

language studies.

Finally, the responses implied that the teachers are hardly satisfied with these textbooks and they are not likely to choose it again for teaching purposes, if they did have the option.

Table1 below summarizes the ranking of each category, along with their means as obtained from the statistical data.

Table1. Ranking of the questionnaire's categories

Rank	Category	Mean
1	Layout and Design	8.21
2	Practical Considerations	5.16
3	Language Type	3.77
4	Subject and Content	3.49
5	Activities	3.27
6	Skills	3.11

Conclusion and Implications

In the realm of language teaching and learning, there is little doubt on the significant role of textbooks, since in most cases both teachers and students rely on these textbooks. Besides, in Iranian junior high schools, there is not any option for teaching EFL materials except using the textbooks offered by Iranian Ministry of Education. The present study demonstrated that teachers are not generally satisfied with the EFL textbooks which are taught in junior high schools, believing that these books are not concerned with students' needs and desire nor are they compatible with the criteria of an EFL textbook. Generally speaking, it can be concluded that English language textbooks that are currently taught at junior high schools in Iran do not meet the teachers' expectations.

The findings of this study may offer insights for those involved in educational administration and materials development, especially those authors who work in the Ministry of Education

to re-evaluate the current textbooks used in junior high schools and provide revised versions of them with sufficient supplementary sources available for both teachers and students. The results can also be useful for syllabus designers and curriculum planners to consider teachers' expectations as well as students' interests and needs while developing EFL materials.

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and productive skills and provide an appropriate balance between the two sets of skills.

As the junior high school textbooks are designed based on Audiolingualism, they provide opportunities for oral practice but the probability is that because teachers have not been trained to teach audiolingual materials they revert to grammar translation and therefore they tend to change the oral activities to written ones. This point is central and should be considered especially in teacher education programs.

E. Language type

The mean composite score of the respondents is 3.77, and the standard deviation is 2.45, which indicate that there is a general tendency among teachers to view the language of the textbooks as neither authentic nor representative of different registers and accents.

In the next group of items, the teachers commented on the language used in the textbooks. As the data indicated, the language used in the textbooks was judged as not being realistic and representative of real life language use. In fact, it was observed that, seemingly, no real life context is provided in the textbooks and the language used in the textbooks is mostly formal and there are no samples of language that may be used in informal situations.

Another important weak point of the textbooks was found to be that there is very little emphasis on language functions. The focus of these textbooks appears to be more on language usage rather than language use. Furthermore, there is no diversity in terms of register and accent.

All in all, it seems that the teachers tend to perceive the language type used

in junior high school textbooks as not appropriate and authentic. These results are in line with what Yarmohammadi (2002) and Abdollahi (2011) found about the authenticity of senior high school textbooks.

F. Subject and content

With respect to the subject and content of junior high school textbooks, the composite score and standard deviation were 3.49 and 2.32 respectively. This entails that teachers tend to see the subject and content of these textbooks as neither interesting and challenging nor generally realistic. Just like other parts of the textbooks, subject and content of these books turned out to be lacking many of the criteria mentioned in the questionnaire from the teachers' perspectives. The subject and content of these textbooks were reported to be neither relevant to students' need nor interesting and challenging for them.

Moreover, it was evidenced that the teachers see little variety in the subject and content of the books. The teachers' point of view was neutral toward culturally biased texts and negative stereotypes.

G. Other considerations

The last part of the questionnaire is regarded as the conclusion, since in this part the teachers were asked for their overall views toward junior high school English textbooks.

According to their responses, most of the teachers believed that current English textbooks are not appropriate for language-learning objectives followed by the Ministry of Education. These textbooks seem not to be suitable for homogeneous, co-educated classes and they do not motivate students to further their English

the classrooms are teacher-centered and learning is believed to take place as a result of drills and memorization. This might reflect the observation that there is too little emphasis on meaning-focused activities, student-centeredness and fluency in the textbooks under study. The teachers' responses also confirm this conclusion.

In the same vein, the majority of the teachers believed that the textbooks do not provide a balance of activities, nor are their activities communicative and meaningful. Also, there appears to be no room for pair and group work and the grammatical points and vocabulary items are not introduced in motivating and realistic contexts. In addition, both language types and pictures that are used in these activities seem artificial and boring. This may reduce the creativity and originality of the responses produced by the students. However, few teachers agreed that textbook activities could be modified or supplemented easily. This could be attributed to the fact that they have to follow the activities provided in the textbooks due to the constraints imposed by the exam system. These findings are in line with Riazi's and Aryasholouh's (2007) study, where only one percent of vocabulary exercises were categorized as consciousness-raising as these types of exercises lend themselves to modification. Regarding such modifications, Azizifar et al. (2010) suggested that there should be

The majority of the teachers believed that the textbooks do not provide a balance of activities, nor are their activities communicative and meaningful. Also, there appears to be no room for pair and group work and the grammatical points and vocabulary items are not introduced in motivating and realistic contexts

enough opportunities for the learners to practice the language they are learning communicatively.

D. Skills

The composite mean of the respondents regarding the skills is 3.11, and the standard deviation is 2.06 for these textbooks. The English textbooks which are used in Iranian junior high schools seem to be based on the Audio Lingual Method. Speaking is presented just in the form of pronunciation patterns and memorization of dialogues. This can be

regarded as one of the most important weak points of these textbooks, as asserted by the respondent teachers. In fact, most teachers agreed that the textbooks pay no attention to essential skills and sub-skills, nor is the practice of individual skills integrated into the practice

of other skills. The same observations have earlier been made as for the senior high school English textbooks. As Riazi and Mossallanejad (2010) concluded, the main focus of senior high school textbooks is on the development of lower-order cognitive skills. Yarmohammadi (2002) also mentioned that ignoring oral skills is one of the shortcomings of senior high school textbooks. However, it is suggested that teachers can compensate for these shortcomings by supplementing the textbook with some activities that are designed to foster both receptive

for in evaluating a textbook is the approach followed by the author(s) as to teaching. This could not be evaluated as for the textbooks under study though, since there are no notations on the author's viewpoints toward language leaning and methodology.

However, it was observed that the teachers tend to see the textbooks mostly in favor of structural approaches to language teaching and maintain that particular emphasis is placed on grammatical structures, lexical development and reading skills, having little focus on establishing communicative competence. The responses thus implied that most of the teachers did not favour this approach toward language learning and teaching.

B. Layout and design

Given the second category of items, it was observed that the textbooks do not provide a detailed outline at the beginning of each lesson and it seems that the authors have limited themselves to the table of contents at the beginning of the books. The obtained mean and standard deviation for this section are 8.21 and 2.36 respectively. The responses showed that most teachers believed that the textbooks' design and layout is not appropriate and clear. In fact, different parts of the textbooks are organized as follows. Each lesson starts with a dialogue. The second part of each lesson is grammatical patterns followed by exercises and drills (most of them related to grammatical points). And finally we have pronunciation patterns and readings. However, most teachers asserted that they tend to start teaching with vocabulary and then come to the dialog and grammar. This finding suggests that the design of the textbook

does not provide enough clues about the way each section of the lesson should be taught.

Regarding vocabulary, however, most of the teachers agreed that there was an adequate list or glossary of vocabulary items. Each junior high school English textbook has a glossary at the end of the book.

Besides, each of the textbooks has two review sections, one in the middle and one at the end of the book. Teachers' point of view toward these review sections and exercises was found to be neutral. However it was observed by the researchers that these sections are just repetitions of each lesson's exercises and do not provide learners with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in new contexts.

Regarding the teachers' manual guidelines, most teachers believed that the guidelines provided in the teachers' manual is not useful. One of the important goals of language learning is to improve learners' communicative competence, however, as also confirmed by the results; these textbooks tend to stick to grammatical points and reading skills. Moreover, based on the teachers' responses, the materials' objectives are apparent neither to the teacher nor to the students.

C. Activities

The size of the composite mean is 3.27 and that of the standard deviation is 2.08 for junior high school textbooks. Given the third category, i.e. the activities, the data revealed that the textbooks under study are viewed as being deficient in terms of the number of activities that encourage communicative practice. This is corroborated by the fact that most of

They were from different cities of South Khorasan province, Iran. For the purpose of the current study, three Iranian EFL textbooks entitled “Right Path to English I, II, and III” written by Iranian authors and prescribed by Iran’s Ministry of Education for the junior high school level, were evaluated.

To conduct the evaluation, a textbook evaluation questionnaire developed primarily by Litz (2000) was used. The questionnaire consists of 40 items (statements), coming in several categories each of which addresses a certain aspect of the textbooks. The categories include practical considerations, layout and design of the book, activities, skills, language type, subject and content of the book. Moshfeghi and Ajabshir (2011) reported the reliability of the teacher-version of this questionnaire to be 0.91, obtained by means of test-retest method which implies a high degree of reliability.

The questionnaire was administered to 35 junior high school teachers either in paper or via e-mail. The participants were required to express their level of (dis) agreement with the 40 statements on a ten-point Likert scale (ranging from highly disagree to highly agree).

To provide the answer to the research question, descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each of the items, using SPSS 16 (statistical package for the social sciences).

Results and Discussion

In the first step, the Cronbach’s alpha (α) was calculated for the questionnaire to ensure the reliability of the scale. The overall reliability of all the 40 individual statements of the questionnaire was 0.96, which is regarded as an acceptable

indicator of reliability. In the following sections, the findings based on an analysis of the data collected using the questionnaire are presented and discussed for each of the categories on which the teachers were asked to express their opinions.

A. Practical considerations

The composite mean and standard deviation of this section for these textbooks are 5.16 and 2.31, respectively. Undoubtedly, an important point to be considered in choosing a textbook is its cost. In this regard, the data showed that the teachers did not find the textbook too expensive. The other criterion which is regarded as rather important is the textbook accessibility. That is to say, the selected textbooks should be currently in print and readily available in the market. As also approved by the respondents in this study, most of the books published by Iranian Ministry of Education are easily available in the market. Yet another point that is worth considering is that the textbooks should be recently revised. Taking this into account, it was observed that although the latest version of the textbooks being investigated for the purpose of this study were published in 2010, their content, subject and even activities have not changed dramatically in comparison to the previous editions. This could probably be the reason why most teachers tended to disagree with statement 3.

It was also confirmed by the data that the textbooks contain supplementary materials like teacher guide or audiotapes. However, they are not accessible. This is considered as one of the shortcomings of the textbooks.

An additional criterion to be accounted

individual words are more important for students than the combinations of words.

In another study, Jahangard (2007) critically evaluated English textbooks in Iranian public high schools. His findings are worthwhile to mention since all sections of EFL textbooks were scrutinized regarding ten different criteria proposed by various authors to conduct a thorough evaluation.

Elsewhere, using Tucker's (1975) textbook evaluation model, Azizifar et al. (2010) carried out an evaluation of two series of ELT textbooks used to teach English to Iranian students at junior and senior high schools. They tried to show how pronunciation points, content and grammar are dealt with in each series. The results suggested that there should be enough opportunity for the learners to practice the language they are learning communicatively.

In a similar vein, Riazi and Mossallanejad (2010) used Bloom's taxonomy to investigate the types of learning objectives represented in Iranian senior high school and pre-university English textbooks. The researchers concluded that the main objectives as followed in the textbooks revolved around the development of lower-order cognitive skills. In other words, regarding the cognitive levels in the textbooks, lower-order components were dominant in the high school textbooks.

Yet another study was carried out by Abdollahi (2011) on the authenticity of Iranian English textbooks for schools, based on Dougills' textbook evaluation checklist. The results showed that the textbooks lack the authenticity of natural English in terms of content and presentation. Additionally the passages were found not to be attractive for

students and tended to avoid cultural and communicative points.

Amini (2012) also attempted to examine the extent and types of gender bias in two of the Iranian high school textbooks (books 2 & 3). He investigated sexism in five categories of visibility, first, generic masculine constructions, sex-linked occupations and activities. Taking into consideration both texts and illustrations of the books, it was evidenced that sexism is still practiced in Iranian EFL materials.

Looking from a different perspective, Cheng and Biglar Beigi (2012) focused on the religion and education with particular reference to EFL textbooks which are taught in Iranian junior high schools. They scanned Iranian secondary-level EFL textbooks prescribed by the Ministry of Education to find religious concepts in the form of linear and nonlinear content. The findings of this research showed that religion is not overtly depicted nor is it explicitly taught. At the same time, EFL textbooks were viewed as not exposing students to the culture of the language that is being taught.

Most of these studies have evaluated junior high school English textbooks with regard to various models, frameworks, and checklists and few ones have considered teachers' perspectives toward junior high school English textbooks as the target of their evaluation. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to evaluate English textbooks in Iranian junior high schools from teachers' point of view.

Method

The participants of this study were 35 Iranian EFL teachers (both male and female) who were teaching at junior high school level. Their teaching experiences were within the range of 2 to 30 years.

Introduction

There is general agreement on the crucial role played by textbooks in the process of language teaching and learning. In EFL contexts such as Iran, English textbooks and textbook evaluation assume a more important role. In Iran, the Ministry of Education has the responsibility of designing textbooks for schools. Due to the fact that English language is one of the compulsory subjects in the Iranian school curriculum and most students start encountering English as a foreign language from junior high schools, it becomes important to evaluate the available English textbooks for this purpose. On the other hand, since the primary users of textbooks are the teachers, a comprehensive evaluation can only be carried out when the teachers and their view points are also taken into consideration.

Most of the studies have evaluated senior high school English textbooks and few ones have considered junior high school English textbooks as the target of their evaluation. Therefore, the present study was an attempt to evaluate English textbooks in Iranian junior high schools from teachers' point of view.

Review of literature

In the realm of textbook evaluation, different authors and researchers have conducted a vast body of studies in different contexts. In this regard, they have used various textbook evaluation schemes, models or checklists for evaluating different textbooks or materials. Similarly, many studies have been done on textbook evaluation in the Iranian context, the majority being focused on the evaluation of senior high school textbooks

and only few ones on junior high school textbooks.

Among all the studies done on various course books, Yarmohammadi (2002) listed a number of the shortcomings of the senior high school textbooks. He concluded that lacking authenticity, ignoring oral skills and using English and Persian names interchangeably are among the weaknesses of these books.

Elsewhere, Ansary and Babaii (2003) performed two types of analyses to examine the manifestation(s) of sexist attitudes and values in two textbooks (Right Path to English I & II). In their quantitative analysis, they investigated sex visibility in both texts and illustrations and female/male topic presentation in dialogs and reading passages. As for the qualitative part of their analyses, they studied sex-linked job possibilities, sex-based activity types, stereotyped sex, and masculine generic conception. Their results found the books biased in terms of all the categories investigated.

Amalsaleh (2004, cited in Azizifar et al., 2010) also evaluated junior and senior high school textbooks in terms of inclusion of social factors. He used Van Leeuwens' (1996) model and concluded that high school textbooks tended to shape normative views of gender and class relations in which a middle-class urban male was considered to be the norm.

In the same line, Riazi and Aryasholouh (2007) examined the four high school and pre-university English textbooks with a focus on the consciousness-raising aspect of vocabulary exercises. They concluded that only one percent of exercises could be categorized as consciousness-raising. Also, the researchers found that the meanings of

Textbook Evaluation: Teachers' Perspectives

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**Classroom
Techniques**

چکیده

در ایران تدریس زبان انگلیسی به صورت رسمی در قالب مدارس دولتی از دوره راهنمایی شروع می شود و تا مقاطع بالاتر ادامه می یابد. بنابراین، نقش کتب زبان انگلیسی در این دوره آشکار و مبرهن است. هدف مطالعه حاضر ارزیابی سه کتاب آموزش زبان انگلیسی Right Path to English، که هم اکنون در مدارس راهنمایی ایران تدریس می شوند، از دیدگاه معلمان است. برای ارزیابی این کتابها ۳۵ نفر از معلمان راهنمایی پرسش نامه لیتز (۲۰۰۰) را تکمیل کردند. نتایج نشان داد که کتاب های یاد شده انتظارات معلمان را برآورده نمی کنند. استفاده از نتایج این مطالعه می تواند برای مجریان آموزشی، طراحان برنامه درسی، برنامه ریزان و مؤلفان محتوای آموزشی مفید باشد.

کلیدواژه ها: ارزیابی کتاب درسی، مقطع راهنمایی، پرسش نامه لیتز، Right Path to English

Abstract

In Iran, English is taught formally at state schools from junior high school up to the end of secondary education. Thus, the role of English textbooks becomes evident in junior high school. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the three English language textbooks (Right Path to English) currently used at junior high schools in Iran from the junior high school English teachers' point of view. For the evaluation of these textbooks, thirty five junior high school teachers were asked to fill the Litz (2000) questionnaire. The results indicated that the junior high school textbooks were not acceptable from the teachers' point of view. It is concluded in the present paper that the English language textbooks that are currently taught at junior high schools in Iran do not meet the teachers' expectations. Findings of this study may offer insights for those involved in educational administration, syllabus design, curriculum planning, and materials development.

Key Words: textbook evaluation, junior high school, Litz questionnaire, Right Path to English