



High School English Textbooks Content Analysis Based on Students' Needs

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ABSTRACT

Evaluating existing programs could help material developers and teachers understand students' needs and make future improvements. This study investigated English textbooks for high school students in Iran, moving from explaining objective facts about the context to a subjective analysis of expectations and needs based on the assessment framework of Littlejohn (2011). This framework draws subjective conclusions about the adequacy of context. To assess the educational value of textbooks, a school board consisted of the first researcher in the study and four of her colleagues who had experience teaching English in high schools. The results showed that the material needs to be adapted to the intended use of the situation. This should include both public and design-oriented aspects of the material. Some of the criteria that make up the publication element of material (physical layout, path, and continuity of the printed material) are consistent with what the teacher expects from the material that is desirable for a particular person. However, in most cases, partial discrepancies (access, location of material in the set, division of sections into subsections) or significant discrepancies (a division of the entire material) may encourage textbook developers to start revision projects based on the results of this study.

Keywords: Content Analysis; High School; Needs Analysis; Textbook Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Commercially produced textbooks became widely used as the primary teaching material, focusing on material evaluation in the early 1980s. Richards (2001) states that textbooks serve as a tool for training EFL teachers. ELT textbooks are both a source of information and guide teaching materials (Yu, 2018). The importance of textbooks in language education and learning was also emphasized by Tom Linson (2011). Tom Linson suggested that textbooks can play an essential role in developing communication skills and that textbooks need to present genuine material that involves learners emotionally and cognitively.

Today, the evaluation and selection of materials that best meet the needs of learners are becoming increasingly important in language education (Tosun, 2012). As Hutchinson (1987) points out, material evaluation not only serves the immediate practical goal of selecting materials but also by helping teachers analyze assumptions about the nature of language and learning. It plays an essential role in educating teachers. It forces teachers to create conditions and helps to consider the material as a fundamental portion of the overall teaching and learning situation. Above all, in material evaluation, the assumptions of the requirements analysis approach can be regarded as essential. Material

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authors cannot always predict that others may find problems with their material, so it can be helpful to get ideas and feedback from teachers and students (Stoller, 2006).

The *Graded English* series was wholly removed from the school in 2013 and replaced by another series. The most famous of these is *Right Path to English*, which has contributed to the Iranian educational system for several years. A more recent English series for school is the three-volume series titled, *Prospects* (1-3 for Middle School) and *Vision* (1-3 for high school). According to a study by Kheirabadi and Alavi Moghaddam (2016), many teachers and practitioners feel that the new series is an important step forward, but some severe shortcomings need to be addressed.

It may be understandable that teachers are end-users who face the pros and cons of textbooks, but ignore that students are other shareholders who are positive or negative about the potential of textbooks. For this reason, learners' needs should be carefully considered when choosing a textbook. When teachers who are committed to the success of their students know what they need to learn, they can express their needs. Therefore, the present study was motivated by the lack of meaningful, practical research and definitive discoveries in terms of detailed content evaluation and aimed to address the following questions:

RQ1. *What is the analytical description of high school English textbooks according to the criteria proposed by Littlejohns (2011)?*

RQ2. *What expectations do high school Iranian English teachers have concerning the teaching materials that meet their needs?*

RQ3. *To what extent do the contents of English textbooks for high school meet the requirements of high school English teachers in Iran?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Significance of Needs Analysis

Tomlinson (2011) considers material evaluation to be "a systematic assessment of the value of material about the goals of the material and the goals of the learners who use it" (p. 14). As Genesee (2001) pointed out, assessments help improve student performance and make

essential decisions that make educational programs more successful.

Hyland (2006) proposed to refer to methods for collecting and evaluating information related to course design. This process changes our teachings as we learn more about our students and, thus, move on to evaluation. Richards (2001) considers needs assessment to be the basis for designing a general language course, and when planning a language curriculum, needs assessment is used to achieve several things. I can do it. It serves as a means of collecting a wide range of contributions to the content, design, and implementation of language programs through the involvement of all stakeholders.

Research on EFL Textbooks in Iran

Various studies on evaluating textbooks centered on the *Vision* Series are being conducted in Iran. Bagheri and Moghadasi (2020) investigated the frequency of courtesy markers (PM), speech act (SA), and speech act (LF) in high school English textbooks in Iran. The results showed that these practical factors were not evenly distributed throughout the interview and there was no significant correlation between the level of the textbook and the frequency of the practical factors.

Gheitasi, Aliakbari, and Yousofi (2020) evaluated the cultural content of the *Vision* series. They used frequency counts to collect data and analyze it using cultural classification and reference frameworks. As a result, it was found that the textbook contains most of the cultural content related to Persian as the source culture. It also focused primarily on cultural aesthetics, followed by semantic, sociological, and sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sensations. Salehpour (2018) evaluated English textbooks taught in high schools in Iran in the 11th grade. She was asked by 30 female and male high school teachers to fill out a questionnaire to evaluate the textbook. She found that the purpose of her textbook was consistent to teach English at 11th High school. On the other hand, the textbook materials did not meet the purpose of English education.

Pouranshirvani (2017a) also conducted an external assessment of *Vision 1* from a teacher's

standpoint. She asked 25 high school teachers to fill out a questionnaire describing their perception of the book regarding physical characteristics, goals, and supplements in her study. The results showed that the teacher was satisfied with the physical characteristics and goals of the book, but not entirely with the supplementary material. In a comparable study, Pouranshirvani (2017b) conducted an internal assessment of *Vision 1*. This time, I focused on the internal characteristics of the book, such as the content of language education and language skills. Thirty teachers participated in the study. The results show that teachers were dissatisfied in several areas, such as sociocultural context, but were completely satisfied with the content and skills.

What is left over is that most EFL learners are utterly unaware of their needs. They learn English not because they want or have to, but because they have to. In such cases, the teacher's prior knowledge of the classroom and teaching experience helps identify the student's problems and challenges and empowers the student to become the student's voice. Therefore, it is necessary to give more space to content analysis to find out how well the textbook materials meet the needs of the students.

METHOD

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore Iran's high school English textbooks prepared by the Ministry of Education in 2016. This was the subject of a detailed content analysis of a detailed survey by an educational institution consisting of the researchers and four high school teachers (two men and two women) who had experience teaching these textbooks. The teacher participants have been teaching *Vision* Series since the beginning of fall 2016. They were selected through convenient sampling from among the high school teachers in Isfahan.

Framework

After reviewing various content analysis frameworks, researchers used the experimental framework of Littlejohn (2011). This framework consists of two key steps that

distinguish between material analysis and usage analysis. Based on the analysis framework of Littlejohn (2011), the material analysis consists of two main sections, including publications. Form, subdivision, continuity/coherence, pathways and access, purpose, subject nature and concentration, educational and learning practices, and beneficiary (teacher and student) roles.

Instruments

The instruments used in the study are as follows: Schedule for the explicit nature of the material (EN) and schedule for task analysis (TA). These tools are used to break down the target audience, publication date, time to process textbook materials, material types, and how to obtain materials into different units or lessons.

Materials

The materials examined in this study consisted of four lessons from a textbook titled *Vision Series* (2016). One lesson extracted from each of the four books in the series are based on Littlejohn (2011)'s claim that "it makes sense to analyze about 10-15% of all material" (p. 186). Was reviewed by the committee.

Data Collection Procedure

According to Littlejohn's (2011) Review Framework, a committee consisting of five Iranian high school teachers (the researcher and four experienced colleagues) was set up. In the first step, committee members were asked to use the EN system to provide a general description of the material. There was some disagreement over the most relevant information within the Commission and a majority vote on all issues. In the second step, which lasted 15 days, committee members gradually moved from objective decisions to deeper levels of analysis, including detailed workplace analysis. As a first step in analyzing the work, committee members divided the textbook into different activities. To determine how all specific tasks can be categorized, the committee determined that each task needs to consider specific content, specific types of participation, and specific processes. Members

of the committee then began analyzing their activities using the TA system.

Finally, to fully understand the basic principles underlying the material, the Commission relied on the findings of the previous two categories. Using data from EN

objects (first step) and detailed operational analysis (Phase 2), committee members were appointed and issued a general statement on an alternative process of publication or design. These statements include the topics listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Analytical Description Criteria Based on Littlejohn's (2011) Evaluative Framework

Aspect of Analytical Description	Criteria
Publication	Place of materials
	Published Form of material
	Subdivision
	Subdivision of sections into sub-sections
	Continuity
	Route
	Access
	Design
Principles of selection	
Principles of sequencing	
Subject matter	
Types of learning/teaching activities	
Participation	
Role of teacher	
Role of students	
Role of students	
Role of Materials as a whole	

Data Analysis Procedure

Descriptive analysis methods, including interpretive (qualitative) data analysis, were used to find clear answers. The qualitative results of the systematic analytical description of the study were presented in tabular form, and the interpretation of the text provided clear answers to the research questions of the study. Descriptive analysis methods, including (appropriate) translation methods for data analysis, were used to obtain clear answers to the survey questions. Subsequently, the Commission's perception of desirable materials was considered based on the context of the particular purpose of use. It then considered the

Commission's views on desirable materials based on specific subject situations. The results obtained from the systematic description of the study were presented in the form of a table that provided clear answers to the study questions.

RESULTS

The material description was provided by examining the open nature of the textbook under the EN scheme. The committee determined the framework criteria based on a fair description of the material and a thorough analysis of the data by the TA plan. Each criterion is either public or draft. Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the textbook analysis.

Table 2
Analytical Description of the Book Vision: Publication

Element	Criteria	Descriptions
Publication	Place of the materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a one-year English curriculum
	Physical appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monolingual instructional materials, multicolored materials, black and white materials for teachers
	Subdivision of the materials as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> four “Lessons”, covering four and a variety of sub-skills
	Subdivision of the sections into sub-sections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get Ready, Conversation, New Words & Expressions, Reading, Vocabulary Development, Grammar, Listening & Speaking, pronunciation, Writing, What You Learned
	Continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inclusion of materials centered around the same topic an incremental (in terms of complexity) syllabus of skills and sub-skills Continuity throughout particular sections by using a/an written/oral source material
	Route	according to the specified pattern of presentation
	Access	“Lesson Map”: listing of lesson titles and sub-sections

Based on the objective presentation of the material (the data from the EN timetable) and the data collected through a thorough investigation of the tasks, the textbook will serve as educational content for a one-year

English course followed by a four-color workbook. Identified. And a two-color teacher’s manual. The only access to textbook materials was the lesson card, which consisted of lesson titles, sections, and content.

Table 3
Analytical Description of the Vision: Design

Element	Criteria	Descriptions
Design	Aims and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing learners’ linguistic and communicative competence Emphasizing learning through authentic language use Providing learners with comprehensible and culture-specific instructional contents
	Principles of selections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks: both output-free language presentation activities, and output-based learning activities non-fiction discourse around topics of general knowledge and linguistic items carrying no specific message Language: specific areas of grammar and topic-oriented vocabulary items
	Principles of sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks: movement from meaning-based activities to, form-, and form and meaning-based activities Content: movement from graphic and linguistic materials to extended written and oral discourse Language: incremental use of language
	Subject matters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Output-based language learning activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm-up activities to produce graphic outputs (lines, circles, etc.) Vocabulary-building activities Reading activities including written and oral extended materials Listening activities including oral extended fictional materials speaking activities including written materials writing activities including written materials grammar activities including the written form of limited discourse Output-free language presentation activities:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocabulary activities including both oral and written form • grammar activities including the written form accompanied by tables to detail the use of grammatical structure in focus • Pronunciation activities including written and oral sentences
Types of teaching-learning activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasks to draw attention to form, meaning, and both • Two broad categories of activities: meaning-focused before the Grammar section, and form-focused or form and meaning-focused activities throughout the remaining sections. • Decoding semantic meaning and selecting information
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning tasks for learners to work individually and simultaneously • learning tasks entailing pair-working by learners • No task entails group-based participation
Teachers' role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following the pre-determined task directions • managing class time devoting appropriate time to every particular activity. • responsible for output monitoring
Learners' role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in reproductive and receptive language practice • Following the task directions • Going through the prescribed syllabus
Role of materials as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the only source of instructional content • Providing a pre-determined route for teaching and learning English

Tasks are ranked according to to form or meaning, or both form and meaning emphasis. Most pre-grammar tasks are meaning-based tasks, but the tasks presented after a grammar presentation are either shape-based or meaning-

based. After a complete analysis of the material, the Commission considered the desired material based on the usage of the particular subject material. The results are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

Teachers' Perspective on the Materials' Target Situation of Use: Publication

Element	Criteria	Descriptions
Publication	Place the materials in the set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basis for classroom work for high school students • Part of a complete package • Relevant supplementary materials
	The physical appearance of the materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A medium-sized multicolored book including visual aids for students • Medium-size book including visual aids for teachers
	Subdivision of the materials as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • four units including various topics • A standardized number of pages for each unit (15 to 20).
	Subdivision of the sections into sub-sections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on different language learning skills and sub-skills • supposed to embrace four major parts, including one of the four language learning skills, and three sub-sections to develop sub-skills including grammar, vocabulary • commenced with warm-up activities • Every two or three units be followed by a review section
	Continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incremental presentation of vocabulary and grammar • inclusion of materials around a particular theme
	Route	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • under the presentation order
	Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a listing of units/lessons • a listing of new vocabulary items • a listing of forms of language items in focus

As shown in Table 4, teachers refused to divide the book into several long subjects because they felt that including more units could add diversity to what they taught. In

addition, teacher analysts felt that more emphasis was needed on the equitable allocation of additional resources.

Table 5

Teachers' Perspective on the Materials' Target Situation of Use: Design

Element	Criteria	Descriptions
Design	Aims and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing learners' linguistic competence in language learning skills • Providing comprehensive instructional content feeding with instructional materials to achieve success in the national university entrance examination in Iran • Providing learners with authentic language
	Principles of selections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasks: Inclusion of both output-free and output-based language learning activities • Content: age/level-appropriate storylines and short fictional texts • Language: grammar areas accompanied by topic-related vocabulary
	Principles of sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasks: moving from form and meaning-based activities to activate learners' background knowledge via a narrative task to meaning-based, form-based, and meaning and form-based activities to use the newly-presented language • Content: visually-aided linguistic items followed by a written and oral extended discourse • Language: incremental use of language (simple to complex)
	Subject matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a couple of output-free language presentation activity/s specific to the skill/sub-skill in focus • two or three purposeful output-based learning activities
	Types of teaching-learning activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drawing learners' attention to both form and meaning • drawing learners' attention to form, meaning, or form and meaning-based activities • designed taking account of mental operations equally. • requiring learners to produce narrowly-defined language output
	Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entailing individual and simultaneous working by learners • including a couple of tasks for pair and group work
	Teachers' role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the materials' route and directions • Classroom management • Decision-making • Providing Corrective feedback
	Learners' role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in reproductive and receptive language practice • Following the task directions • Going through the prescribed syllabus
	Role of materials as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving as the only source of English learning • Providing a pre-determined route • Providing learners with comprehensible, stimulating, and engaging instructional content • Acting as a source to achieve success in the national university entrance examination in Iran

The content of the table above shows the disagreement between the teaching material and the teacher's expectations for the desired material concerning various design criteria. Teachers suggested that the wobbling content arrangement should be replaced by a gradual transition from linguistic elements to sentences and verbal and written language blocks. The final step in determining the educational value

of a studied textbook is the essential nature of the material, the teacher's view of the appropriate material, and the whole context in which the material is directed. As shown in Table 6, some of the publication criteria for the material met teacher expectations, but most of them did not correspond to the partial or total intended usage.

Table 6

Results Drawn from Comparative Evaluation of the Materials Based on Littlejohn's (2011) Evaluative Framework

Element	Matching Results	Criteria
Publication	Congruent	The physical appearance of the published form of the materials
		Route
		Continuity
	Partial mismatch	Access
		Place the materials in the set
		Subdivision of the sections into sub-sections
Contrary	Subdivision of the materials as a whole	
Design	Congruent	Teachers' role in the classroom
		Learners' role in the classroom
		Learners' role in learning
	Partial mismatch	Aims and objectives
		Principles of selection
		Subject matters and focus of subject matters
		Types of teaching-learning activities
		Participation
		Role of materials as a Whole
		Principles of sequencing

DISCUSSION

The detailed analysis of the tasks shows two different tasks in the material: a) tasks that expect students to notice certain areas of the language without expecting a reaction. b) achievement-based language learning tasks that require students to achieve results using a commonly defined language. Performance-based learning tasks were more common for all language learning skills and sub-skills. The abundance of homework that leaves room for language practice can symbolize the emphasis on language learning through the use of language. This result shows that the book

achieved its primary purpose of providing implicit language education through student participation in classroom activities. Tasks include deciphering the superficial meaning of a particular entry, extracting information from a particular text, creating hypotheses, repeating previously provided entries, applying general knowledge, analyzing linguistic forms, and more. We know that various mental manipulations are required. However, most tasks consisted of deciphering semantic/propositional meanings or selecting information. Frequent use of tasks, including deciphering the semantic meaning, promotes

communication skills, but students need to use a broader range of mental manipulations to develop the language fully. Most of the classroom-related learning tasks consisted of students working individually and simultaneously. A small number of learning tasks include pair work, but none are designed to facilitate group work.

The importance of collaborative learning through pair work or group work is negligible, and the development of communication skills is hindered. According to Pouranshirvani (2017b), findings on these traits suggest that teaching materials teach students effective use of the four skills in fundamental tasks. The role of the teacher was to follow the instructions for the task. However, the teacher's exclusive access to assessments and materials symbolizes a leadership role in the classroom. If the program does not have peer modifications (because group work is not considered), the teacher is responsible for monitoring the results provided by the students and providing correction feedback. Therefore, the student's role in the learning process is limited to following the prescribed curriculum of the material. Given the particular context of the study (such as secondary school) and the language level of the target students (mainly beginners), the results regarding potential users of textbooks seem plausible. The inputs provided by the task mainly were related to non-fiction topics and contained output of linguistic nature (that is, words, phrases, or sentences that had no particular meaning). The Committee concludes that tasks are ranked, emphasizing form or meaning itself, or both form and meaning. Most of the tasks presented before the grammar are primarily purpose-oriented activities, while those presented after the grammar presentation focus on form or form and meaning.

Textbook developers strive to develop communication skills by understanding another purpose, or meaning, of relevant material. This finding was confirmed by Pouranshirvani (2017b) and can be interpreted as a sign that Vision has eliminated the shortcomings of older books that suffered from a reliability standpoint (Yarmohammadi, 2002). The language of the

tasks is ordered step by step in terms of both structural and vocabulary complexity. The results for this property have been fully confirmed by Pouranshirvani (2017a) and Mirzaei and Tabatabaei (2017). The survey sought to clarify the preferred use of the material, based on various considerations, including the general English curriculum standards for high schools in Iran, to find a clear answer to the second question. Committee members made subjective inferences about which materials were desirable after discussing situations in which the materials were ideally suited to the high school curriculum requirements. Pairwise comparison of teacher expectations and the quality of materials led to subjective conclusions about the educational value of textbooks.

The present research sought to clarify the preferred use of the material, based on various considerations, including criteria for the general English curriculum of secondary schools in Iran, to find a clear answer to the second question. After discussing the situation in which the material was suitable for the high school curriculum requirements, the committee members drew subjective conclusions. Pairwise comparison of teacher expectations and the quality of materials led to subjective conclusions about the educational value of textbooks.

Consistent with what Pouranshirvani (2017a) and Torki and Chalak (2017) have concluded about the physical properties of books, analysts-teachers made somewhat similar decisions about textbook flow, continuity, and continuity. Indeed, the committee confirmed the suitability of specific routes of material, the thematic and gradual nature of linguistic expressions, and general features associated with the physical appearance of textbooks, such as size, color scheme and range, and print quality of materials. They were very much in agreement with the novelty of this book, as it is a recent publication. They also found the book easily accessible, together with its teacher manuals, workbooks, and audio CDs. These results were inconsistent with the results of studies by Pouranshirvani (2017a) and Salehpour (2018),

in which participants were not completely satisfied with the additional tools.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation results showed that the material needs to be adapted to its intended users. In order to expand the opportunities for self-study, it is necessary to distribute supplementary materials evenly. Slight growth in the number of lessons can bring diversity to education. The review section should continue every few lessons. In addition, content-based access to textbook reports should be accompanied by a list of some new word and verb formats that need to be covered throughout the book. Researchers need to adapt the book design to specific contexts and the needs of textbook users through a systematic evaluation of the material in three phases, primarily focusing on basic principles. Based on the results, including a fictitious short language section instead of a long factual text section may suit young book users' needs (students). Also, the order of the materials is (a) activating new meanings with activities focused on meaning and form and strengthening previously learned forms, and (b) new activities focusing on meaning and form. We recommend that you follow the three-step direction of presenting. Structure and vocabulary, (c) meaning and form-centric activities to create space for practicing newly learned languages. The design requires some changes in class attendance and subjects. The revised material should include appropriate group work and a wide range of mental activities. Therefore, in a practical sense, the results can encourage textbook developers to start a modification project based on the results of the systematic phase. Such an all-inclusive plan strengthens the educational value of textbooks as the sole source of information for teaching and learning English in high schools in Iran. Given the importance of textbook adequacy for a particular usage situation, it is suggested that managers consider the needs, aspirations, and prospects of both teachers and learners as the primary recipients of the book. Educational decision-makers and material developers in Iran, especially textbook developers, will benefit most from the current

research results. English teachers and high school students will also benefit indirectly from the changes and additions. The current research results may ultimately help textbook users find a reliable source of information that matches their needs, desires, and interests.

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