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An Evaluation of the Third-Grade High School English Textbook: An Iranian Case Study

Mohammad Bagher Shabani (Corresponding author)

IKI university of Qazvin, Qazvin-Iran

Ali Mansoori Nejad M.A.

Ilam university, Ilam-Iran

Abstract. Textbooks are packages with different but interrelated parts. Thus, the selection of textbooks necessitates the meticulous consideration of their weakness and strength; otherwise, the process of learning will bear some inefficiency. The present study intends to depict the educational value of the third-grade English Book in Iranian high schools and its significance in the language program. To this end, the study was equipped with questionnaire adopted from Litz (2001) which entailed four parts. This study included only two parts of this questionnaire, student textbook evaluation form and teacher textbook evaluation form. 233 students (91 male and 142 female) majoring math and science on the third grade in different high schools in Ilam and 5 teachers teaching the English book took part in the study. These questionnaires were handed to the students across 5 schools in Ilam and teacher textbook evaluation forms were given to teachers of these schools. The textbook's defects and effectiveness in Iranian pedagogical system were probed in terms of textbook package (practical consideration), layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content and overall consensus. Relatively shocking overall conclusion revealed that only a low number of teachers and students (2.5 and 4.56 percentage respectively) were eager to choose the textbook to study again.

Key words: EFL, ESL, Textbook Evaluation

Introduction

Role of textbook in EFL/ESL classroom

No one can ignore the paramount function of textbooks in teaching English. They form the basis of any course in the realm of teaching. In fact, English courses are covered by textbooks. Therefore, they should serve ELT courses in the best way as much as possible. In other words, regarding McGrath (2006), "Course book tend to dictate what is taught, in what order and, to some extent, how as well as what learners learn." (P, 171)

In order to accomplish their real aim, text books should take into account different aspects of language teaching. However, we may encounter with textbooks comprising archaic topic and functions. As we have progress in the technology, we should try to accommodate textbooks into the real needs of time. For example, this fact that English language is becoming a lingua franca should reflect itself in designing different English language teaching materials and especially in textbooks. That is, as English broadens its uses and purposes, textbooks and teaching materials should provide enough room for such functions (Reda, 2003).

Regarding the crucial role of ELT textbooks and English globalization, the investigation of textbooks qualification becomes an inevitable task for EFL/ ESL teachers and textbooks authors. The quality and appropriateness of textbooks emerge through such inspections like the present research. What has gone under investigation in this study is the third level English book taught in Iranian high schools. It has tried to hand out a clear picture of the textbook.

Literature review

According to Jacobs and Goatly (2000) any ELT course books should involve some environmental topics. It is more likely that inclusion of such topics in textbooks not only assists the entrance of motivation but also inspires students to participate in these topics out of classes' environment. There, they try to satisfy their competence

in practical situation.

Guariento and Morley (2001) tried to investigate the authenticity in EFL classroom. They considered authenticity through text and task. They believed that in addition to authentic text, learners' responses should also involve to some extent authenticity. In other words, integration of "input and output, reception and production should move toward authenticity."

In Sung kyun Kwan University in Suwon in South Korea, Litz (2001) conducted an evaluation of a textbook entitled English Firsthand 2 (EF2). In this study, he tried to analyze the "pedagogical value and suitability of the textbook" in its environment and instructional program. This investigation described in details that the textbook is not "whole-heartedly" matched with program however it can be effective in hands of experienced teachers and instructors.

Gilmore (2003) carried out a study in order to compare textbook and authentic interactions. He investigated discourse features of seven dialogues in course book between 1981 to 1997. He juxtaposed these features beside the real and authentic interactions so as to find out their differences. The study demonstrated that there were remarkable differences between dialogues and their authentic equivalences with respect to discourse features: length and turn-taking patterns, lexical density, number of false starts and repetitions, pausing, frequency of terminal overlap or latching, and the use of hesitation and devices and back-channeling. The study also explicated that this differences rooted in material writers' tendency toward using dialogues to "reinforce the grammatical points."

Dominguez (2003) in an impressive study evaluated the text book New Interchange Intro, developed by Jack C. Richards, in terms of gender. The purpose of the study was to find any gender stereotypes. The study disclosed that the book is a "sex-fair" ESL/EFL textbook, which is the overriding factor in motivating the learners.

Appraising the usefulness of lexical phrases in three contemporary course books Koprowski (2005) presented a lexical profile of the items designated for each course.

In this study it came out that multi-word lexical items had "limited pedagogical value to learners." (p, 322)

Chen (2006) evaluated an EFL textbook of China for grammar teaching approaches and techniques. After reviewing different points of view regarding teaching grammar, the writer came to this point that the book utilized an implicit language instruction and impressive approaches toward teaching grammar. In short, the researcher claimed that the book had been "well organized" and gained its goal.

Amuseghan, and Olayinka (2007), in a comprehensive essay, implemented an evaluation of "Intensive English" as a course book for English as second language in Nigeria. Their evaluation clarified that the book had been upheld by audio-lingual method with structural and situational approaches in four sections: speech, comprehension, language structure and composition. However presenting a text book covering all needs of students seemed impossible, providing the students with adequately designed supplementary books can compensate the gap in a single textbook. These researchers also announced that teachers of the textbook should be acquainted with psychology of teaching foreign language.

The purpose and significance of the study

The real aim of this study is to evaluate the English textbook of the third year students in Iranian high schools. What has made to carry out such a study is that so far we might not find any comprehensive and pertinent evaluation of the English textbooks instructed in Iranian high schools. Due to such paucity of English textbook evaluation, we have not yet find any prolific changes in English textbooks. The question that is going to be answered is: Does the third grade English textbook appear as a valuable textbook based on a sample of EFL students and English teachers' point of view. In order to elucidate the textbook appropriateness, this investigation is hoped to take place in different aspects such as practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and

content and overall consensus so that the suitability of the textbook in the program becomes clarified. What contributes to the significance of the present study is its wash back in pruning and the ineffective parts of the textbook and fortifying the weak parts through an incisive and comprehensive analysis of textbook. This evaluation of the textbook can play the role of criteria of editing the English textbook in various ways which are indicated above. In other words, this study can mostly assist teachers and the textbook authors to perceive the weakness and strength of the textbook.

Method

Participants

91 male participants, 142 female students, and 5 teachers had taken part in the study. These students all were studying math and biology at third grade in different high schools in Ilam. The English teachers of the course were teaching the intended textbook in these schools. A random sampling strategy had been employed to select five high schools amid all high schools across Ilam. All names of high schools in Ilam had been written on small pieces of papers. Having been mixed together, then, fortuitously five schools had been selected

.

Instrument

In order to carry out the study, it was necessary to have an evaluation checklist whereby the analysis of the textbook can be facilitated. The checklist contained two questionnaires. Although, some scholars believed that there could not be a general checklist for different teaching contexts, most of evaluation checklists shared the same items. Scrutinizing various questionnaires we found out that some were devoted to the physical aspects of textbooks and others to textbooks' pedagogical methods. Few of them had presented a general checklist entailing all necessary considerations of textbooks. What was strongly requested in this study was a

questionnaire which not only coped with physical attributes and teaching methodology but also taken into account the socio-cultural facets. That kind of checklist which could satisfy such purpose was Litz's (2001) well designed questionnaire. Therefore, we have the study equipped with questionnaire adopted from Litz (2001). This questionnaire entails four parts: student textbook evaluation form, teacher textbook evaluation, student profile, and student needs analysis. The first two parts were primary in evaluating the textbook while the other forms were used as supplementary ones. They did not directly contribute to the evaluation of the textbook. Thus, this study included only two parts of this frame work, student textbook evaluation form and teacher textbook evaluation form.

Accordingly, two questionnaires had been exploited: student textbook evaluation form, and teacher textbook evaluation form. As students were not competent enough in using English language, the student textbook evaluation form had been translated in order to facilitate their answering the questions however teacher textbook evaluation form was administered without any translation or modification. These evaluation forms had been attached to the appendixes I and II at the end of the study.

Procedures

These questionnaires were handed to the students across 5 schools in Ilam and teacher textbook evaluation form was given to teachers of these schools. During filling these questionnaires, students were provided with enough explanation about how to fill them.

We had gained overall average per question for students and teachers. Then, the average of female students' answering to each items of questionnaire with that of male students had been compared. Finally a comparative analysis of student textbook evaluation form and teacher textbook evaluation form was conducted.

Results and findings

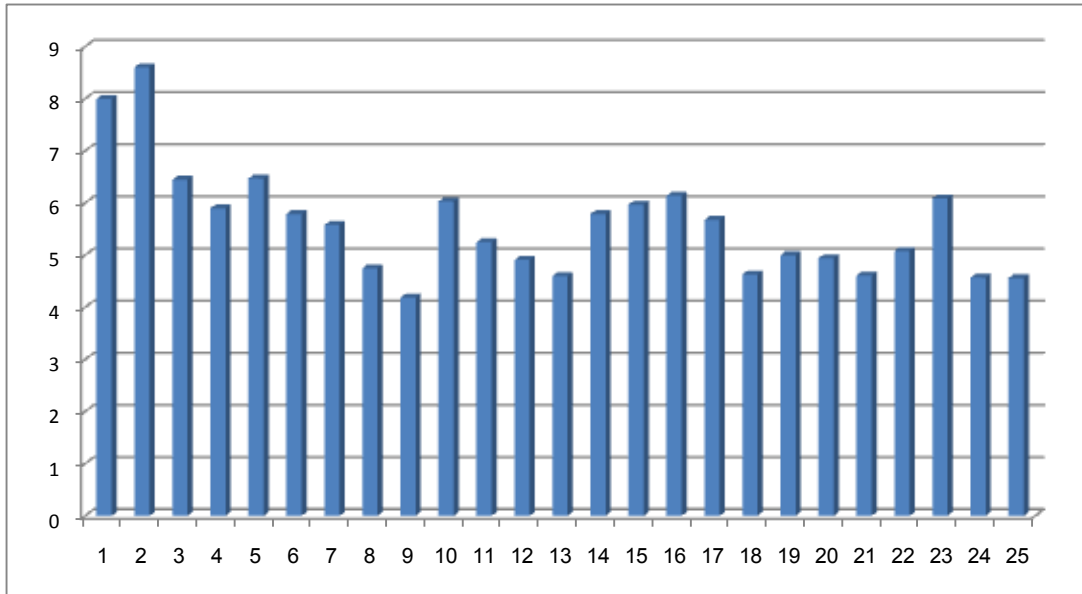
In this part we deal with textbook analysis in different perspectives: textbook package (practical considerations such as textbook price and accessibility), layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, and overall consensus. These parts are discussed based on students and teachers' responses to the questionnaires. Their outlook toward the different traits of the textbook will pave the way to accomplish a meaningful evaluation. To do so, individual sections have been arranged according to their relevant bar graphs

.

Textbook package (practical consideration)

The very beginning point in any text evaluation is to provide enough information about authors and publisher. The authors of this textbook are Beerjandi, Noroozi, and Mahmoodi and the publisher is the Company of Press and Publishing Iranian Educational Books. The textbook includes adequate amount of information about the publisher such as phone number, mailbox, and E-mail (talif@talif.sch.ir), but there is no information about authors, the suggested way of teaching, and the aim of the textbook.

The next point to be discussed is the cost and availability of the text book. As the figures 1 and 2 display, both teachers and students considered it cheap and accessible. However the accessibility and expense were not so much important for both teachers and students.



Figure

1: textbook evaluation from analysis-students' overall average/question

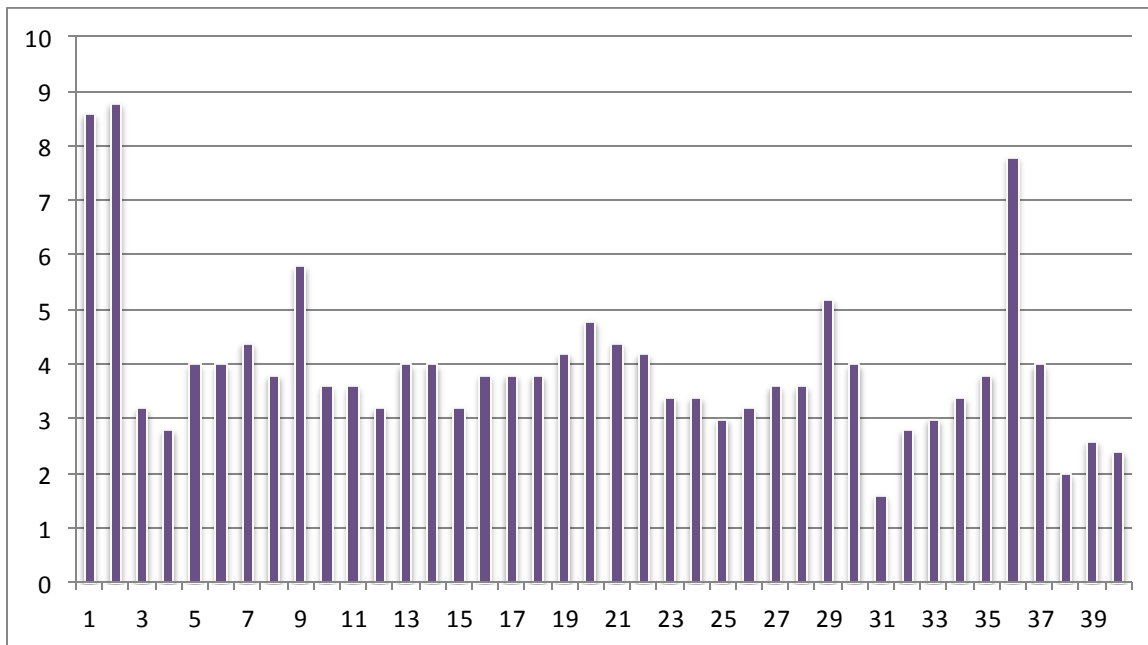


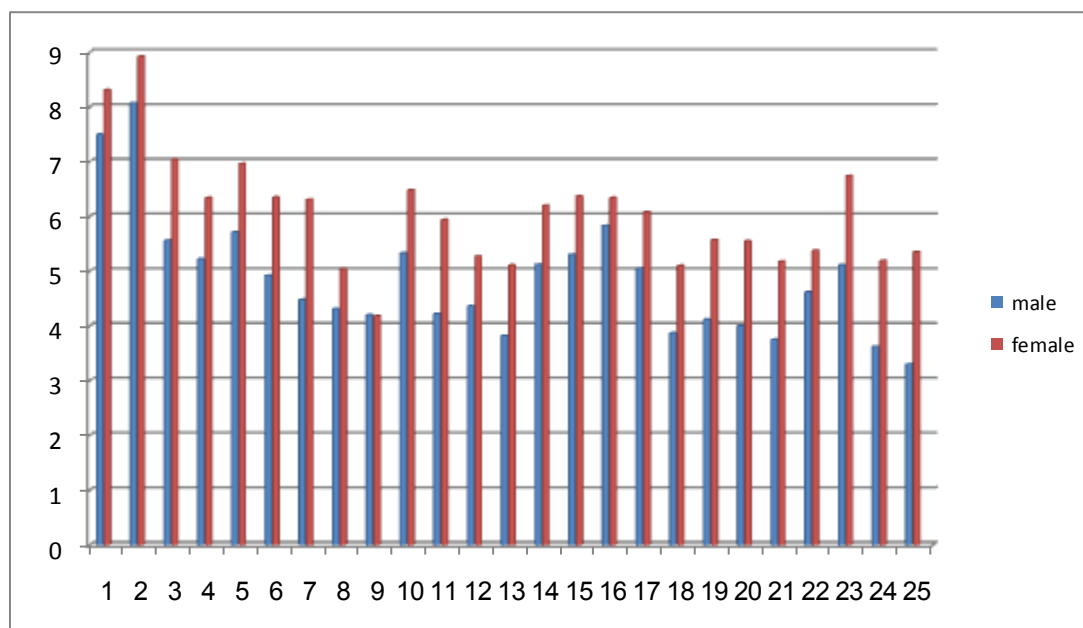
Figure 2: textbook evaluation from analysis-teachers' overall average/question

In addition to what said above, there are some severe criticisms against the textbook regarding the teachers' evaluation form and the package of the textbook

itself. Firstly, no supplementary materials such as teachers' guide, student work book, and audio tape or CD's accompany the textbook. Secondly, what has made the textbook a kind of out of date material is the fact that the textbook does not provide any room for new technology in terms of software and internet. No website has been designed for the textbook whereby teachers and students can work on the textbook easily out of the formal time of class. Thirdly, the blurb on the back of the textbook contains no theoretical propositions about the way and aim the textbook utilized in a specific course. Finally, according to the figure 2, a low average of teachers believes the correspondence between the authors' view of language and methodology and that of teachers.

Layout and design

In this section, the organization and design of the textbook would be analyzed. Regarding student evaluation form, female students possessed a more positive view toward its layout and design than male student. However, generally speaking, based on the figure 3, both groups confirm the appropriateness of the general organization of the textbook.



Figure

3: female-male contrastive textbook evaluation

In contrast to students, teachers disconfirmed the suitability of design and

organization of the textbook. Furthermore, what had made this textbook thorny to teachers was that they had to merely cope with the corpus of the textbook. They did not find any testing suggestions, teachers' manual, and adequate review sections, i.e. the textbook merely employs two review parts: review exercises (1) and review exercises (2). The former refreshes the contents of the second grade textbook and the latter covers all chapters' paramount points through eight parts (from A to H). What had made the review sections inadequate, looking through teachers' glasses, was that there were not found single review for each chapter concentrating on its contents (based on figure 2).

Activities

In this part, the activities of this textbook in different viewpoints would go under specification. Analyzing the student evaluation form it came to this point where female students found out the textbook activities more balanced, meaningful and cooperative and the representation of grammar points and vocabulary items more motivating in contrast to their male counterparts. Although it should be indicated that both groups of students share nearly the same average regarding the creativity that the textbook activities promoted (see figure 3). On the one hand, student thought that activities were approximately balanced, communicative, and cooperative while they announced that grammar points and vocabulary items were represented in a low motivating context and activities do not expedite creativity. Teachers, On the other hand, did not regard activities as balanced, meaningful, and cooperative. In addition, in teachers thought that grammar points and vocabulary items were not served in a high motivating context, activities did not accelerate creative responses so much, and modification of activities was not an easy task for teachers (see figures 1 and 2).

Skills

According to the student evaluation form in figure 3, focus on the vital skills, balance among them, and attention to sub-skills were more tangible in female

indication compared to the male one. What was remarkable regarding figures 1 and 2 was that students stated that sub-skills were not paid enough attention to in the textbook. Teachers also agreed with such an adequacy in the textbook. Further, they portrayed in their survey that the textbook lacked integration of four skills, attention to sub-skills, and balance between four skills and that there was no specific section allocated to the practice of stress and intonation.

Language type

This section requires us to consider the level of authenticity of the textbook and the way language utilized in the textbook. Like the preceding sections, in contrast to male respondents female students owned a more positive view toward the language type of the textbook. That is, they found out that the textbook was authentic, that the language of the textbook was compatible with their current English ability, and that the textbook was replete with diverse range of register and accents according to figure 3.

Both teachers and students shared the same implication in their questionnaires that the textbook did not sound authentic and did not possess wide range of registers and accents. However their evaluation forms demonstrated that grammar points were administered with laconic and easy examples and explications. In contrast to their common points indicated above, students pondered that the textbook language was compatible with their level of English. They also agreed with the appropriateness of grammar and vocabulary progression and of language function for future use. Reversely teachers pointed out, based on their evaluation form, which textbook language did not really follow the students' current English ability and language functions did not exemplify their exact future use. Based on the implication of the teacher evaluation form, they questioned the appropriateness of the progression of the grammar points and vocabulary items (based on figure 2 and 3).

Subject and content

"Subject and content" circumscribed the consideration of authenticity of the textbook subjects, its relevance, motivation, variety, and cultural view. Across all these items, student evaluation form advocated a higher average for female students than male pupils (based on figure 3).

Both pedagogues and student joined in this fact that the textbook contents were not culturally biased. Moreover, they asserted that the textbook subjects were not so much authentic and relevant to the students' needs. They also declared that contents had not been established on a high level of motivation and that the textbook did not take advantage of variety (based on figure 2 and 3).

Overall consensus

The last part comprises the debate of textbook role in raising students' interest in further English language study and of students and teachers' willingness to study and teach respectively the textbook again. Compared to the male students, female students proclaimed that the textbook motivated them to further English study and that they were ready to study the textbook again (based on figure 3). However what was startling was that both instructors and pupils comprehensively did not believe in the textbook capability to inspire them to study or teach the textbook again and provoked a further English study (based on figure 2 and 3).

Conclusion

Regardless to the textbook price and accessibility which appeared highly reasonable toward subjects' point of view, the textbook seems to call for a profound revision regarding its layout and design, activities, skills, language type, and subject and content. There may be some reason supporting this claim. First of all there have not been slight changes in the textbook for the several years even in the pictures of the

textbook. Furthermore, a host of students are pouring to the foreign language institutes to learn English through other textbooks such as Interchange, Stream line, Headway, and so many other textbooks despite of studying English textbook in high schools. The very first question that this scene brings out is that what the usage of teaching English in high school is. In other word, why do students have to bear additional expense for learning English? In short, emergence of these institutions beside Iranian Education System lucidly talks about methodological and practical problems that the textbook is suffering from.

The last and the most important reason which makes the revision of the textbook inevitable is the paucity of modern technology that is the use computer, multimedia tools, and internet in the textbook. Employment of these modern instruments along side of any textbooks will best signal that the textbooks are update. The modern technology not only hastens the speed of learning but also intensifies the quality of the learning.

It is hoped that a scrupulous reconsideration of the English textbook will guarantee a satisfying quality for the textbook and a high speed of learning English.

Limitation of the study

In this study we encountered with two main limitations. The first is that some students avoided answering to the questionnaire and a few of them just carelessly filled one column for all items of the questionnaire. It made us to exclude them from study. The second and paramount point is that since most of students were not well qualified in using English, we had to translate the questionnaire into the Persian language. Therefore, it is likely that the translated questionnaire may have not conveyed the items as clearly as the real questionnaire. However to hinder the latter limitation and to promote the reliability of the questionnaire we have revised the translation several times.

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