools provided quality education in the classroom. He conducted an exploratory study in three private and three public basic schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The study was restricted to classroom interactions. 26 teachers and 6 headteachers whose classes were observed participated in the study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw 128 pupils for interview. Headteachers' questionnaire, teachers' questionnaire, pupils' interview schedule, observation schedule, and document review were used to gather data. It was concluded that "the lack of textbooks in the public, rural and urban schools places such schools behind the private schools where pupils had their own textbooks and therefore had access to them in and outside the classroom "(p. 35).

Lockheed and Hanushek (1987) also studied the cost-effectiveness of several educational intervention regarding 15 empirical studies. Evidence regarding the effectiveness of different educational inputs on student learning was drawn from three sources:"(a) experiments, in which variations are controlled by the experimenter, (b) surveys, in which variations occur naturally, or (c) descriptive reports from more anecdotal sources"(p.18). It got clear that textbooks were more cost-effective than "(a) not having textbooks in Nicaragua and the Philippines, (b) teacher education in Thailand and Brazil, and (c) a variety of other educational infrastructure and "software" inputs in Brazil"(p. 22).