



An Investigation over Iranian Middle School English Textbook

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Abstract

This paper has aimed to evaluate and analyze the Iranian English textbook as the material for students in second year of middle schools by taking the opinions of English teachers into account. The research was done by administering a standard questionnaire to 60 English teachers. The researchers evaluated and analyzed the textbook via different ideas about the book from English teachers. The collected data were analyzed by Chi Square. The data analysis revealed that the hypotheses of the study are proved. The results indicated that the textbook did not conform to international criteria; and also the teachers' ideas were totally negative about the textbook.

Keywords: English Textbook, Middle School, Evaluation, International Criteria, Education System

Introduction

English the language of worldwide communication is being viewed as one of the most useful subjects in educational curriculum. So many attempts have been made to devise the most efficient and effective ways of teaching English; as result, much greater time is now spent on learning English than any time before (Shoa Hasani, Rahimy, & Arjmandi, 2014). The relation between textbooks and language teaching is the issue which has always been commented. It has a long history because the quality of teaching and learning has been of interest to all people in general and for professionals in specific. Keeping textbooks as learning source up-to-date requires educational materials receive evaluation and revision time to time.

Sheldon (1988) has offered several reasons for textbook evaluation. He suggests that the selection of a language textbook often signals an important administrative and educational decision. A thorough evaluation, therefore, would enable the managerial and teaching staff of an institution to discriminate between all of the available textbooks on the market (cited in Abdollahi & M., 2001).

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) identified three ways in which textbooks can help in times of educational change: first as a vehicle for teacher and learner training; second, they provide support and relief from the burden of looking for materials; and third they give a complete image of what the change will look like. Evaluation of textbooks also considered to function as a kind of educational judgment. In addition, Hutchinson (1987) believes evaluation is a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose.

Review of the Literature

In contemporary society, education may be viewed as comprised of two basic elements as formal education and informal education (Shoa Hasani, 2014). Formal education which this paper deals with occurs in a more structured educational setting that representative of this element would be school in which the textbook is its necessary element. There is a vast body of literature on textbook evaluation in different contexts; different authors and researchers have employed different textbook evaluation schemes or checklists to evaluate different textbooks and materials. Litz (2000), for

example, tried to evaluate a textbook called English “Firsthand 2” (EF2); He concluded that EF2 is a relatively new addition to the vast array of ELT materials that are currently available on the market. While perhaps not as well known as other prominent series of textbooks, EF2 has many notable and worthwhile characteristics. For example, the textbook package conceived while it contains a wide variety of useful supplementary materials. The book is also very attractive and organized in a clear, logical, and coherent manner. In addition, EF2 reflects a multi-skills syllabus, and it manages to integrate the four language skills without neglecting other important aspects of ELT such as vocabulary development. Despite its strengths, EF2 had some shortcomings; many of the activities, for instance, were repetitive, failed to encourage truly meaningful practice, promote realistic discourse, lead to the internalization of language.

Content analysis could aid in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in textbooks which already used in “Interchange third edition” that also been evaluated according to Littlejohn’s framework in a study carried out by Sahragard, Rahimi & Zaremoayeddi (2008, cited in Alemi and Sadehvandi 2012). The study was set to find out the values of the newest version of Interchange in particular, the correspondence between the newly developed and widely used Interchange textbooks, third edition, and their stipulated objectives, and the strengths and weaknesses of the series. The findings of study indicated that Interchange series (third edition) own several pedagogical values nonetheless, it suffers from certain drawbacks. The tasks of the series could be considered productive with regard to promotion of communicative competence and promoting in giving learners the opportunity to personalize the newly learnt pieces of language through production. On the other hand, the series lack of auditory and visual activities could render disadvantage since it does not exploit sensory channels in the course of learning (Alemi & Sadehvandi, 2012).

Kayapinar (2009, cited in Alemi and Sadehvandi 2012) for example, in a study of two textbook packages, namely “Opportunities” and “New English File”, by incorporating 134 teachers’ survey results, pointed out that there was not overall positive views of a course book package among teachers. The course books must be adapted in a way to meet learners’ needs and interest at nationwide scope. He suggests that the materials used in the teaching process should have evaluated on a regular basis to stay renewed.

Litz (2000) says English language instruction has many important components but the essential constituents to ESL/EFL classrooms and programs are the textbooks and instruction materials that often are used by language instructors. The preparation of any textbook requires a systematic evaluation. In order to reflect the aims of the curriculum, a number of factors should be taken into consideration. Among these factors, teachers’ thoughts and experiences are valuable while preparing a textbook for a certain group or community. While designing and organizing foreign language textbooks, the situation is similar. Moreover, language teachers’ observations and thoughts about the students’ learning process are important because language learning is process oriented and requires a considerable amount of time (Aytug, 2007). Garinger (2002) states that textbooks play pivotal role in language classrooms in all types of educational Institutions, public schools, colleges, and language schools all over the world.

Hypothesis of the Study

H¹: Iranian English textbook for second grade of middle schools do not conform to international criteria.

H²: The ideas of English teachers are negative about the textbook.

Method

In this study, the participants were 60 male and female TEFL instructors in Tehran area who had enough experience in teaching ELT, they taught English in middle schools; their age ranged 30 to 50. The research consists of two parts: the first part, analyzing Iranian middle school English textbook for second grade students in Iranian educational system prepared by Iranian Ministry of Education; and second part taking 60 English teachers views about the book. In order to carry out this research, it was necessary to have a questionnaire to be administered to 60 English teachers in order to take their ideas as professional bodies. The standard questionnaire adopted from Adelifar and Arjmandi (2014), included 30 5-Likert scale items ranging from agree to strongly disagree to test reading, grammar,

vocabulary and overall the content of the textbooks based on experts opinions. Data gathered from questionnaires analyzed by Chi Square using SPSS package.

This work has done by the help of English teachers in Tehran area. The population of teachers consisted of 35 females and 25 males having high experience in language teaching. The administration of the questionnaires to 60 teachers was at the beginning of educational year. By receiving teachers' ideas about Iranian English textbook as data, researcher analyzed each item to get sensitive results, and then the textbook compared according to the international criteria by taking the standards of Garinger into account. Criteria were divided into 4 main categories as shown in table 1.

Table 1

Garinger's international criteria for textbooks

A. Program and Course
The textbook supports the goals and curriculum of the program.
The appropriateness of the text for the intended learners is identified.
Sufficient number of the course objectives addressed by the textbook.
The textbook was suitable for learners of this age group and background.
The textbook reflects learners' preferences in terms of layout, design, and organization.
The textbook should be sensitive to the cultural background and interests of the students.
The objectives of the textbook matched with the objectives of the course.
B. Skills
The skills presented in the textbook were appropriate to the course.
The textbook provides learners with adequate middle as they are acquiring these skills.
The skills that presented in the textbook include a wide range of cognitive skills that will be challenging to learners.
C. Exercises and Activities
The exercises and activities in the textbook promote learners' language development.
There is a balance between controlled and free exercises.
The exercises and activities reinforce what students have already learned and represent a progression from simple to more complex.
The exercises and activities varied in format so that they will continually motivate and challenge learners.
The exercises and activities in the textbook contribute to learners' language acquisition.
The exercises balanced in their format, containing both controlled and free practice.
The exercises are varied and challenging.
D. Practical Concerns
The textbook is available.
The textbook can be obtained in a timely Manner.
The textbook is cost-effective.

Results

The goal of study was to investigate the analysis of Iranian English textbook at middle school the second grade. This study is a kind of both qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative study led the researchers to come with the explanations about the textbooks as shown in table 2.

Table 2
Description of Qualitative evaluation

<p>There is need to use multimedia software and videos for better learning cause the main emphasis of textbooks were on writing and grammar and not speaking skill. Textbooks should have a supplementary workbook to engage students. Conversations are intangible so it should be managed in a more realistic fashion. Sentences are irrelevant to everyday life; it is better to use real life situations. The volume of the book is good. The explanations of the grammar are good. The font type of the textbook is appropriate. Readings should be supported by interesting images following suitable questions. Pictures and images are in a childish fashion. Pictures and text conversations in different lessons seem unrealistic. There is no entertainment and interesting activities in the book. There are no multimedia CD and tape in books. Some exercises and conversations are not applied below the activities.</p>

Also the quantitative study which is resulted from chi square reveals that 73.33 percent of teachers agree that the content of the textbook has many problems; while 76.66 percent agree the content of each lesson is not interesting. Amongst all participants of study 48.88 percent were disagree that the appropriate training with regard to the content of each lesson is included. 75 percent of ideas show that textbooks have not appropriate flexibilities and 66.66 percent agree that textbooks should have a workbook. near 66.66 percent of subjects agree that textbooks have not a lot of colorful and interesting pictures, meanwhile 83.33 percent agree that the pictures of textbooks are not fascinating. An interesting point with regard to images of the book is that 28.33 percent of teachers disagree that the pictures are in the books were not interrelated with the text of the lesson. And also most of them, 93.33 percent agree that textbooks should have an educational CD rom.

Discussion

Many studies have been investigated around the topic in realm of evaluation and content analysis in order to propose new materials as a standard source for different educational settings. The hypotheses of the study which connoted the English textbook for second grade of middle schools in Iran does not conform to international criteria, and the ideas of English teachers are negative about the textbook are proved. Some evidences came to justify the proof of these hypotheses. First, the textbooks lack many elements as mentioned before. Second evidence to justify the proof of the hypothesis was the results came from questionnaires, which showed that the ideas of teachers are negative about textbooks. Third, the textbooks are completely different with the international criteria as Garinger believed.

H₁: Iranian English textbook for second grade of middle schools does not conform to international criteria

H₂: The ideas of English teachers are negative about the English textbook for second grade of middle schools.

Conclusion

After a long investigation, the researchers believed that the investigated textbook as the material for middle school students in Iran had problems in goals which did not conform to Garinger's criteria. Actually, items of textbook in regarding skills, exercises and activities did not match to the international criteria. In other words, the researchers came to this point that the textbook was far from to international criteria while teachers' ideas about textbooks did not seem positive at all. So it is strongly advisable that the textbook in this level (Second grade-Middle School) should probably be renewed as Kayapinar (2009) suggests. All EFL textbooks should be adapted in a way that meet learners' needs and interests. A nearly published work by Adelifar and Arjmandi (2014) is in

line with the outcome of current research in the case of lacks of textbooks in Iran. Also Kayapinar in his work adapting the same method to extract teachers' views found that the investigated course book did not meet experts' expectations as a suitable educational material (2009). We can conclude that when designers want to prepare textbooks at first step should analyze the needs of students in that special setting; second be aware of students backgrounds and general language abilities then to renew the materials occasionally to be up to date in contrast to learners overall understandings of world knowledge.

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