

A Comparative Study of Interchange 1 and English Book 1 of Iranian High Schools

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Abstract: *Textbooks play a pivotal role in language classrooms and educational systems all over the world. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate and compare two English textbooks, Interchange 1 (Richards et al., 2005) and English Book 1 of Iranian high schools (Birjandy et al., 2011) in order to illustrate their probable similarities and differences in terms of content, vocabulary, grammar, reading exercises and activities, pronunciation practice, physical makeup, and language functions. For this purpose, the weaknesses and strengths of these English textbooks are explained using eight criteria which have been drawn from various checklists. Since these two English textbooks are compared and contrasted according to these specific criteria, data collection are exploratory involving qualitative data which were analyzed interpretively. Although each one of these books has its own merits and demerits, overall the findings revealed that English book 1, in comparison with Interchange 1, is more grammar-based and does not satisfy Iranian students' needs in the real world, moreover it is not compatible with the principles of communicative language teaching. It is argued that the writers of this book had better modify it by employing more communicative tasks to satisfy Iranian students' needs and wants.*

Keywords: *Criteria, Comparison, Contrast, checklist, textbook*

Introduction

Textbooks are one of the crucial components of the language teaching programs, furthermore they are one of the factors that may encourage or discourage learners depending on their materials. They are a kind of support for both teachers and learners. Textbooks give students a kind of consistency. By using textbooks, learners can go forward step by step and find their ways, and on the other hand they are a kind of plan for teachers and help them manage their time in order to enhance learning in the classroom. There has been considerable controversy about the role of EFL textbooks in teaching and learning foreign languages all over the world. In Iran many researchers have conducted studies on textbook evaluation in the contexts of high schools and guidance schools to find out why teachers and students are not satisfied with their EFL textbooks. Where is the problem? It depends on many factors, one is textbooks. It seems that Iranian EFL textbooks are not designed according to the learners' needs or interests.

This study serves as a guide for the students in order to realize their weaknesses in each part of their textbooks by considering the similarities and differences among different books. This study will also help teachers have a deeper understanding of textbooks and to overcome the problems by careful planning and time management. It will also be of benefit to the educationalists and textbook developers and will help them have a better view about designing textbooks.

Review of the Related Literature

Teaching materials

Material development is a recent phenomenon; it concerns both theoretical and practical undertakings. As a field of study it involves principles and procedures for designing, implementing, and evaluating language teaching materials, and as an undertaking it entails the production and evaluation of language teaching materials. These two aspects of materials development are related to each other by the development and use of classroom materials and theoretical studies, and they both inform and are informed by these procedures (Tomlinson, 1998). According to Richards (2001), language teaching classes all over the world take place by the extensive use of materials, that may take the form of *printed*, *nonprinted* or both together. They include:

- Printed materials such as books, workbooks, worksheets, or readers,
- Nonprinted materials such as cassette or audio materials, videos, or computer-based materials
- Materials that include both print and nonprint materials are self-access materials and materials on the internet;

In addition, there are some materials that are not designed for the instructional use, like magazines, newspapers, and TV materials.

Authentic versus created materials

When the role of materials and their efficiency in language curriculum came into account, the argument over the use of authentic versus created materials emerged. As Richards (2001, p. 252) suggests, "Authentic materials refer to the use in teaching of texts, photographs, video selections, and other teaching resources that were not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes. Created materials refer to textbook and other specially developed instructional resources." Authentic materials are useful for native speakers; they are not used for their language instruction, but they help speakers of the language to share information or ideas. Authentic materials cause learners to encounter the real-world language use. Non-authentic materials are those that are designed for language instruction. They are simplified form of authentic texts, i.e. scripted texts, (Tomlinson, 2003).

There is an argument that using authentic materials may cause some difficulties for teachers as these materials contain difficult structures and they would be a burden on the shoulders of teachers especially in lower proficiency levels. However it can also be argued that ready-made materials may decrease the teachers' responsibility and by using these materials, teachers instead of being creative and planning the teaching, may act poorly; in addition they may influence the

learners in a similar way (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Therefore using a combination of created and authentic materials in many language programs is preferred.

Textbooks

Textbooks are an important element in language teaching curriculums. They are necessary for both teachers and learners as they give them confidence. According to Brown (2001, p. 136), "The most obvious and most common form of material support for language instruction comes through textbooks." Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p. 232) defined the role of textbooks in educational system as "a vehicle for teacher and learner training, as a support and relief, as providing as complete a picture as possible of what the change will look like and as a psychological support they give to teachers." It can be argued that although there are role plays, conversations, discussions, and chalkboard work, none of them fulfills the role of textbooks which are unified instructional materials, moreover as supporting materials they play a very important role in the classroom (Brown, 2001).

An introduction to evaluation

There have been many definitions of *evaluation* some of which will be mentioned here. Probably the most frequently given definition is by Trochim (2006) who states that "Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the worth or merit of some object." There is another definition that emphasizes acquiring and assessing information rather than worth or merit which states that "Evaluation is the systematic acquisition and assessment of information to provide useful feedback about some object" (ibid.). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 97), textbook evaluation is basically a straightforward, analytical matching process; matching "needs" to available solutions.

Types of evaluation in language teaching

There are three types of evaluation which are acknowledged by most of the researchers. They include: formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and illuminative evaluation.

Formative evaluation

A formative evaluation sometimes referred to as internal evaluation is a method for judging the worth of a program while the program activities are formed in progress. This part of the evaluation focuses on the process. It permits the designers, learners, and instructors to monitor how well the instructional goals and objectives are being met. Its main purpose is to catch deficiencies so that proper learning can take place which allows the learners to master the required skills and knowledge.

Summative evaluation

A summative evaluation is another broad category of evaluation types. As the name shows, it is a method of judging the worth of a program at the end of the program activities. It is sometimes referred to as external evaluation. Scriven (1967) argued that "All assessments can be summative (i.e. have the potential to serve a summative function), but only some have the additional capability of serving formative functions."

Illuminative evaluation

The illuminative evaluation is mostly concerned with studying the ongoing process of education. In general, the techniques used in this method are more subjective, and often involve personal value judgments of the results. The arguments in favor of this type of approach are that the variables in educational developments cannot be readily identified or controlled, and that inputs and outputs can be varied, complex, and difficult to specify with certainty, and often virtually impossible to measure. In such cases, the evaluator explores the perceptions, opinions, and attitudes of the staff and students, using a variety of methods (Richards, 2001).

Evaluation checklists

Among the various instruments used to collect data, questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and testing can be mentioned. The model or methodology used to gather data should be specified using a step-by-step procedure. It should be carefully designed and executed to ensure the data is accurate and valid. One of the procedures to collect data is checklist. Checklists are one of the common methods to evaluate English language teaching materials. A checklist is an instrument that provides the evaluator with a list of features of successful learning-teaching materials. As Tomlinson (2003) suggests, checklists are categorized separately into *quantitative*, *qualitative*, or *outline format*. Quantitative checklists are those that utilize rating scales with or without accompanying questions. Qualitative checklists are those that use close/open-ended questions without rating scales and outline format checklists are those without any rating scale and questions of any kind.

Characteristics of checklists

According to Mukundan and Nimechi (2012), in developing a checklist several points have to be considered including: *validity*, *reliability*, and *practicality*. A checklist must be reliable; it means that all the items on it should be clearly understood by each person using it. A checklist must be valid, which means, its developers must be aware of the relevant theories. A checklist is likely to be valid if it is based on a well-thought-out, well-researched system of knowledge that is directly relevant to what is being evaluated. A checklist also must be practical, which means, it should be in such a way that its users can use it, being economical can also assist to improve its practicality. A checklist is likely to be practical if it is not too long, if it is easy to use, and if it is easy to interpret its results.

Research on textbook evaluation in Iran

In Iran several projects have been carried out to evaluate textbooks (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2002; Golpour, 2012; Hashemi & Rahimpour, 2011; Jahangard, 2008). For example, Jahangard (2008) evaluated four EFL textbooks which had been prescribed to be used in Iranian high schools by retrospective or post-use procedure. He elaborated merits and demerits of the textbooks according to a checklist. In the results section of his study, he mentioned that the ultimate goals of the curriculum were not clarified and final objectives were not clearly specified. Another example is Hashemi and Rahimpour's (2011) study, which is the evaluation of three English language textbooks of Iranian high schools. At the end she declared that English language textbooks that are taught at Iranian high schools do not meet teachers' expectations.

Method

Design and procedure

In this study two English textbooks, *Interchange 1* and *English book 1*, were compared and contrasted according to some specific criteria derived from various evaluation checklists, so data collection were exploratory involving qualitative data which were analyzed interpretively. Before conducting the study various checklists by different researchers were collected and analyzed to determine the specific criteria relevant to the study. Next, the selected criteria were included in the checklist for the present study and these two English textbooks were evaluated with the selected criteria. Finally the results of their evaluations were compared and contrasted to reveal their similarities and differences and to ascertain their merits and demerits for Iranian EFL learners.

Research question

What are the similarities and differences of the two English language textbooks, *Interchange 1* and *English Book 1* of Iranian high schools, in terms of content, vocabulary, grammar, reading, language functions, pronunciation practice, exercises and activities, and physical makeup?

Materials

The materials used for the evaluation purpose in this study were the textbooks *Interchange 1* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2005), and *English Book 1* (Birjandi, Soheili, Nowroozi, & Mahmoodi, 2011). *Interchange 1* consists of 16 units divided into different sections, and each section has its own purpose and the organization of *English Book 1* is in the form of nine lessons in which each lesson consists of nine sections.

Instruments

The two English language textbooks, *Interchange 1* and *English Book 1* which are respectively utilized in the private institutes and Iranian high schools, were evaluated based on an evaluation checklist which is a combination of different criteria used in various evaluation checklists by different researchers (e.g., Cunningsworth, 1995; Sheldon, 1988; Skierso, 1991). The checklist used in this study consisted of eight sections with each section separately including some categories for examining the books in detail. The criteria used in the checklist were: 1- Content, 2- Vocabulary, 3. Grammar, 4- Reading, 5- Language Functions, 6- Pronunciation Practice, 7- Exercises and Activities, and 8- Physical makeup (see Appendix A).

Findings

The checklist used in this study had eight categories and 16 subcategories. The following is a review of the findings:

Regarding the first category, content, the objectives in *Interchange 1* are introduced in detail but in *English Book 1* they are very short and brief, moreover in *English Book 1* there is inconsistency between objectives and content in terms of vocabulary. Regarding the second category, vocabulary, there are a large number of new vocabulary items in *English Book 1*,

approximately 50 to 60 items; however in *Interchange 1* the number of new vocabulary items does not exceed 12.

In terms of the third category, grammar, the clarifications and examples of grammatical points in *English Book 1* are not enough and they are ambiguous in some parts of the book but the number of activities accompanying the structural points are satisfactory. However, a shortage in terms of pair or group work in these exercises is obvious. Grammatical points in *Interchange 1* are introduced by some examples in which all of the subject pronouns: (I, you, we, he, she, it, they) are considered and this satisfies the learners' needs. This logical manner of introduction is taken into account in both of these English textbooks except in the lessons eight and nine of *English Book 1*. Regarding the fourth category, reading, the results revealed that the topics in both of the English textbooks are interesting but in *English Book 1* they are not up to date and they are mostly stories which aim to present more new vocabulary items and grammatical points, that is, they are not designed according to the learners' needs and there are not any tasks for students to share their opinions.

Regarding the fifth category, language functions, it was argued that, all parts of the units in *Interchange 1* are designed to introduce different language functions, however, in *English Book 1* they are introduced in part F through one or two examples and they seem to be insufficient. Furthermore, there are not any exercises related to them except in lessons six and four of *English Book 1*. One of the demerits of *English Book 1* is that speaking which is a skill to enhance learners' communicative ability is embedded in the grammar part (part D), to further practice grammatical structures instead of speaking.

The sixth category is "pronunciation practice", which is introduced in both of the textbooks appropriately and step by step. It is beneficial for the students that the phonetic symbols are considered in *English Book 1*. The difference is that in *English Book 1* the individual words are mostly considered but in *Interchange 1* the whole sentences are the main concern. One of the demerits of *English Book 1* is that there is not any listening part accompanying the pronunciation points and it is left to the teachers and this may cause problems for learners' pronunciation in the future because teachers at high schools are not native speakers of English.

The seventh category is "exercises and activities". The number of activities in both of the textbooks is acceptable but the progress check activities in *English Book 1* are in a way that there are only two exercise sections for reviewing from which one is at the beginning of the book and the other is at the end of the book whereas in *Interchange 1* there is one progress check activity after every two units. It is obvious that the exercises and activities in *Interchange 1* are designed for communication and they enhance fluency but in *English Book 1* the exercises are designed for practicing grammatical points and to enhance accuracy. These exercises and activities mostly include: substitutions, repetitions, and completions but the exercises in *Interchange 1* include role plays, pair work, and group work.

"Physical make-up" is the eighth category. The evaluation revealed that *Interchange 1* contains more pictures and illustrations which are colorful and real and its papers' quality is more acceptable in comparison with *English Book 1*. The pictures in *English Book 1* are insufficient

and colorless and they are not real. Moreover it was argued that *English Book 1* is biased and this is clear from the names and the style of clothing in its pictures. This is a demerit for this book because as Golpour (2012) contends the culture and language are not only inseparable but also complementary to each other.

Discussion

The main purpose of the present study was to provide practical guidelines for Iranian EFL students and Iranian teachers regarding *English book 1*, by providing a clear picture of the weaknesses and strengths of this book, so in what follows the results of the comparison of this book with *Interchange 1* are discussed, and mainly its shortcomings are highlighted.

Considering the findings of the study, as Jahangard (2008) mentioned, it can be concluded that in comparison with *Interchange 1*, in *English book 1* there is a lack of concordance between the numbers of new words introduced in the new words section and the reading comprehension section and also there is a poor contextualization of the words. However there is a glossary both at the end of each lesson and at the end of the book and also the phonetic representation of words are included in it. But the final objectives are not specified in this book and what the students should achieve at the end of the course is not clear.

Regarding “grammar”, as Hashemi and Rahimpour (2011) contends, it can be argued that although in *English book 1* grammar is to some extent acceptable but the emphasis on drilling exercises is one of the problems of this textbook and it contradicts the basic principles of communicative language teaching.

In terms of “reading”, it can be argued that the passages in *English book 1* are long and they may tire the learners; therefore, it seems that the texts would have been more interesting and understandable if they had been related to the learners’ background knowledge. In this regard, *Interchange 1*, in using authentic texts and having good topics, is invaluable.

In terms of “language functions”, as Dahmardeh (2009) contends, it seems that activities in *English book 1* are different kinds of drilling exercises and are not designed to emphasize oral proficiency and their main focus is on accuracy.

“Pronunciation practice” is the other criterion which as Azizfar et al. (2010) contend, is nearly neglected in this textbook and includes only a few explanations related to suffixes.

Regarding “exercises and activities”, it seems that the majority of the drills in the *English book 1* are mechanical and they do not present a sufficient number of meaningful and communicative drills. Moreover, the exercises and drills in this textbook are too controlled and they do not develop learners’ communicative ability. However in the internationally developed ELT textbooks, like *Interchange 1*, there are many activities for pair and group work and role-playing. Plenty of communicative tasks are seen in these books such as opinion sharing and the focus on fluency is obvious in these textbooks.

The last criterion is “physical makeup”. As Golpour (2012) contends, it is clear that the cover of the *English book 1* is poorly bonded, and the pictures used in the lessons do not attract the students and there is not enough space for writing the answers to the exercises. It seems that it would be much better if colorful pictures of real people and real environments were used in this book.

Pedagogical Implications

The present study by specifying the similarities and differences between two English textbooks, *Interchange 1* and *English Book 1*, may help educationalists and material developers improve the textbooks and solve the problems and the shortcomings of the textbooks. Furthermore, it may also help the teachers diagnose the problems of the students in different parts of the books by considering the differences and similarities between these two textbooks.

Conclusion

The present study compared two English language textbooks, *Interchange 1* and *English Book 1*, in terms of content, vocabulary, grammar, reading, language functions, pronunciation practice, exercises and activities, and physical make up. The study revealed that the Iranian high school textbook (*English Book 1*) has some weaknesses in some of the above mentioned categories. The study also showed that this book emphasizes grammar and accuracy rather than fluency. In addition its passages are not authentic which means that they are not designed according to the learners’ actual needs in the real world. It can be argued that the writers of this book had better modify it by employing more communicative tasks to satisfy Iranian students’ needs.

The present study has also some limitations that should be taken into account. The first limitation is that, the present study compared only one of the Iranian English textbooks with one of the books of *Interchange* series. The second limitation of the study is that it was not accompanied by an interview and the teachers’ opinions were not considered.

Future research can deal with the other aspects and areas of textbook evaluation which were not included in this study. For example, all the books in *Interchange* series can be studied separately or in comparison with other Iranian English textbooks. Also a micro evaluation can be done in terms of separate parts of the books such as listening parts, reading parts, etc. Finally different kinds of interviews can be developed for both teachers and students to consider their opinions in the evaluation of the textbooks.

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Appendix A

1.	content
	a) Are the objectives spelt out?
	b) Is the material clearly organized?
2.	vocabulary
	a) Are the new vocabulary items presented appropriately and in various ways?
	b) Are the new vocabulary items repeated in subsequent lessons for reinforcement?
3.	Grammar
	a) Are the grammatical rules presented appropriately and in a logical manner?
	b) Are there enough exercises and activities related to the grammatical points?
4.	Reading
	a) Are the reading texts interesting for the students?
	b) Are there enough exercises and activities accompanying the reading texts?
5.	Language functions
	a) Are the language functions presented appropriately?
	b) Are the language functions accompanied by different kinds of exercises?
6.	Pronunciation practice
	a) Are the pronunciation points presented in an appropriate way?
	b) Are there enough exercises accompanying each point of pronunciation?
7.	Exercises and activities
	a) Are the exercises clearly and appropriately presented?
	b) Do the textbooks contain review sections and exercises throughout the lessons?
8.	Physical make-up
	a) Are the textbooks appropriate in terms of appearance and paper's quality?
	b) Are there enough and colorful illustrations in the textbooks?