Textbook Evaluation in Morocco: A study of EFL students' perceptions and attitudes towards *'Ticket to English 2'*

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Abstract

While textbooks are one of the key factors to successful foreign language development, they are likely to contain some pedagogical issues as they are, after all, human-made products. This, in turn, explains the vast amount of scholarly attention that has been invested in research on EFL textbook evaluation. To contribute to this line of research, the present paper aimed to explore second-year Baccalaureate students' perspectives on *Ticket to English 2*, an ELT textbook currently used in Moroccan public high schools. More specifically, it aimed to elicit students' attitudes and perceptions towards learning English through this locally-designed EFL textbook. The study adopted a quantitative research design. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire that was, based on Litz' (2005) textbook evaluation checklist and, administered to 104 EFL students who were taught using the textbook under study. The findings indicated that most participants are not generally satisfied with their textbook. The majority of students stress that the activities do not develop their listening and speaking skills, the topics do not meet their interests, and the physical appearance is not attractive. In light of these findings, the current study offers a set of recommendations for curriculum designers and textbook writers suggesting ways in which the content of future Moroccan EFL textbooks can be improved.

Keywords: EFL students, ELT textbooks, Textbook evaluation.

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1. Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) has always been of paramount importance. English today is the language of science, business, and technology as well as the lingua franca of the world. Therefore, many countries have chosen to teach this language at an early stage of the students' learning process. Morocco is no exception. For over 50 years, English has been taught as a foreign language in Moroccan public schools (Elfatihi, 2019).

In the Moroccan English language teaching classroom, the textbook is an essential tool in the teaching-learning process. According to Sheldon (1988), among all instructional materials, EFL teaching textbooks are tremendously important throughout the process of language development. Despite the abundance of materials on the Internet, language teachers need textbooks because they are practical and clear illustrations of what the educational curriculum suggests (Richards, 2001; O'Neill, 1982).

Given these reasons, language teaching textbooks deserve careful attention because they represent a range of critical contents to students with completely different backgrounds, learning styles, preferences, and needs. Designing coursebooks that are likely to cater for such requirements, and to provide ample opportunities that optimize learning for a heterogenous class community can be of serious difficulty. Therefore, language teaching textbooks can be subject to bias, inaccuracies, and deficiencies (Ait Bouzid, Erguig & Yeou, 2016; Jaafari, 2016; Litz, 2005; McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2013) since they are, after all, human-made products. In this respect, textbook evaluation steps in as an effective practice to identify issues and work towards promising solutions.

Research on foreign language teaching textbooks indicates that textbook evaluation can considerably improve the quality of EFL textbooks. This practice is essential in selecting textbooks for new language programs or for updating the ones already used. More precisely, textbook evaluation helps policy makers, educationalists, researchers, school inspectors, and language teachers identify the strengths and weaknesses of textbooks and address them to curriculum designers and textbook writers in order to redress them. The practice of textbook evaluation has been employed by various researchers to evaluate the contents of EFL textbooks (see Cunningsworth, 1995; Jibreel, 2016; Litz, 2005)

Moroccan public-school teachers of English are provided with a wide variety of English language teaching textbooks. This diversity can be useful if these textbooks are accompanied with a continuous and comprehensive evaluation. Moroccan English language

teaching textbooks have never been updated since they were first published in 2006. This does not only show how much the content of these textbooks is outdated, but it also portrays some of the difficulties that both teachers and students can face while using one of these textbooks. Thus, there is an urgent need for a complete evaluation of these textbooks.

Besides, it is noted that most of the previous literature on textbook evaluation is based on teachers' points of view. This is undeniably helpful in refining the quality of EFL teaching materials; however, students' opinions need to be taken into consideration, for they are also part and parcel of the teaching-learning process (Badea & Iridon, 2015; Knecht & Najvarová, 2010). Therefore, the present research aims to evaluate the content of a Moroccan EFL textbook, namely *Ticket to English 2*, from students' perspectives. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the Moroccan high school students' perceptions of learning English in EFL textbooks?

2. How relevant and attractive are EFL textbooks to Moroccan high school students?

2. Literature review

A considerable number of studies have been conducted to evaluate the content of EFL textbooks from both students' and teachers' perspectives. Some selected studies are reviewed below. At the international level, Herliana, Djajanegara and Suendarti (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of an Indonesian EFL textbook specifically designed for 10th-grade pupils. The evaluation was based on both students' and teachers' perspectives. To meet this end, the researchers administered a questionnaire to 94 students and conducted interviews with four EFL teachers. The participants of this study, particularly teachers, uncovered a number of pedagogical inconveniences. First, the textbook includes lengthy reading passages with unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures which do not meet the level of the target students. Second, the tasks are not organized from easy to difficult. Third, listening activities are not sufficiently implemented throughout the textbook. Due to these shortcomings, students fail to cope up with their teachers who most of the time resort to supplementary materials.

Another study by Alshenqeeti (2019) investigated the cultural representation in a textbook entitled *Total English*, used to teach English at public universities in Saudi Arabia. Through carrying out a content analysis and administering questionnaires to 120 EFL

learners, the researcher highlighted an unbalanced representation of cultures in the textbook under study. More specifically, the source culture, that is the students' own culture, was hardly presented throughout the textbook, whereas most contents and activities revolved around international cultures. While the majority of this study participants showed a keen interest in learning about foreign cultures, they still feel pleased to perform tasks on their native culture although they were very scarce. Therefore, the researcher urged textbook designers and writers to pay due attention to include a balanced cultural presentation in EFL textbooks.

An attempt was made by Khodabakhshi (2014) to evaluate *Skyline 4* used in teaching English to intermediate students. To fulfill this objective, 75 Iranian EFL teachers were asked to evaluate the textbook based on Litz's (2000) evaluation checklist. Unlike previous research, the findings of this study revealed that *Skyline 4* has some useful characteristics, such as attractive layout and real-life activities which relate to the needs of Iranian EFL learners. However, most of the teachers raised two issues that need to be addressed. The first issue is that the textbook does not include a glossary with phonetic transcriptions. This can help students acquire new vocabulary items with their corresponding correct pronunciation. The second issue is that the textbook is culturally biased and portrays mostly American cultures. In light of these results, the researcher stressed the need for designing appropriate supplementary teaching materials in order to offset the shortcomings identified in *Skyline 4*.

Hammad (2014) also evaluated the EFL textbooks used at the first three grades of elementary school in Ghaza. The researcher elicited the attitudes of Palestinian EFL teachers towards using the target textbooks through administering questionnaires to 70 EFL teachers and holding semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers. The results showed that there is a strong consensus among teachers who had positive attitudes towards the textbooks. The participants stressed that the topics are relevant to students' cultural background and needs, the instructions are clear, the pictures are appealing and meaningful, and the activities are presented from easy to difficult. Nevertheless, some teachers underscored two main problems, namely a large number of unfamiliar words in texts and a special focus on listening at the expense of other language skills, particularly writing.

In the same line of research, Ahour, Towhidiyan and Saeidi (2014) investigated the appropriateness of an EFL textbook, entitled *English textbook 2*, specifically designed for Iranian second-grade high school students. The participants of this study were 25 EFL

teachers who were asked to evaluate the textbook under investigation using a textbook evaluation checklist developed by Litz (2005). The researchers pointed out a number of pedagogical issues that need to redressed to textbook designers for improvement purposes. Despite the importance given to design textbooks that meet students' needs and interests in the first place (Jevitz & Meints, 1979), some textbook writers seem to overlook this critical criterion. Findings revealed that the content of this textbook is not relevant to students' interests and needs, which can only increase students' frustration and anxiety. Also, the exercises do not involve meaningful practice or encourage communication. In fact, the majority of teachers stressed that most of the activities foster reading skills, while listening and speaking are not given due attention.

Furthermore, Alemi and Sadehvandi (2012) explored teachers' perceptions of *Pacesetter* series, an EFL textbook series used in teaching English to four different levels at several Iranian language institutions. Through the means of a questionnaire which was administered to 64 EFL teachers who use this textbook series in question, the researcher found out that the majority of participants are satisfied with the textbooks. The layout and design are attractive, and the topics meet the target students' interests and revolve around everyday activities. Besides, the textbooks are accompanied with workbooks that include activities compatible with the lessons introduced in their respective units in the main textbooks. In this way, students can resort to their workbooks for further practice and reinforcement. Finally, the textbook contains an equal representation of gender, age, and ethnic groups.

In the Moroccan context, Ait Bouzid (2017) conducted a study with the aim of investigating the extent to which three Moroccan EFL textbooks, specifically designed for second-year Baccalaureate level, conform to the principles of the standard-based approach which guides the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in Moroccan public schools. Using content analysis as a data analysis tool to evaluate the content of the three textbooks, the researcher uncovered that a great number of activities help students develop good reading skills through reading dialogues, texts and sets of sentences, while activities that foster students' communicative competence are not sufficiently included. Based on these results, Ait Bouzid (2017) encourages Moroccan textbook designers and writers to take into account these findings in designing new EFL textbooks or updating the current ones.

Likewise, Laabidi and Nfissi (2016) evaluated the content of a Moroccan EFL textbook entitled *Visa to the World* from teachers' perspectives. The textbook was specifically designed for common core high school students. To fulfill their objective, the researchers administered questionnaires to 50 EFL teachers who revealed that the general physical appearance of the textbook is not appealing and the topics are not interesting. Put differently, the textbook is not up-to-date and does not meet the needs of the 21st century EFL learners. The participants of this study also complain about the shortage of accompanying materials and lack of activities that can stimulate students' critical thinking skills.

In light of the studies presented above, it shows that most of previous research did not investigate students' perceptions regarding the content of their EFL textbooks. Rather, most of them explored EFL teachers' attitudes towards the materials they use in their classes, or analyzed of a particular content in EFL textbooks. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to fill in this gap by investigating Moroccan EFL students' perceptions and attitudes towards using *Ticket to English 2* in learning English.

3. Research Methodology

The present study followed a survey research design. The objective of this study was to evaluate an EFL textbook from students' perspectives. It aimed at revealing Moroccan students' attitudes towards learning English in EFL textbooks, namely *Ticket to English 2* currently used in some Moroccan public high schools.

3.1. Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in two different public high schools both located within the region of Casablanca. As participation was voluntary, the present study utilized a voluntary response sampling technique to recruit participants. More specifically, the participants were 104 Moroccan second-year science stream baccalaureate students distributed between 42 boys and 62 girls. Their ages ranged between 17 and 18 years old. These students studied two languages: Arabic and French. They have been studying English for at least four years. Following is a brief overview of the setting and participants:

Table 1

Overview of the setting and participants

School	Number of boys	Number of girls	Total number of students
Moulay Youssef	29	45	74
Ibnu Khaldun	13	17	30
Total number of students	42	62	104

3.2. Instruments

The current study used a quantitative approach to collect data. The choice of a questionnaire stems from the fact that it has different benefits. First, using a questionnaire is time-saving as it can be administered to a large number of participants in the same place. Second, respondents often feel at ease to express their opinions since their responses are anonymous. Lastly, a questionnaire is considered an objective tool of collecting data as the researcher's influence is not very strong in comparison to an interview or classroom observation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

A four-point Likert scale questionnaire expressed in terms of agreement, strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD), was adopted in the current research. Likert scales range along a positive-negative dimension, offering a number of responses as opposed to simple yes/no questions. They also allow participants to choose a clear and definite answer that best reflects their standpoints and attitudes. In this way, Likert scales is useful for quantifying results and, therefore, generating conclusions that answer the underlying research questions.

The questionnaire used in this study is a self-developed questionnaire that was based on Litz' (2005) textbook evaluation checklist. It comprises two parts. The first section elicited demographic information about age, gender, school, stream, and textbook. Then, the participants were asked to carefully read and fill in the second part of the questionnaire. This section consisted of 26 statements which were chosen in a meaningful way through adopting some criteria of selecting and evaluating textbooks. These criteria are the following: skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), language matters, content, and physical features. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic in order to ensure that the students fully grasped what was required of them.

With regard to the validity of the questionnaire, two researchers examined the questionnaire for readability, clarity of wording, and layout. Next, we ran a test of Cronbach's alpha which is a coefficient of internal reliability. More specifically, Cronbach's alpha measures the consistency of the items in the questionnaire and determines the degree to which this data collection instrument is accurately measuring the variable(s) of interest. The closer the obtained figure is to 1, the higher the internal consistency of the items is. With regard to the internal consistency of the items in questionnaire used in the present study, the figure obtained was .75, suggesting that the items have relatively good internal consistency.

3.3. Material

The present study examined one Moroccan EFL textbook, namely *Ticket to English 2* (Hammani, Ahssen & Tansaoui, 2007). This EFL textbook is currently used to teach second-year Baccalaureate level at public high schools nationwide. The choice of this textbook is basically driven by the fact that it is designed for the terminal year of secondary education. At the end of high school, Moroccan students sit for a national Baccalaureate examination in English along with other subjects and, therefore, need to be equipped with the necessary tools to pass this exam. Thus, EFL textbooks designed for this critical educational level deserve careful, thorough, and continuous evaluation.

3.4. Procedure

In order to achieve the objectives of this research paper, the following steps were taken. After obtaining the consent from the university, the principals of the two high schools were contacted to agree on a schedule. Three days later, the researcher prepared copies of the questionnaire and went to the high schools. First, the purposes of the study were clearly explained to the students who were asked to participate in this research. Fortunately, they were all willing to take part in this study. One hundred and four students were given the questionnaires and were asked to tick the appropriate options. The researcher intervened, when necessary, to provide further clarifications. It took about two hours to cover the four targeted classes. After the collection of data, the coded answers were fed into and processed by EXCEL (Experiential Curriculum for the Enhancement of Learning) for further analyses. Quantitative data were presented in the form of bar graphs with an attempt at offering a

visual and clear presentation of the main results. The findings show students' attitudes and perceptions of learning English in a Moroccan EFL textbook.

4. Results

4.1. Skills

As stated previously, this study aims to investigate Moroccan second-year Baccalaureate students' perspectives on an EFL textbook. The findings are reported in bar graphs. They show students' attitudes towards the skills, language matters, content, and physical appearance of the textbook under study. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the first criterion deals with the four skills of language, namely speaking, reading, writing, and listening. The figure shows that most students are not satisfied with the textbook's language skills, particularly speaking and listening.

Figure 1.

*Students' attitudes towards the textbook's language skills*
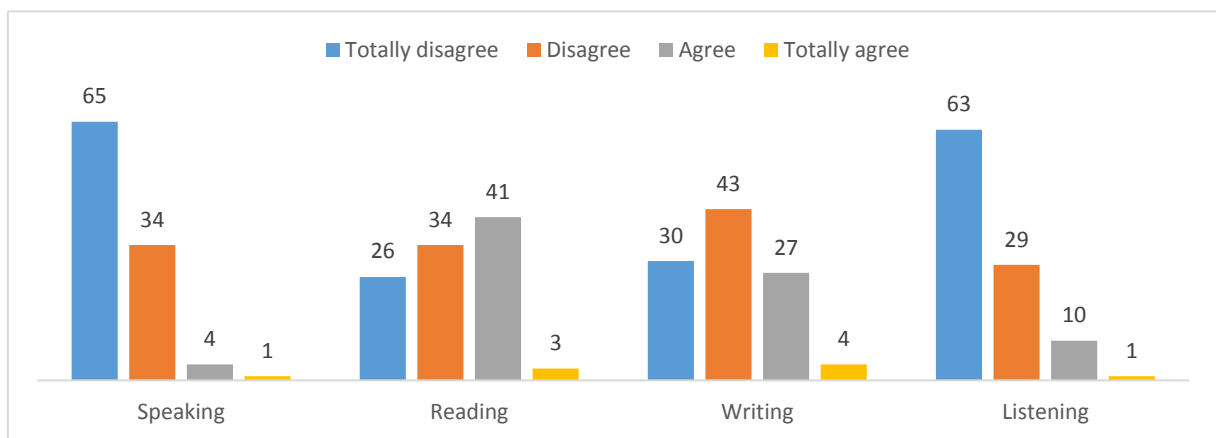
4.2. Language matters

The second criterion evaluates the textbook's language matters. It targets the following issues: if the textbook enables the students to generalize grammar rules, if the student needs the teacher's explanation to understand these rules, if new vocabulary is easily recognized and understood in the context, and if the language functions are authentic and used in pair or group work. The following figure shows the participants' attitudes towards the aforementioned evaluation criteria.

Figure 2.

*Students' attitudes towards the textbook's language matters*
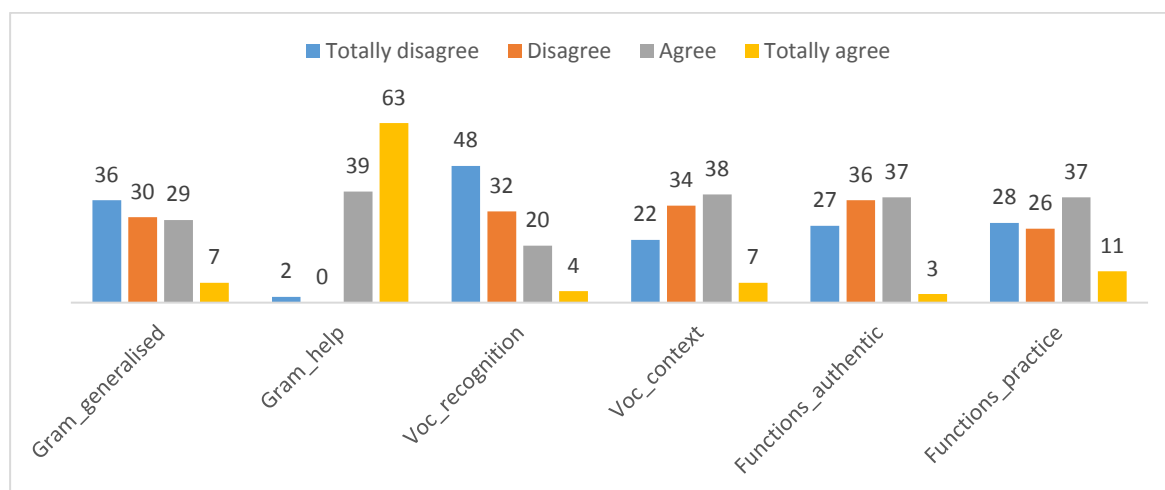
It can be seen, from Figure 2 above, that the textbook does not enable most students to generalize grammar rules in different contexts. That is to say, students are not able to make use of their grammar rules in other activities. Besides, almost all the students need the teacher's help and explanation to understand grammar rules. They also think that new vocabulary cannot be easily recognized. Students do not have the new vocabulary items italicized, bold, or colored so that they can quickly see them within the text. However, these students slightly agree that they can understand new vocabulary in the context. Finally, while some participants agree that the textbook provides them with pair and group work tasks in order to put the language functions they have learned into use, the majority of them disagree that they learn these language functions in their authentic use.

4.3. Content

Figure 3, below, reveals that most EFL students seem to be critical of their textbook. First, almost all participants believe that its content does not meet their interests and needs. They further claim that the topics are not updated. Second, there seems to be no consensus among the participants on whether the topics presented in the textbook are relevant to their cultural background; half of them agree while the others disagree. There is also no correlation between English and the other school subjects. In other words, the textbook rarely activates the students' background knowledge acquired in the other subjects.

Figure 3.

*Students' attitudes towards the textbook content*
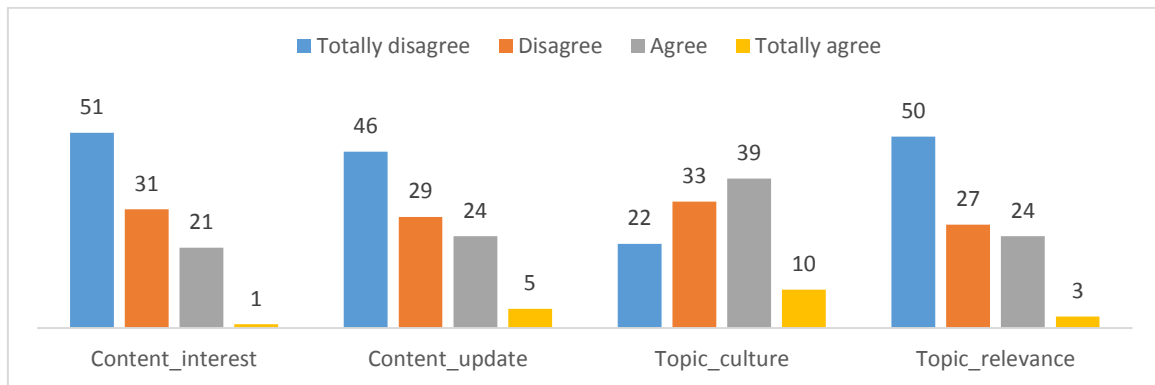
4.4. Physical Features

Physical features are of paramount importance while designing textbooks, in general, and language textbooks, in particular. It is generally assumed that students learn best and perform better especially when the textbook is aesthetically appealing. The following figure shows the participants' attitudes towards the textbook's physical features, particularly: if the textbook has different quality pictures and if the students themselves refer to the pictures to understand the meaning of texts.

Figure 4.

Students' attitudes towards the textbook's physical features
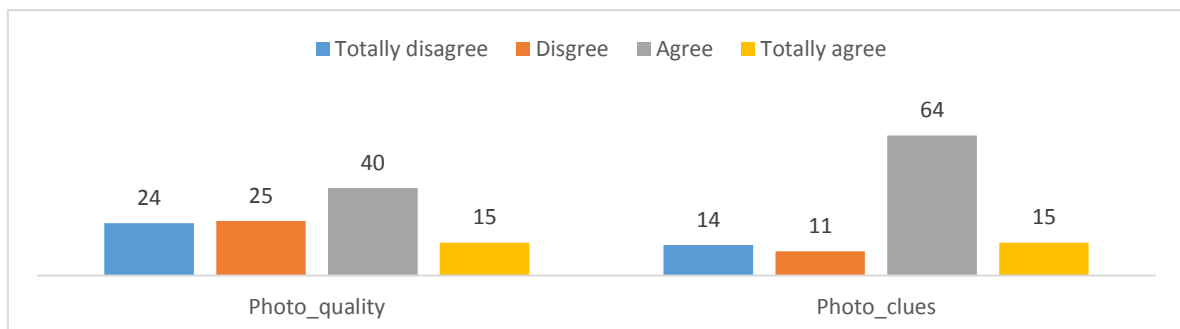
As it can be seen in Figure 4 above, half of the participants agree that the textbook has different quality pictures (real, portrait, caricature, and so on); whereas, the other half does not agree. This shows that this point is highly debatable. We cannot really judge whether the pictures are of different quality or not since the percentages are quite the same. However, a lot of students agree that they refer to these pictures in order to understand the texts.

5. Discussion

The current study has aimed at evaluating Moroccan EFL textbooks, namely *Ticket to English 2*. The first research question addressed Moroccan high school students' perceptions on learning English in this particular EFL textbook. The obtained findings are consistent with previous literature (Ait Bouzid, 2017; Herliana et al., 2020). The majority of participants completely disagree that the textbook enables them to listen, speak, and write well. They also state that they do not learn to read well in English through this very textbook. This can be due to the teacher reluctance to use the resources available in the textbook. The latter actually includes some listening and speaking activities, but teachers seem to be critical of the content of these tasks, which seems either of little interest or very difficult for students to grasp.

As a matter of fact, a great number of public high school students have a low level of English proficiency. That is why some teachers may avoid dealing with such activities in the classroom. Another reason behind the students' critical attitude vis-à-vis their textbook is the lack of infrastructure, i.e., teachers usually do not have the necessary tools and materials to make students listen to a CD or watch a video clip. In addition, the textbook does not include a kind of engaging writing activities that would suit the different learning styles of students. Some learners are auditory, some are visual, and others are kinesthetic, that is why they often get bored in a classical writing session (Ellis, 2014; Ortega, 2014).

As far as the reading skill is concerned, students feel that the textbook does not enable them to read well. In fact, the textbook includes some lengthy texts and reading passages with some difficult and challenging vocabulary. Thus, learners do not have the opportunity to practice their reading skill as they will constantly need some help and further clarification. This lends support to Hammad's (2014), findings which also revealed the large number of unfamiliar words included in some EFL textbooks.

Another finding is that most students cannot generalize grammar rules in different contexts. Actually, the textbook rarely provides the opportunity for students to use the structures they have learned in subsequent writing activities outside their respective units. The textbook does not also provide ample opportunities for grammatical rules to be used outside grammar sessions. The other activities seem to be independent from the grammar rules even though the latter can greatly serve the former. Besides, it has been represented in the same figure that students badly need the teacher's help to understand structures, even if

most of them do use the textbook to do grammar exercises. This shows that students will always need another source of knowledge (the teacher) apart from the textbook. This justifies the findings of the study conducted by Badea and Iridon (2015), who came to the conclusion that the textbook can never be enough to meet the students' needs.

Moreover, the present study shows that the majority of participants cannot easily recognize the new vocabulary items in a text. As the researcher consulted the textbook, it was found that all the texts are written in one font and in one size, without putting new vocabulary items in italics, bold, or in colors. This makes it quite difficult for the learners to identify these words easily and quickly. However, a lot of students claim that they can understand these words in the context. So, the clearer the context, the easier it becomes for the learner to grasp new vocabulary concepts. In addition, most students do not find language functions authentic. Students have no opportunities to learn and use the target functions in a meaningful context. For example, there are no role-play or acting-out activities that may engage students in to practice the target language functions in life-like situations.

Regarding the second research question, it aimed to explore how relevant and attractive this EFL textbook is to Moroccan high school students. As reported by Ahour et al. (2014) and Laabidi and Nfissi (2016), the obtained findings offered further evidence that the majority of participants entirely agree that the content does not meet their interests and needs, and that it is not updated. This is quite true, the textbook was published in 2007, and since then rapid changes have taken place. The content should have kept up with these changes which have affected almost all the aspects of life.

In addition, the same figure shows that the textbook's topics do not relate to the other subjects. However, some students believe that the content meets their cultural background. In fact, the textbook contains some units about Moroccan celebrations, traditions, customs, and cultural practices. This allows students to talk about their home culture as well as that of English-speaking countries. These findings contrast with Alshenqeeti (2019) and Khodabakhshi (2014), who pointed out that most EFL textbooks are culturally biased and reflect mostly foreign cultures.

Furthermore, most of students agree that the textbook's pictures are of different quality (real, portrait, caricature). Besides, the majority claim that they do refer to pictures in order to understand the content of texts. This shows how pictures can really facilitate the learner's understanding. That is why they should be of good quality, clear, appealing, and various.

6. Conclusions and Implications

By and large, the findings obtained in this study are empirically supported. Different studies have more or less come to the same conclusions. The findings of this survey offered clear and tangible evidence that this English language textbook which is currently used at a lot of high schools in Morocco does not satisfy the learners' needs. To sum up, students are not generally satisfied with their textbook. The latter does not allow them to develop their language skills, particularly listening and speaking. Moreover, the great majority of these students find the textbook old, unattractive, unuseful, and uninteresting. Therefore, they usually need the teacher's help and explanation. Last but not least, a lot of students believe that the content of the textbook is outdated and thus does not meet their interests. However, it is worth mentioning that the textbook is still relevant to the learners' cultural background. This feedback which comes directly from learners is likely to lead to important recommendations that should be seriously taken into account by textbooks designers and writers for improvement purposes.

First of all, the content and topics of this textbook should be updated so that they would meet the learners' interests and needs. It is generally believed that students perform better and learn quickly when they are interested in what they are learning. Students should also be initiated to the current world-wide issues. Part of their learning is to be informed of the latest news and things that concern them in technology, society, education, and science breakthroughs. It is high time students found the world in the textbook they are actually using.

Furthermore, textbooks designers need to improve the quality of pictures. This is the image-age and one image in language textbooks can concretize abstract concepts and ideas. Students usually refer to pictures to understand what a text is about. Therefore, they should be clear, various (real, portrait, caricature, fictional), and aesthetically appealing. Pictures should be colorful, attractive, relevant, and inclusive of all the target students, i.e., all the social, ethnic, and cultural groups should be equally represented. Also, these pictures should not include any offensive images or sigs that would invoke feelings of hurt, anger, or dislike towards any of these groups (Ait Bouzid, 2016; Ait Bouzid; 2017).

In addition to this, it is greatly preferable to put the new vocabulary items in bold or in italics so that they will be easily recognized and grasped. Another crucial point is the presentation and teaching of structures which seems to be problematic in *Ticket to English 2*

which does not provide ample context and practice for the target structures. Therefore, it is highly recommended that textbooks designers present grammatical structures and functions in a way that allows learners to be independent.

Second of all, textbooks should be accompanied with some supplementing materials that can be used by teachers in the classroom or by students at home. For example, in addition to a workbook and a CD, textbooks should also be supplemented by another package which includes progress checks, quizzes, tests samples, and a glossary. This will provide students with reliable resources that they can use to revise and prepare for their exams.

The last recommendation is to create a digital version, along with the paper version, of the textbook. Students nowadays are visual and attracted by screens and technology more than ever. That is why digital textbooks seem to be a reasonable and practical alternative for these students. The latter will be able to check pronunciation and meaning with no more than two clicks through using a well-designed digital textbook.

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