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Research Article

Developing and Evaluating a General English Coursebook for University Students of German with a Focus on Reading Skill

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Abstract

Learning new languages has always been one of the most challenging issues for learners. This deals with learning a third language specifically, in this study, for German university students who improve their reading skill. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the coursebook of the Persian university students of German language, who study German and learn English as their third language. To that end, a new English coursebook was developed based on the models of needs analysis and theoretical frameworks of the language materials evaluation. The method used in this study was an exploratory mixed method, which had two qualitative and quantitative phases. For this purpose, the researchers divided a group of 62 Iranian participants into the control and the experimental groups. The participants in both groups were given a questionnaire to do a needs analysis. The students and their professor were interviewed, via a semi-structured interview to get their needs, expectations, and points of view regarding improving reading skills, needed to evaluate and develop the new language material. In the control group, the students of German were taught English reading skills with the usual material. In contrast, the experimental group received the newly designed language material. Then, the data from both phases (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) were analyzed. The results revealed the inadequacy of the previous coursebook (e.g., irrelevant texts to the interests and needs of the learners, poor exercises, etc.) and the effectiveness of the newly developed language material in reading skill improvement. The results of this research may be helpful to empower those English teachers, who teach bilingual or multilingual students, German language teachers, language materials developers, syllabus designers, second language learners, language schools, and language policymakers to develop new language materials for special groups of students based on their needs.

Keywords: coursebooks, German students, material development, material evaluation, multilinguals, reading skill

1. Introduction

Many English language learners learn English as their second/foreign language while their major is another language (Abdullaev, 2021) rather than English like German, Spanish, etc. Learning English has been one of the most important and problematic issues for those learners, who want to migrate, study abroad, and interact with the native speakers of the target language. Furthermore, there are university students who study English as a foreign language, like university students of the German language in Iran. One important problem for foreign language students is their reading comprehension skills (González-Valenzuela et al., 2021). Teaching reading comprehension has been always a debated issue for L2 teachers given that each learner has his/her strategy and style to acquire a new language. The problem is when teachers face bilingual or multilingual students who know more than one language (Lee et al., 2020) because they compare the meaning of the text with the other languages they have already acquired.

Several scholars, such as Tomlinson (1998, 2009), McDonough et al. (2013), McGrath, (2002), and Nunan (1997, 2014), have presented frameworks and theories of language materials development and evaluation. As Tomlinson (2009) has recommended, many teaching principles should be driven through language materials development and this empowers the teachers to design their materials rather than adopting coursebooks. Such materials must be coherent and meaningful to the target group (Tomlinson, 2009). For that purpose, several items should be considered: a) Language development theories, b) Teaching principles, c) Knowledge of the target language use, and d) Systematic observation and evaluation of materials (Tomlinson, 2009).

McDonough et al. (2013) have maintained that a material must be organized to address a particular learning need for the purpose of small groups. In other words, a material should be designed to meet the needs of learners who need to improve their language ability in any language skills. McGrath (2002) has emphasized the role of the teachers as the authors of the materials. According to McGrath (2002), the cultural information given in the textbook is very important to be familiar for the learners enriching the idea of localized materials for the students related to their culture and ideologies.

Nunan (1997, 2014) has emphasized the role of learner autonomy in choosing suitable material. According to Nunan (1997, 2014), adequate language materials should encourage learners' promotion, willingness, and autonomy to be independent through the process of language learning. This theory helps to design activities that raise learners' engagement with the material and helps the students to do them independently and autonomously.

Foreign language coursebooks are also expected to be relevant to the student's culture and context (Alrashidi, 2021), and their suitability, and reliability must be checked with specific models or frameworks (e.g., McDonough et al., 2013; Tomlinson, 2011). Hence, for each specific context and given the results of needs analyses, the planners and curriculum designers should develop adequate language material that is localized for a special educational context (Miller, 1998) and relevant to the culture and ideologies of the students (McGrath, 2002), especially for EFL which is the focus of this study.

One of the main skills which are complained about by the teachers is reading comprehension (González-Valenzuela et al., 2021) In other words, language beneficiaries, including EFL teachers, or language learners are not tended to study printed language materials (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020), which are designed for all kinds of learners, without paying attention to their needs (Eslami, 2010). As Miller (1998) stated, not all the materials are suitable for *all* kinds of learners; for each specific context and regarding the need analysis, the planners and curriculum designers should develop adequate material that is localized for that special educational context (Miller, 1998). Furthermore, researchers have indicated that many German students have deficiencies in English reading, even though they have passed General English at the school (Gruber & Tonkyn, 2017), and they don't show any interest in the topics of the previous language material.

In addition, several studies revealed the role of appropriate language materials and curricula in removing the drawbacks in the way of language learning, especially for reading comprehension for teachers and learners (Chen et al., 2020) such as using context clues (Makoe & Shando, 2018), memorizing and sentence writing (Xu et al., 2018), finding words in a reading passage (Yanagisawa et al., 2020) are mentioned in the syllabus of books and supplementary materials as efficient ways for learning.

As a solution to the present problem, the researcher focused on the 'material evaluation' and 'material development', based on the learners' needs. Students who learn languages other than English use their special learning strategies and techniques like code-switching, translanguaging, and so on (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021; Park, 2013), which may need to provide efficient material or adequate units to be taught. To this end, a three-credit course in General English language for university students of the German language at Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran branch was under observation. According to the above-mentioned problems, the focus of the researcher in this study was on General English material development based on reading comprehension skills among university students of the German

language, whose L1 was Persian. As there was not even definite General English materials for such students, the instructors taught with different material each semester, which led to poor results, although a language material evaluation was done to demonstrate any probable difference between the newly designed material and the previous one. To clarify the status of the German language as a foreign language in Iran, it should be noted that German is considered as a second language for English language university students at Islamic Azad University and also it is defined as a major in the field of German language and literature and the German students must pass a three-credit General English course at university. Hence, the study aimed to develop an English coursebook for students of the German language, whose L1 was Persian and who had to pass an obligatory three-credit General English course in their fourth semester.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Teaching and Learning

Designing a special material for a specific course of instruction has many advantages such as individual needs, personalization, and contextualization (Howard & Major, 2004). According to Howard and Major (2004), various factors must be considered in material design as learners, curriculum and context, resources and facilities, personal confidence and competence, copyright compliance, and time. Considering the above factors may be fruitful for many language teachers and instructors to engage the students more effectively with the target language and make them more aware of the linguistics points, culture (Shin et al., 2011), and the world of the target language.

Wibowo et al. (2020) defined the role of teaching strategies in the reading skill improvement of the students. They asserted that the more adequate teaching strategies used in the classroom, the more improvement through reading comprehension takes place, although such teaching reading comprehension has its special processes (Irwin, 2007). Nguyen (2022) expressed the role of teacher strategies in reading comprehension. In that study, teachers used techniques like questioning, predicting, retelling, and picturing to promote reading comprehension. The results showed that the majority of the learners reflected feedback on these tactics used by their teachers. Based on the findings, teachers should give information to the students before they engage with the text and use tactics for teaching reading comprehension corresponding to the student's level of ability and personality to enhance engagement.

In another study, Tang et al. (2019) used humor stories to promote learners' attraction, interest, and motivation toward reading which reveals that if the teachers use suitable techniques, strategies, and/or supplementary materials (e.g., stories), they will be able to raise the students' reading comprehension skill. According to Ahsani and Budairi (2022), there are three major reading models: a bottom-up, top-down, and interactive model. They stated that "The benefit of reading may also include the acquisition of different reading skills and cognitive strategies as individuals build and develop positive reading habits over time. As such, the ability to process information through reading becomes critically important for individual development, as well as for social, economic, and civic life" (Ahsani & Budairi, 2022. p. 13).

Lee et al. (2019) proposed a framework in which science and English language learning are integrated in terms of material development. By such a conceptual framework, it is supposed that including scientific concepts through designing material can be helpful for language learners to engage them with both: knowledge enhancement and language learning. This engagement can be done by TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) through different tasks (Masuhara, 2015) to prepare the students to know the subject matter. Masuhara (2015) suggested using TBLT principles, as criteria, in the process of evaluation that, consequently, leads to communicative competence improvement and better results in examinations among the students.

Smith et al. (2021) studied the influence of background knowledge on reading comprehension. As they found out, the background knowledge of the learners affects learners' reading. "Reading involves the interaction between the skills and cognitive processes of the reader and the linguistic characteristics of a text. The reader needs to integrate text information with prior knowledge to form a mental representation of the meaning of the text (Van Dijk et al., 1983)" (Smith et al., 2021, p. 1).

Nguyen et al. (2021) focused on sociocultural and intercultural issues to prepare students to communicate in an international community which is an approach in ELT material development, specifically in multilingualism and globalization, as they stated. There must also be material related to the content and culture of the learners to be taught. So, educators are recommended to teach related books to move ahead in the reading and writing of the students (Simanjuntak, & Barus, 2020).

In another study, Hamra and Syatriana (2015) have conveyed research based on the material design for teaching reading comprehension in the Indonesian context. They used an interactive model contacting five principal aspects (i.e., reading knowledge, reading strategy, reading skills, previous knowledge, and reading participation) to improve reading comprehension

among EFL students. As a result, they concluded that the Interactive Model of Teaching Reading Comprehension (IMTRC) consisting of learning aspects: previous knowledge, reading skills, reading knowledge, and reading participation had enhanced students' reading (Hamra & Syatriana, 2015). In this regard, the researcher of the present study benefited from aspects such as the reading knowledge of students in both phases of material evaluation and development and reading participation in designing tasks and exercises for the newly developed material.

Based on the above theories and studies, it can be summed up that the role of materials in reading comprehension must be taken into consideration in the area of language materials development and evaluation. To that end, the following research questions were put forward:

RQ1: To what extent does the present English coursebook match with the McDonough et al., (2013) criteria?

RQ2: Does teaching the developed English coursebook have any significant effect on learning reading among Iranian university students of German?

3. Method

3.1. Design

A mixed-method design is defined as an integration of both qualitative and quantitative studies in which the researcher tries to enhance the study in terms of reliability, validity, and generalizability (Brown, 2014). Dörnyei (2007) has also asserted mixed method research (MMR) as a pragmatist methodological approach to do research in which the integration of both qualitative and quantitative findings leads to higher knowledge. In this research, the method used by the researcher was an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. First, in the qualitative phase, the researcher ran interviews and distributed questionnaire among the stakeholders to get their needs and interests. In the quantitative phase, the researcher evaluated the previous coursebook and developed a new language material based on learners' needs, and finally piloted the newly designed coursebook to reveal the effectiveness of the newly developed material so that the findings were integrated.

3.2. Participants

In this study, 62 university students of the German language at Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch (29 males and 33 females) participated. As their professor stated, the student's level of proficiency in

English was found to be pre-intermediate based on the results of a proficiency test administered to the control and experimental groups. The number of participants was 30 in the control and 32 in the experimental group. The participants' age range varied between 21 and 36 years for both male and female genders. The participants were native speakers of the Persian language that lived in Iran and were university students of the German language. They had passed an English course at the university as a foreign language (i.e., a three-credit General English course), which is offered in the fourth semester and lasts for three months, and each session lasts 135 minutes once a week. There was no randomization because the sample was considered a convenience sample of university students, who had already registered for and participated in the course.

All the stakeholders of this study, not only the university students of the German language but also the department director, and the instructor participated in the study to complete the questionnaire and answer interview question in order to get more information about the General English course, language materials that have been taught, and the results of every semester. Their course director and instructor had more than 20 years of experience in teaching at the university and were Ph.D. holders in teaching languages (i.e., English and German). The identity of the instructor and the director of the department were hidden based on ethical issues.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Questionnaire

A needs analysis questionnaire was used for evaluation and designing language materials proposed by Aliki et al. (2021). The questionnaire was a multiple-choice Likert-scale instrument (see Appendix A) in which the students marked their willingness, needs, attitudes, etc. There were no right or wrong questions, aiming to restrict their stress (Aliki et al., 2021). It should be taken into consideration that it was filled by the students anonymously to have a higher validity as students responded to the questions without worrying about affecting their performance in English. Additionally, the questionnaire was supposed to measure the needs of learners which was obvious by face, content, and construct validity (Singh, 2017). The questionnaire was also reliable based on the test-retest reliability (Singh, 2017). At the beginning of the questionnaire, the students were informed about the purpose which is their needs in English lessons. It is based on closed questions and *Yes-No questions, multiple-choice, rating, and ranking* questions. The criteria to choose the items in the checklist were as selecting points 4 to 0 (excellent to totally lacking) in the way that the researcher evaluated the material. If there were *all* the criteria, according to McDonough et al. (2013), the item in the checklist was 4, If there

was no criterion, the item was 0. If there were half of the criteria, the item was 2. If there were more than half of the criteria, it was 3. Finally, if there were lower than half, it was 1.

The structured items are easy to analyze based on the limited number of responses to achieve information about different kinds of issues. Consequently, information is reached by answering simply *yes* or *no*, by *choosing alternatives* provided, and by *attributing a value* on a given scale so as to get the main advantage of questionnaires, objectivity (Aliki et al., 2021; Gardner & Winslow, 1983).

3.3.2. Interview

A semi-structured interview for needs analysis was also done with all the stakeholders by the researcher in the university. The interview protocol contained five open and predetermined questions designed by the researcher based on needs analysis. Each question lasted about 2-3 minutes to collect the stakeholders' needs and attitudes:

1) What are your needs and expectations for learning English?
2) What do you do normally in your free time? What are your hobbies?
3) Have you studied English before in any institute?
4) Where do you normally use English?
5) What are your weaknesses and strengths in English?

3.3.3. KET Test

A general version of the A2 level KET test, including the reading part (part 1), was used as placement tests, pretest, and posttest. The test is considered as a standard test by The Common European Framework of References for Languages. The KET test was valid because the researcher chose only the reading parts based on the content validity and the face validity to evaluate the reading skill. The test was used to check the level of proficiency of the students just before starting the General English course, and the posttest was used in the experimental part as the final exam to see any probable difference between the control and experimental groups.

3.3.4. Checklist

The textbook evaluation was measured using a checklist proposed by Miekley (2005) that conforms to the Communicative Language Teaching criteria of McDonough et al. (2013). The checklist contains three main parts *textbook*, *teacher's manual,* and *content*, and each is divided into sub-items. The textbook had *content, vocabulary and grammar, exercises and activities, and attractiveness of the text and physical make-up*. The teacher's manual

included *general features, background information, methodological guidance, supplementary exercises,* and *materials*. Finally, content maintained three parts of *appropriateness of the textbook for the curriculum, for the students, and for the teachers*. The items went from excellent to totally lacking (4= *excellent*, 3= *good*, 2= *adequate*, 1=*poor*, and 0= *totally lacking*). In the checklist M represented mandatory, O equaled optional, and N was not applicable. The checklist was considered valid based on the face, content, and construct validity (Singh, 2017). Furthermore, the results of repeated pilot-testing in other studies, such as Vakilifard et al. (2021), Rashtchi (2020), Khan et al. (2024), showed the validity and reliability of the checklist.

3.3.5. Observation

The researcher also used observation as a part of triangulation to collect data and used the checklist to fill in the evaluation items. The observation was done directly during the study using a checklist at the university.

3.4. Procedure

Initially, the professor of university students of German was interviewed by the researcher in the university to investigate if German students faced problems in reading a text of the language material fluently, in understanding the context, and in getting the main idea to answer the questions of the textbook. For example, they had problem reading loudly and finding the meaning of words. This led the researcher to evaluate the problems of the coursebook of German university students and design new materials for them, considering their needs based on frameworks by McDonough et al., (2013), Tomlinson (2011), Nunan (1988), and Baleghizadeh (2019).

Then, the researcher interviewed the director of the Department of the German Language, at Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, who claimed the deficiencies in terms of the General English language course for university students of the German language, which is presented as a three-credit course as General English in the same faculty. As the department director stated, there was not any specifically designed English coursebook for the university students of German language. Although several instructors have taught this course to the university students of the German language with different materials based on their interests, there was still a lack of one definite adequate English coursebook. As the director expressed, none of the past semesters showed satisfactory results based on the previous materials.

3.4.1. Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Analysis

While the focus of this study was on language materials development and material evaluation based on learners' needs to enhance reading among university students of the German language, the researcher benefited from exploratory mixed method research that first started with the quantitative questionnaire data collection followed by interviews for triangulation purposes.

Before the English semester started (a semester earlier), the researcher met the participants (i.e., students and their instructor) and distributed Aliki et al's (2021) needs analysis questionnaire to the participants first to gather data about their needs, feelings, problems, expectations, suggestions, and complaints. The questionnaire was printed and given to the participants in person. Each lasted about 20 minutes.

In the next step, the researcher set an interview with the students and the professor in the university to triangulate the results of the previous phase. The interview contained five open-ended questions that lasted about 12-15 minutes. The interview and questionnaire data collection were done for needs analysis, which plays a key role in language materials development. The researcher also administered a KET placement test as a pretest (i.e., general version, reading part, A2 level) to check the level of English language proficiency of the participants after the qualitative phase. After developing a newly designed coursebook by the researcher, a posttest was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the new language material in improving the reading skill of the learners.

3.4.2. Material Evaluation Phase

The researcher evaluated the previous coursebook, which was Interactions 2 by Kirn et al. (2002), in two phases of external and internal evaluation based on the McDonough et al.'s (2013) model to extract the weak points and mismatches between the language material content and learners' needs. The researcher used Miekley's (2005) checklist to mark the items of advantage or disadvantage according to the two models.

According to McDonough et al. (2013), language materials evaluation must be started externally. In external evaluation, it is important to check the table of contents and its relevancy to the inside of the book. It is also needed to compare the introduction and claims with the contents inside the book. Accordingly, the introduction section must explain the suitability and relativity to the suitable level of proficiency, the target group of students, and also a brief reference to the contents (McDonough et al., 2013).

Given all of the above, the researcher inserted the results, marked them in the checklist to find mismatchs between learners' needs and the suitability of the previous coursebook. In internal evaluation, according to McDonough et al. (2013), at least two units must be evaluated. The researcher revealed the findings of internal evaluation based on McDonough et al. (2013).

3.4.3. Material Development Phase

In the next phase, the results of the phases of the interview and questionnaire analysis, external and internal evaluation, and the criteria of the mentioned models contributed to the development of a new English coursebook for the target group of the students (i.e., the university students of German language in the faculty of foreign languages in Central Tehran Branch). The researcher designed a 6-unit coursebook, each containing two texts, 5-6 tasks, and activities for each unit (e.g., warm-up, multiple choice, matching) based on learners' needs according to the results of the previous phase and in line with the models by McDonough et al. (2013), Tomlinson (2011), Nunan (1988), and Baleghizadeh (2019). The researcher chose texts from standard and valid sources (i.e., American English File2, Four Corners2, and Top Notch1) to have more authentic and original material based on Tomlinson (2013) considering weak points of the previous coursebook based on McDonough et al. (2013) to improve their reading comprehension skill (see Appendix B). In other words, this phase was based on the results of the needs analysis through the questionnaire and interview instruments. After checking the suitability and readability of the texts, the researcher put some of the texts for the new material and designed tasks and exercises for each, which included two texts for each unit, and a warm-up before every reading related to the needs and interests of the learners. To that end, the following steps were taken:

1) Placement test (pretest): to get the proficiency level of the learners
2) Designing a table of contents and introduction
3) Reading texts selected from different standard and valid sources
4) Cloze test: to check the suitability of the texts
5) Designing the coursebook material by using selected texts for reading and writing
6) Designing tasks and exercises

3.4.4. Experimental Phase

In this phase, the researcher asked the German language professor to pilot the newly developed coursebook through a whole semester (i.e., three months) to the experimental group. However, the control group was taught the previous language material. The researcher observed the sessions and marked the items in the checklist regarding the developed material. At the end of the

semester, to check the results of the students' reading proficiency, the students were asked to take another KET test (A2 level, reading part) at the university because there was no standard test based on the newly designed material.

3.5. Data Analysis

The questionnaire and interview data were analyzed using the keyword extraction method (Firoozeh et al., 2020) to reveal the participants' needs to extract the main needs of the teachers and learners. In external and internal evaluation phases, the results were inserted in the checklist to briefly show the mismatch and unsuitability of the material, which has always led to poor results of the course among the learners.

Furthermore, an independent sample t-test and a paired sample t-test were run using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 22) to analyze the test data. To this end, a t-test sample was conducted and results of pretest and posttest were compared and contrasted to answer research questions. The final results of two steps (quantitative and qualitative studies) were integrated to point out the ineffectiveness of the previous language material.

4. Results

4.1. Results of the First Research Question

To answer the first research question, (i.e., To what extent does the present English coursebook match with McDonough et al.'s, (2013) criteria?), the researcher ran the steps as follows.

4.1.1. Results for Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Analysis

The ideas extracted from the teacher's answers to the interview questions are as follows:

Question 1: While the professor answered question 1 as not learning but teaching English, her expectation was that the learner could read a simple text, understand it and do the exercises, after passing a course for 3 months.

Question 2: Question number two was specific for extracting the hobbies and interests of the learners; therefore, the teacher preferred not to insert hers.

Question 3: The teacher answered that some students in her class were going to English courses but not all the students because their major was German language and not English.

Question 4: She also tried to speak English and defined everything in English in the classroom (like other English classes in English major), but many students don't understand; so sometimes she has to explain not only in English but also in Persian.

Question 5: Based on the teacher's beliefs, some students may be good at vocabulary or guessing the meaning of new words in a context, but most of them have problems in grammar, reading, and understanding the texts. It's because they cannot sympathize with the contextualized content and/or don't understand the expressions and idioms of the texts.

The ideas extracted from the students' answers to the interview questions are as follows:

Question 1: By decoding the common words and analyzing them, 11 students ascertained that they need to understand a text after reading it and they prefer to learn a few new words in each text. They mostly referred to reading articles in the internet, reading subtitles, reading short stories, and the material of the classroom. They focused on being able to pass the course successfully with a good mark.

Question 2: By gathering the results of the third part of the questionnaire and also the answers in this section, 12 students addressed their hobbies in their leisure time as: listening to music, watching movies, internet navigation, chatting, playing games, and navigating in social media. In sum, technology is the most used word by the participants that showed their preferences.

Question 3: Only two of the students have studied English in other institutes outside the university.

Question 4: As they highlighted their hobbies and preferences, they mostly use English in terms of technology and social media for chatting with others, or sending an e-mail.

Question 5: Four of them expressed their weaknesses in reading, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar; while 8 confirmed that not only reading but also understanding the main idea, answering the exercises, and writing a summary of it are their weak points.

Five participants noted what the teacher taught in the classroom was very clear to them whereas 7 were concerned about getting the meaning of words. By analyzing the answers of teacher and learners, the researchers found that the previous material did not satisfy the learners and did not conform to their needs.

In general, in a qualitative study, after distributing the questionnaires to and conducting the interviews with the participants, the researcher found no

relevance and effectiveness of the previous coursebook to the needs and interests of the students based on the answers of the questionnaire and interview. The results of both questionnaires and interviews were inserted and reported briefly in Table 1.

Table 1
Learner Needs Based on the Questionnaire Data

	Background Information		
		yes	no
1	Do you study English outside?	19	41
2	If yes for how long?	BW 1 to 4 years	---
3	Any exam in English?	11	32
	Motivation (reasons for learning English)		
4	To get good marks		48
5	To understand songs, films, and articles on the Internet		39
6	To chat with foreign people on social networks		36
7	Because of the parents		0
8	To help find a good job in the future		29
9	Because of the university program		46
10	Because of being an international language		25
	Favorite Topics		
11	Friends		√
12	Free time		√
13	Traveling		√
14	Famous people		--
15	Art		--
16	Technologies & Inventions		√
17	Environment		
18	Music		√
19	Games		√
20	Entertainment		√
21	Literature		--
22	Food		--
23	Health		--
24	Transport		--
25	Internet		√
26	Human rights		--
27	Media		√
	Learning Styles Preferences		
28	Reading English texts		39
29	Doing projects		9
30	Doing vocabulary exercises		11
31	Doing pair-work activities		36
32	Working individually		17
33	Solving problem in English		28

Aptitude (Difficulty with Skills and Componants)	
Grammar, reading, and writing	34 often
Vocabulary and spelling	21 Sometimes
Reading Comprehension	
34 Reading quickly a text to get a general idea	often
35 Reading slowly to get the details	sometimes
36 Understanding the main points of the text	rarely
37 Being able to guess the meaning of the unknown words	sometimes

As Table 1 shows, the participants were asked about their background, motivation, favorite topics, learning styles, attitudes, and comprehension. The majority of the students did not study English outside the university; however, they were motivated to get good marks on their university exams. They also showed interest in topics such as music, games, arts, traveling, the internet, etc. which were not included in the previous coursebook. The main learning style of the students was reading text the most, which was inserted in the newly developed coursebook by the researcher (i.e., two texts in each unit) (Baleghizadeh, 2019). The learners' attitudes toward difficulty with grammar, reading, and writing problems raised the importance of enriching the passages with easier grammar and structure related to their level of proficiency rather than difficult texts. Finally, the students were asked about their reading comprehension, which showed most of them had problem skimming (reading the texts quickly to get the main idea) and also understanding the meaning of the texts that were inserted in the previous material.

All in all, the results of both questionnaire and interview revealed a great irrelevancy and mismatch between learners' needs and interests and previous coursebook.

4.1.2. Results for Material Evaluation Phase

The material evaluation was piloted in the two phases of external and internal evaluations as advised McDonough et al. (2013). In the external evaluation phase, the researcher found that the coursebook suffered from a lack of any rich and meaningful introduction that stated the contents of the material. There was still a lack of complete explanation of proficiency level, the intended audience, used materials in context, and the author's view as stated by McDonough et al. (2013). There were no claims in the introduction to check the relevancy of the contents. Finally, the table of contents was evaluated. Considering the fact that this coursebook was used for university students (ESP) and there were about 3 months of duration as one semester, it seemed that 12 lessons (each containing about 20 pages) were too many to be covered in a whole course. Moreover, the topics did not match the preferences of the students except one or two.

According to McDonough et al. (2013), in internal evaluation, at least two units must be evaluated. The researcher revealed the findings of internal evaluation based on McDonough et al. (2013) as follows:

a) Based on the scholars' criterion which was grading and sequencing of the material, there seemed to be many exercises as *warm up* more than enough because before the reading, the students didn't have enough knowledge, and inserting too many warm-up exercises made them just exhausted and disappointed.

b) After one reading, there were two or three practices of comprehension and vocabulary achievement and suddenly there was another reading that seemed difficult and complex to handle two readings continuously because each text needs to be comprehended and clear by the teacher and students through exercises.

c) Although the book had 2 texts for reading, based on Baleghizadeh (2019) which was considered a positive point, the texts weren't based on the needs and expectations of the learners. The students mostly had no idea about the topics and contexts which may make problem for the teacher to raise the students' prior knowledge in the warm-up stage.

d) The material did not seem to be suitable for self-study or learner autonomy because there were readings with topics that weren't related to the interests and needs of the learners. Such book needed to be taught by a facilitator (teacher).

As the items in the checklist conform to the criteria of McDonough et al. (2013), the previous language material was evaluated (Table 2).

Table 2
Material Evaluation Report based on McDonough et al.'s (2013) Criteria

Criteria	Yes	No	To some extent
External & internal evaluation		√	
Useful cover		√	
Adequate introduction		√	
Suitable and well-structured table of contents			√
The presentation of the skills in the materials		√	
The grading and sequencing of the materials		√	
Coherence between skills		√	
Listening and speaking skills	√		
Suitability of the materials for different learning styles		√	
Mismatch between teacher beliefs and learner perception	√		

Adaptability of the results with the checklist		
Applicable content	√	
Suitable vocabulary and grammar	√	
Addressing exercises and activities		√
Attractiveness of the text and physical make-up	√	
Adequate features of teacher's manual	√	
Background information	√	
Methodological guidance		√
Supplementary exercises and materials	√	
Appropriate context for curriculum and students	√	
Respectful and understandable context		√
Match between material and learner needs		√

As shown in Table 1, the researcher evaluated the previous material by the criteria of McDonough et al. (2013) in the first part. The researcher also reported the results, in line with the items of the checklist, in the second part (Table 2). The results showed the most inadequacy of the material for the students. Based on the results, there weren't so many items, which matched between the evaluated coursebook and scholars' criteria. The mismatch samples were marked in items of the checklist in detail, as the inadequacy of rating new vocabulary in texts, not enjoyable and interesting topics for the students, etc. All in all, the results showed that the evaluated coursebook does not conform to McDonough et al.'s (2013) criteria and learners' needs based on both external and internal evaluation shown in the checklist. Although there were many drawbacks, there were also some advantages (e.g., maintaining two texts for each unit) in the previous coursebook that were used in the phase of material development.

4.1.3. Material Development Phase

Table 3 shows the table of contents of the newly developed coursebook by the researcher (Table 3).

Table 3
Table of Contents of the Newly Developed Material

Units	Contents	Learning outcomes	Functional language	Reading	Tasks & Exercises
1. The world's friendliest city Attractions in the city	Traveling	Destinations of vacations	Asking about places, cities, brochures etc.	Big cities	True/false-word order-bubble map
2. Girls' night out	Friends	Hang out with friends	Making appointment	Girls' night out	

Restaurants with a difference			and fix a date		Matching-skim-gap fill-naming-letter soup
3. Musicians from around the world Who wrote *imagine*	Music	Describing singers and favorite musicians	Getting & giving info about popular celebrities	African superstars	Words in context-t/f-questioning-skim/scan
4. Peoples' profiles: This is me	Media, Internet & technology	Describing the personality and appearance	Using key words & suitable info in web page design	online profiles and webpage	Predict/preview-matching-missing sentence
5. What's your all-time favorite movie? What's your hobby?	Free time	Watching movies and describing famous popular movies	Clues about movies and actors, protagonists, etc.	What's your all-time favorite movie?	Cloze test-ask & answer-predict/preview
6. Video games The rules of the game	Game	The use of games in life & its beneficiaries	Different types of games from past to now	Video games are good for you	Main idea-multiple choice-match headings-paragraph order

As shown in Table 3, the researcher inserted two texts for each unit based on Baleghizadeh (2019) and defined the contents by topics, learning outcomes, and functional language based on McDonough et al. (2013), and finally, designed tasks and exercises regarding the developed readings (see Appendix B).

4.2. Results of the Second Research Question

In order to answer the second research question of the current research (i.e., Does teaching the developed English coursebook have any significant effect on learning reading among Iranian university students of German?), in the experimental phase, the paired samples t-test was used. In addition, to reveal the difference between the scores of the learners in the control and the experimental group, an independent samples t-test was applied.
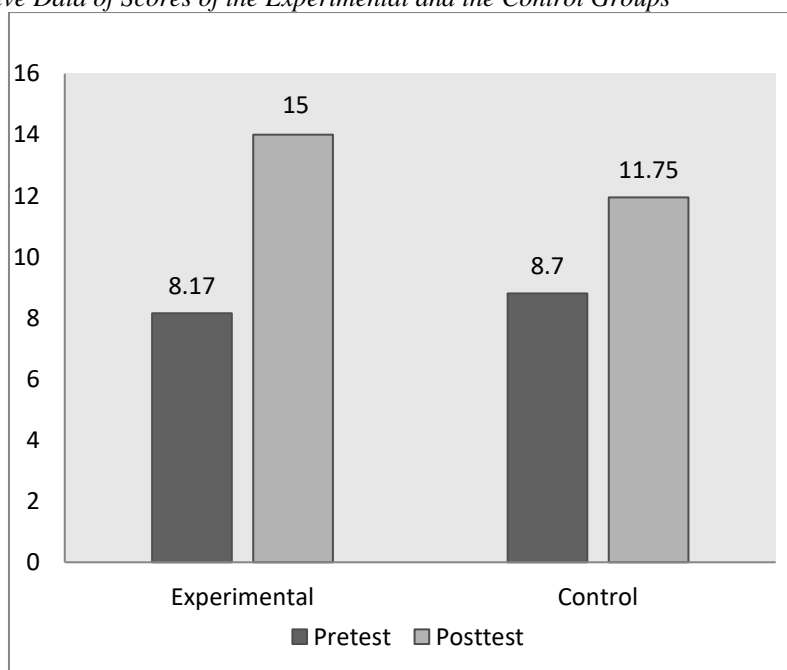
Table 4
Paired Samples Test for the Experimental Group

	Paired Differences		t	df

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pretest - posttest	5.850	2.300	.514	4.773	6.927	11.373	19	.000

Table 4 shows that the newly designed material had positive results on the improvement of learners' proficiency in reading skills. For that reason, the new coursebook had a significant impact on the mastery of English reading of the pre-intermediate university students of the German language, t (19) = -11.373, p= .000. Figure 1 shows the descriptive data of scores in the control and experimental groups.

Figure 1
Descriptive Data of Scores of the Experimental and the Control Groups

An independent sample t-test was run based on the data collection phase from the pretest administered to the learners of both groups (Table 5).

Table 5
Independent Samples T-Test in the Pretest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference

Equal variances assumed	1.64	.20	-1.18	38	.24	-.65	.54
Equal variances not assumed			-1.18	35.92	.24	-.65	.54

The data in Table 5 shows the pretest results of an independent sample t-test on the scores of learners. The significance value for Levene's test explains that the variance in the pretest had homogeneity ($p=.20$). As the p-value defines ($p=.24$), there was not a significant difference between the performance of control and experimental group learners on the pretest, $t(38) = -1.18$, $p > 0.05$. To measure learners' improvement in reading skills after treatment and also to answer the second research question, an independent samples t-test on the posttest scores was run (Table 6).

Table 6
Independent Samples T-Test in the Posttest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	.64	.68	4.19	38	.000	2.05	.48
Equal variances not assumed			4.19	37.88	.000	2.05	.48

The significance value of Levene's test indicates the homogeneity of variance in the posttest ($p=0.68$). The sig value of the T-test in this table explains that there was a significant difference between the performance of the learners in control and experimental groups of learners, $t(38) = 4.190$, $p < 0.05$). According to the results of Table 6, there was a significant difference between posttest scores of the experimental and the control groups. The mean score of the experimental group was more than the mean score of the control group.

The results of the Independent and the Paired Samples T-tests revealed that the newly developed coursebook had a significant effect on improving the pre-intermediate learners' mastery of reading skills quantitatively. Therefore, it can be stated that the newly developed material positively affected improving the reading proficiency of the students.

5. Discussion

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the inadequacy of the previous English coursebook for university students of the German language and design a new material for them based on the theories and models by Tomlinson (2011), McDonough et al. (2013), Nunan (1988), and Baleghizadeh (2019). In the qualitative study, the researcher collected the

data by questionnaire and interview, gathering the participants' needs and expectations, and then analyzing them. In the next phase, the researcher evaluated the previous coursebook based on McDonough et al. (2013), extracting its weak points and irrelevancy to learners' needs. No research had been done to investigate the needs of the university students of the German language in the faculty of foreign languages, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, and no specific English coursebook had been developed for this group of learners to improve their reading skills.

Regarding the present study, Nguyen (2022) expressed the role of teaching reading comprehension. In his study, teachers used techniques like questioning, predicting, retelling, and picturing to promote reading comprehension. The results showed that the majority of the learners reflected feedback on these tactics used by their teachers. Based on the findings, teachers should give information to the students before they engage with the text and use tactics for teaching reading comprehension corresponding to the student's level of ability and personality to enhance engagement. Such results highlight the importance of learner needs and interests in developing a material. Furthermore, the level of proficiency of the students must be taken into consideration in designing a suitable language material, which has been considered by the researcher in this study.

Smith et al. (2021) studied the influence of background knowledge on reading comprehension. They found out that the background knowledge of the learners affects their reading skill. This is what the researcher inserted as warm-up exercises in newly designed material. In general, the results of the study are in line with Smith et al. (2021), and partially in line with Hamra et al. (2015) and Nguyen (2022).

On the other side, the results of this study conformed to Hamra and Syatriana (2015) regarding teaching reading comprehension. The interactive model of Hamra et al. (2015) containing five principal aspects: "reading knowledge, reading strategy, reading skills, previous knowledge, and reading participation" to improve reading comprehension among EFL students was considered by the researcher in this study to design material. In this regard, the researcher benefited from this model and finally the results were in line with Hamra et al. (2015) in reading skill improvement among the learners.

This research was also in line with Masuhara (2015) based on TBLT principles that raised the importance of designing mutual and pair activities for the groups of students to enhance their communicative competence. This study conformed to Nguyen et al. (2021) who focused on sociocultural and intercultural issues to prepare students to communicate in an international community which is an approach in ELT material development, specifically in

multilingualism and globalization. Nguyen (2021) encouraged educators to design materials based on the content and culture of the learners to be taught.

6. Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed to propose a newly designed English coursebook for German language university students, according to the models of Tomlinson (2011), McDonough et al. (2013), Nunan (1988), and Baleghizadeh (2019), who presented the theories of language materials evaluation and materials development. Both phases of material evaluation and material development were run by the researcher to answer two main research questions based on the appropriateness of the commercial materials for the learners, and also the effectiveness of the newly developed needs-based coursebook. In the end, the researcher found that the previous coursebook was not adequate and relevant to the needs of the learners. There were many mismatches between the needs of the learners and the previous material, which were the reasons for the poor performances of the students previously. After designing a new material, the results revealed the appropriateness of the new material for the participants; consequently, the newly developed coursebook had a significant effect on improving the pre-intermediate learners' English mastery of reading skills.

The results of the present study are useful for the department of the German language in particular, in which the study was handled, in the way they can empower teachers and language instructors to design their material based on the learners' needs. Other departments such as French language *can* test the book as a sample for their learners to check any probable effectiveness. The results are also fruitful in empowering English teachers, who teach bilingual or multilingual students, German language teachers, language materials developers, syllabus designers, second language learners, language schools, and language policymakers to develop new language materials for special groups of students based on their needs.

The current study was conducted on pre-intermediate Iranian ESL learners who study the German language at the university, so its results may not be generalized to all language learners at different levels in various educational contexts. Hence, future research could focus on learners at different levels (e.g., elementary, upper-elementary, intermediate, and advanced and upper-advance). The current study was focused on the reading skill for developing new material for pre-intermediate Iranian ESL learners in the German language department. Therefore, further research could consider other skills such as listening and speaking and/ or sub-skills like grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. Other skills of the language such as speaking and listening were not investigated in this study. The current study was

conducted on a small group of ESL learners. Further research could study the larger groups and areas to create more reliable results.

The research study was conducted on both genders; because of the Iranian educational system both genders register for courses in the faculty, so it was impossible to separate males and females for this study. Accordingly, further research could delimit gender to check the ability of only one gender in English skills enhancement. Based on the shortage of time, the lack of a proper guidebook is considered a shortcoming of this study. Future researchers are suggested to propose a guidebook regarding the present developed coursebook.

On the other hand, there are English-language university students who must pass a credit as a foreign language/second language at the university like French or German. Researchers and scholars of other fields of study such as French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, and German can also develop new material for those students.

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Appendix A

Needs Analysis Questionnaire

A QUESTIONNAIRE ON STUDENTS' NEEDS , PREFERENCES AND DIFFICULTIES REGARDING THE ENGLISH LESSON.

The following questionnaire is part of an assignment regarding students' needs related to the learning of the English language. Your answers will help us adjust the English lesson to your demands and needs. It is anonymous and there is no right or wrong answers. Try to give careful and honest responses so as to use the results for the benefit of the students' community.

Background information

1. Do you study English outside school? (Tick **V**)   Yes…………..   No…………..

2. If *Yes* for how long? (please write)   ……………………………………………………

3. Have you taken any exams in English ?   Yes …………   No…………

The following questions will specify why you are learning English and your favourite topics.

Motivation

A. Why are you learning English?   (Number the sentences starting from the most important to you)

a. To get good marks at school	
b. To understand English songs.films or articles on the Internet	
c. To chat with foreign people in social networks	
d. Because my parents want me to	
e. To help me find a good job in the future	
f. Because I want to travel abroad	
g. Because it's in the school program	
h. Because English is an international language	

i. Other reasons (please write)

……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

A Needs Analysis Questionnaire: Designing and Evaluation

B. Tick your favourite topics (more than one answer is possible)

a. Friends	....	k. Literature	....
b. Free time	....	l. Food	....
c. Travelling	....	m. Health	....
d. Famous people	....	n. Transport	....
e. Art	....	o. Internet	....
f. Technology &Inventions	....	p. Human rights	....
g. Environment	....	q. Media	....
h. Music	....	r. Other (please write)...................................
i.Games	....		
j. Entertainment	....		

The next question will show what you like and don't like practicing

Learning styles-preferences

Tick the appropriate column (☺ = I like , ● = I don't like)

	☺	●
a. Listening to English songs		
b. Writing grammar exercises		
c. Writing stories		
d. Reading English texts		
e. Studying grammar rules		
f. Playing games		
g. Doing projects		
h. Doing vocabulary exercises		
i. Doing pair-work activities		
j. Working individually		
k. Speaking with classmates in English		
l. Practicing pronunciation		
m. Solving problems in English having visual prompts		
n. Acting up dialogues with classmates		
o.Doing listening activities		

The next question is about your learning strategies

Learning strategies

Circle a number from 1 to 4 (1=not at all , 2=little , 3=much , 4=very much)

A. Do you like:

a. Working alone?   1   2   3   4

b. Pair work?   1   2   3   4

c. Group work?   1   2   3   4

d. Whole class work?   1   2   3   4

B. Do you like learning vocabulary:

a. By hearing new words?   1   2   3   4

b. By seeing new words?   1   2   3   4

c. By copying new words?   1   2   3   4

d. By using new words?   1   2   3   4

e. Other (please specfy)………………………………………………………………………………

C. Do you like learning grammar:

a. By studying grammar rules?   1   2   3   4

b. By doing exercises at home?   1   2   3   4

c. By doing exercises at school?   1   2   3   4

d. By oral practice in class?   1   2   3   4

e. Other (specify)………………………………………………………………………………………

The two following questions will show how feel about the various skills involved in learning the English language

Aptitude

A. How often do you have difficulty with each of the following skills (tick what expresses you more)

	Very often	Often	sometimes	Rarely	Never
Reading					
Writing					
Speaking					
Listening					
Spelling					
Learning vocabulary					
Learning grammar					

B. Circle the answer that best suits you:

Listening : Do you understand:

a. The class cd's?   always often sometimes rarely never

b. When the teacher talks in English?   always often sometimes rarely never

c. When your classmates talk in English?   always often sometimes rarely never

Reading

a. Do you read the text quickly to understand the general idea? always often sometimes rarely never

b. Do you read the text slowly to understand every detail?   always often sometimes rarely never

c. Do you understand the main points of the English texts?   always often sometimes rarely never

d.Can you guess the meaning of unknown words?   always often sometimes rarely never

Speaking

a. Do you speak English during the lesson?   always often sometimes rarely never

b. Are you afraid of making mistakes while talking? always often sometimes rarely never

c. Do you find it difficult to talk with other people? always often sometimes rarely never

d. Do you have difficulties in pronunciation?   always often sometimes rarely never

Writing

a. Do you have the right syntax when you write in English? always often sometimes rarely never

b.Do you use the appropriate vocabulary?   always often sometimes rarely never

c. Do you organize your paragraphs correctly?   always often sometimes rarely never

d. Do you express your ideas in the right way?   always often sometimes rarely never

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE!

Appendix B

Unit 1. All-Time Favorite Hobbies and Free Time Activities

PART 1

Preview and predict (pre-reading)
Look at these images and answer the following questions.
1. How do people spend their free time?
2. What kind/genre of movies do people watch?
3. Do you like to watch movies at home or go to the cinema?
4. What genre of movies are you interested in?
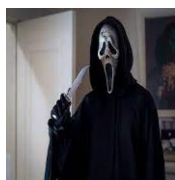
Matching

Match the words with the activities.

Sleeping

Going to a movie

Bar and restaurant
Parks/bars/ discos

Going to gym and
Hanging out

doing sports

Taking a rest and doing nothing
Going out and having fun with friends
Watching a film
Eating out
Going to a local

Cloze Test

Fill in the blanks with the given words. There are two extra words you won't need.

> Silly/ danger/ incompetent/ unforgettable/
>
> funny/ dramatic/ hilarious/ violence/ great

Recently, Phil has seen a ………movie that was one of the ………..comedies. The protagonist plays as a ……….role. Before watching it, he thought …………about it but it wasn't. Angela likes documentaries. She is interested in …………and adventure. On the other hand, Rebecca prefers …………. and classic films. She likes stories and real life events that have …………………endings.

Ask and Answer

Answer the following questions based on the text.(work in pairs)

a) What are the genres of movies named in the passage?

b) What kind of movie is Rebecca interested in?

b) Which movie does Angela suggest to avoid violence?

c) What did Phil think about the movie before watching it?