An In-depth Evaluation of Intermediate
Top Notch

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Abstract

After the teacher, the most important factor in foreign language classroom is the textbook. It is vital that the best possible text be chosen for each situation. Even with the development of new technologies that allow for higher quality teacher-generated materials, demand for textbooks continues to grow, and the publishing industry responds with new series and textbooks each year. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to establish and employ a certain number of relevant and contextually appropriate criteria for the evaluation of the textbooks that are used in our language classrooms. In order to evaluate ELT textbooks, theorists and writers have offered different kinds of evaluative frameworks based on a number of principles and criteria. The purpose of this study was to evaluate a series of ELT textbook, namely intermediate Top Notch based on Littlejohn's (1998) evaluative framework, in order to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and explicit features of the books and to see whether the books are in line with the CLT principles and the objectives set for them. Six ELT teachers helped the researcher rate the evaluative checklists. The results of the study

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showed that although a number of shortcomings were found in Top Notch, it stood up reasonably well to a detailed and in-depth analysis and that its positive attributes far out-weighed its shortcomings.

Keywords: ELT textbook evaluation

1. Introduction

English language instruction has many important components, but the essential one to many EFL/ESL classrooms or specialists in education is the textbook. Garinger (2002) suggests that whatever related to textbook selection will affect teachers and students, so it is an essential factor that educators deal with. He also states that "a textbook can serve different purposes for teachers: as a core resource, as a source of supplemental material, as an inspiration for classroom activities, even as the curriculum itself."(p.1)

According to Sheldon (1998, p. 237), "Coursebooks are perceived by many to be the route map for any ELT program, laying bare it's shape, structure, and destination, with progress, program, and even teacher quality being assessed by learners in terms of sequential , unit-by-unit coverage."

Using coursebooks has some advantages and disadvantages: autonomy (a learner without a coursebook is more teacher-dependent), providing guidance and support for the teacher, convenience, economy, ready-made texts and tasks, syllabus and framework are examples of its advantages; limitation, inadequacy, over-easiness, homogeneity, irrelevance of topics and lack of interest are ideas which are against using a textbook. (Ur, 1996)

Overall, a critical approach to a coursebook is very important. Selected coursebooks should be in accordance with the objectives and methods of the language course, otherwise achieving the aims of the course are impossible. The teacher and coursebook relationship is also extremely important.

Because of the importance of textbooks, The purpose of this study is to evaluate a series of ELT textbook, namely intermediate Top Notch based on Littlejohn's (1998) evaluative framework, in order to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and explicit features of the books and to see whether the books are in line with the objectives set for them.

In the following two sections, textbook evaluation studies in foreign countries are first presented. Then studies done in Iran are reported briefly.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Textbook evaluation studies in foreign countries

By the changes and developments in teaching trends, attitudes toward textbooks, materials development and syllabus design have changed so that different suggestions have been proposed by different scholars.

Allwright (1981) claimed that one basic issue related to ELT materials is whether learners need a textbook or not. Those who support the use of textbooks in classroom argue that they are the most convenient tools for presenting teaching points in that they give the learners a feeling of order, achievement, and consistency in their English studies. On the other hand, the opponents of textbooks argue that textbooks cannot cater for all the demands of learners, that they are superficial in that they are limited in scope. That they cannot help learners directly experience the language, and that they deprive teachers of freedom of action in the classroom.

Kuo (1993) suggests an eclectic approach towards materials development about such issues as whether to use a published textbook or to develop one's own materials, whether to begin with content or skills as the basis for designing materials, whether to take a process-oriented or product-oriented

approach in materials writing, whether to use authentic or modified texts, and how materials should be adapted to different contexts. He presents some useful advice for both teachers and materials writers on these issues.

Bell & Gower (1998) argue for making a compromise between the content and design of ELT materials intended for global use on one hand, and the needs of users and diverse situations in which the textbooks are to be used on the other. The actual users of these textbooks (teachers and students) may be living in an EFL context where they hardly get exposed to authentic language outside the classroom and this fact should be considered when developing materials for worldwide use. Based on their own experience of trying to develop a course book for students living both in UK and overseas (i.e. in EFL contexts), they made some useful suggestions for publishers and materials developers to achieve this compromise.

While some researchers like Allwright, Kuo, and Bell & Gower have focused on the trends in the history of syllabus design, others have focused on issues such as developing criteria for textbook evaluation.

During the last three decades, different textbook evaluation frameworks have been proposed in order to evaluate the existing English textbooks prepared for ESL/EFL learners. These frameworks mostly focus on designing criteria for such an evaluation. For instance, the frameworks of Tucker (1975), Davison (1976), Daud & Celce Murcia (1979), Williams (1983), Sheldon (1988), Ur (1996), and Littlejohn (1998) are some significant examples dominating the ESL field.

It seems that the frameworks of the 1970's decade include behaviorist views of learning and structural theory of language; hence they are suited to the materials developed for Audiolingual classes at the blooming time

of that method. The frameworks of the 1980's decade echo the principles of communicative approach which at that time gathering momentum. In these frameworks issues such as authenticity, attention to learners' needs, practical use of language in the classroom, and group activities were stressed. The frameworks of the 1990's decade are more complex and communicative-based models in which not only language skills and components are incorporated but pragmatic aspects of language use are also included. This indicates the development of models of second and foreign language proficiency from past to present (Riazi, 2003).

While a lot of such studies have focused on the issue of developing criteria for materials evaluation and selection, some others have practically evaluated some specific materials to find their privileges and shortcomings according to the objectives set for them. As an example, Morgan (2003) evaluated IELTs preparation materials and showed that there is a need for more materials that are beyond test-taking practice and aim at developing the language competencies that the candidates need for their work or study destinations. In the books, strong motivation of IELTs candidates was seen as taken for granted and therefore, there is not any attempt to make the books emotive as visually attractive books do; and this was found to be the problem with the books.In his study on the comparison of textbook and authentic interaction, Gilmore (2004) compared seven dialogues in coursebooks and authentic interaction and found that textbook dialogues differed considerably from their authentic equivalents.Grandall and Basturkmen (2004) evaluated a set of instructional materials targeting the speech act of requests. The materials aimed to raise learners' awareness of native-speaker norms of requesting in an academic environment. Using a guided discovery approach, they made the learners analyze samples of authentic

spoken language. The learners' perception of the appropriateness of requests matched those of native speakers more than before, after the instruction.

2.2 Research on textbook evaluation in iran

In the evaluation of EFL materials taught at Iranian public high schools, Toolabi (2002), Yarmohammadi (2002), Amalsaleh (2004), Jahangard (2007), Razmjoo (2007), came to the conclusion that these textbooks suffer from a lot of shortcomings such as: They are not authentic, they don't have attractive layout and the papers of the books is of low quality, they do not pay attention to the fluency practice in all four skills. They are reading and grammar-based. Students' needs are not taken into account. CLT principles are not utilized in the Iranian high school textbooks. Also, in an attempt to evaluate New Interchange which is the mostly used textbooks in ELT institutes of Iran, Iraji (2007) and Zare-Moaayedi (2007), criticize New Interchange because the series do not follow the principles of communicative and task-based approaches as the authors have claimed are the objectives set for them. It has no frequency of metapragmatic information. The distributional pattern of communicative activities were random and without pattern. Unlike communicative activities the distributional pattern of functions not only are random and without purpose, but also they are rule-governed and purposely patterned. It doesn't use learners or even the teachers as a source for its content. Finally suprasentential level as well is ignored for both the expected output and input of the learners.

It's worth mentioning that all the studies reviewed in this section are actual evaluations of English textbooks that are used in schools and institutes of Iran based on different material evaluation frameworks. Most of these studies focus on the merits and demerits of the textbooks.

2.3 Objectives of the study

This study attempts to conduct an in-depth evaluation of intermediate *Top Notch* based on Littlejohn's (1998) evaluative framework. This evaluation benefits from a comprehensive checklist which examines the selected textbooks in the first and second level of Littlejohn's framework (respectively 'what is there' and 'what is required of users?') to arrive at the third level of evaluation ('what is implied?'). The results of the evaluation is hoped to be beneficial for English teachers in many language institutes in that it might give them some insights into the coursebook they use and how they can exploit it better. As such, the study seeks answers to the following questions based on Littlejohn's framework.

2.4 Research guestions

1) How are the widely used intermediate Top Notch textbooks in line with the objectives set for them?
2) What are the strengths and weakness of intermediate Top Notch?
3) What are the explicit features of intermediate Top Notch?

3. Methods

This section presents the design and methods of the study. In this respect, materials, instruments, and data collection and analysis procedures are discussed.

3.1 Materials

The selected textbooks evaluated in this study were Intermediate Top Notch written by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher in 2006 and include three-level (Top Notch 1, 2 &3) English course for adults and young adults, and each textbook consists of 10 units. A workbook and a super CD-ROM are linked to the end of each student's book. For practical reasons and because all the units are in the same format, one typical unit of each level was examined on

the basis of Littlejohn's framework. So the sample selected for this research included 3 units (10%) of the total material and a total number of 100 tasks. Littlejohn also believes that for a snapshot impression of the general nature of a set of materials, it is useful to analyze about 10% to 15% of the total material. (Littlejohn 1998, p. 196)

3.2 Subdivision of the books into sections

Preliminary section: Before starting the first unit in each text-book there are some parts such as: Table of content, Scope and sequence, Acknowledgement, To the teacher, and About the author.

The main body: Each unit of Top Notch series is composed of a two-page warm-up section plus a four two-page lessons and a two-page checkpoint section. The sequence of activities in each unit is as follows: Topic review, Discussion, Sound bites, Conversation model, Grammar, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Listening comprehension, Reading, Writing, Pair/group work, Top Notch interaction, Unit Warm-up.

Final section: This part follows units section in Top Notch books and consists of: Grammar booster, Pronunciation table, Social language list, Alphabetical word list, Top notch pop lyrics.

3.3 Instrument

The principle instrument used for data collection for this research was a checklist based on Littlejohn's (1998) coursebook evaluation framework. This checklist consists of two parts. The first part-Task Analysis Sheet (TAS)- examines the activities and tasks of the selected textbooks. Here, the raters were asked to tick the items which were present in the tasks. In the second part of the checklist-'Design'- demands numerical values to be given to the textbooks under analysis in nine major evaluative subsections

In order to examine the reliability of the questions devised for the 'Design' part,

the Cronbach's Alpha reliability was calculated using the SPSS software and the result showed rather high reliability (0.87).

3.4 Data collection and analysis procedure

Six raters were asked to evaluate the textbooks based on Littlejohn's evaluative framework. The raters were teachers who had taught textbooks under analysis, for at least one year and had taught English as a foreign language for at least five years. Four of the raters were females, two of them were males, and all of them were MA students.

The evaluation was conducted in three levels of analysis, the first level -'What is there?'- deals with "tangible" or physical aspects of the materials, so it is provided by giving a description of the textbooks under analysis by the researcher (explained earlier in Material section). The second level -'What is required of users?'- is done through the checklists developed for analysis of tasks (Task Analysis Sheet), and evaluating the 'Design' of the textbooks. The results of these two levels of analysis helped the researcher to do the third level of analysis –'What is implied'- which was done by the researcher herself.
For each activity in each unit, one TAS was allocated and the raters were asked to tick the items which were present in the task. In each subsection, the raters may have ticked one or more items.

In the second part of the checklists –'Design'- a numerical scale of 0 to 4 points was provided. This part consisted of nine sections of Design part in Littlejohn's framework. Each section contained some evaluative questions which were developed based on the claims of Top Notch authors. For each of the questions in these sections, the raters were asked to give a score of 0(not at all) to 4(completely). In completing this part the raters were asked to consider the textbooks as a whole, since the questions were about the design of the whole books.

Through performing the analysis of evaluative checklists, already checked by the raters, frequency counts and percentage indexes were reported for individual features which were listed in the 'TAS'. For the second part, 'Design', first a general percentage index was reported for the nine subsections and then the percentage index of each evaluative question was reported.

4. Results of Task Analysis

Task analysis sheets were composed of three sections, each addressing a question about the major aspects of the tasks.

4.1 What is the learner expected to do?

According to Littlejohn, this question analyses the demands which the tasks have on the learners and contains three subsections: Turn-take, Focus, and Mental operation.

4.1.1 Turn–take

Turn-Take relates to the role that the learners have in classroom while accomplishing a task. When involving in a task, the learners may *Respond* to direct questions by using language supplied by the materials, in Littlejohn's word, 'the learner is expected to express him/her self through language which has been narrowly defined. They may *Initiate,* using language not supplied by the material or according to Littlejohn, the learner is expected to express what he/she wishes to say without a script of any kind, and finally they may *Not required* to take any direct role at all. As Table 1 shows, Intermediate Top Notch in most of its tasks expects the learners to "respond" (64%). "Initiation" receives the next greatest percentage in Top Notch textbooks, with (23 %). In fact there are the limited number of tasks which do not require the learners to initiate and respond, the percentage of which is about 12.17%. Besides, it's worth mentioning that since students

are in intermediate levels, it is not unusual to ask students more to respond than to initiate.

Table 1. Task analysis – turn-take

Turn-take	Frequency	Percentage
Respond	478	64.68%
Initiate	171	23.13%
Not required	90	12.17%
Total	739	100%

4.1.2 Focus

This part refers to whether the tasks require the learners to focus on the meaning and message of the language being used (e.g. comprehension questions), the rules or patterns (e.g. substitution tables), or the relationship between form and meaning (e.g. tracing anaphora). According to Table 2 and Graph 2, more than half (52.9%) of the tasks in Top Notch expect the learners to focus on *meaning*, 29.6% of the tasks ask the learners to concentrate on *meaning/system relationship*, and finally 17.4% of activities draw students' attention to *language system* or rules and patterns. So, these results show that most of the tasks require the learners to focus on meaning, comprehension, and convey the message.

Table 2. Task analysis-focus

Focus on	Frequency	Percentage
Meaning	400	52.91%
Meaning/system relationship	224	29.62%
Language system (rules or form)	132	17.46%
Total	756	100%

4.1.3 Mental operation

While participating in language learning tasks, the learner may involve in different mental processes to decode or encode the language. In TAS, mental operation consists of ten items that may be used in the middle of doing a task. It is worth mentioning that mental processes through which we encode or decode the language are more than the 10 items stated here, because a human being possesses a mind which has consciousness, ideas, and that the mind can influence the behaviors.

As shown in Table 3, the tasks of Top Notch which require learners to *build text* or to produce a longer stretches of spoken or written discourse and give them opportunities to present their own ideas by using their linguistic and world knowledge, have the highest ratio (14%) among others. *Retrieve from long term memory* which requires the learners to recall items from previous lessons and cause the students to have the sense of continuity, receives the second rank of usage (13.2%).. The tasks which require learners to *draw on prior knowledge* or use the linguistic and nonlinguistic knowledge of prior units have relatively high ratio (12.9%). Activities that demand students to decode *semantic and surface meaning* of a given language are about 12.4%. *Relate sounds to objects* are demanded in 10.2% of tasks. This implies that activities which use auditory and visual channels for giving input to the learners receive relatively high importance. This is one of the good points of a textbook, since it may improve learners' listening skill, by using visuals as a means to make the comprehension easier. The proportion of use of the tasks requiring learners to *compare language samples*, the purpose of which is to enable learners to pay attention to the differences among sets of language samples in order to learn about their form and function is slightly moderate (8.6%). . *Repeating with expansion* and *applying language rule* are the two next mental operations which

are almost equal (8.2% and 7.8% respectively), implying that Top Notch activities provide the learners with some outlines as a frame within which to produce further language, and motivate the students to give their ideas and express themselves while providing them with specific vocabulary and structures as a guide. Also, activities which involve *apply language rule,* include mainly the grammar exercises, which are presented in Grammar booster parts in each unit. Although this type of activity is not without pedagogical value, it doesn't seem to provide a meaningful context for the students, as it only lets the learners to use a given language rule to transform or produce single unrelated sentences. Finally, *deduce language rule* and *select information* are 6.5% and 6.2% of the total proportion of tasks. The result may well imply that the under analysis textbook doesn't pay enough attention to the deduction of language rules. Also, the activities which ask students to reply to reading comprehension questions or anything similar, whose answers are located in the passage are so limited. But it doesn't mean that Top Notch textbooks do not supply reading texts.

Table3. Task analysis–mental operation

Mental operation	Frequency	Percentage
Build text	258	14%
Retrieve from LT memory	244	13.2%
Draw on prior knowledge	238	12.9%
Decode semantic meaning	229	12.4%
Relate sounds to objects	188	10.2%
Compare samples of language	159	8.6%
Repeat with expansion	151	8.2%
Apply language rule	144	7.8%
Deduce language rule	120	6.5%
Select information	115	6.2%
Total	1846	100%

4.2 Who with?

This question examines another aspect of a task under analysis dealing with classroom participation; that is who the actual participants in doing the tasks are. As can be seen in Table 4 activities which require students to accomplish a task *individually simultaneously* compose half (48.8%) of the total tasks in Top Notch. The ratio of activities which demand learners to do tasks *in pairs or groups* makes up 26.2% of the tasks. Finally, 25% of the tasks require interaction between students and the class (*learner to the whole class*). This result well implies that in spite of the claims by the authors of Top Notch in giving priority to pair/group work activities, they have given importance to tasks that should be done individually.

Table 4. Task analysis – who with?

Who with?	Frequency	Percentage
Learners individually simultaneously	377	48.8%
Learners in pairs/groups	202	26.2%
Learner to the whole class	194	25%
Total	773	100%

4.3 With what content?

This question examines the content of tasks in a textbook. For instance, whether a task is written or spoken, whether it is individual word/sentences or extended discourse, where does it come from – the materials, the teacher or the learners themselves? What is its nature?

What follows are different subsections of this part.

4.3.1 Input to the learners

This part examines the form of content offered to learners. As Table 5 shows,

written words/phrases have dominant source of input (33.6%). Graphic is the next main source of input in Top Notch by 31%, showing that Top Notch provides the learners with high proportion of visual context, so make the textbook more attractive. Oral extended discourse and written extended discourse are the two next sources of input that are almost equal with 11.5% and 10% respectively. Sounds and music receive a low percentage (7.6%) among other types of input. Finally, the smallest proportion (5.5%) of total sources of input in tasks of Top Notch belongs to oral words/phrases.

4.3.2 Expected output from learners

This section is devoted to the examination of form of content to be produced by the learner. As can be seen in Table 6, the percentage of written words and phrases expected as output from learners is the highest (35.9%) while written extended discourse receives the least percentage on the tasks of Top Notch (13.65%). Oral words/phrases and oral extended discourse are between two ends of this continuum with 29.5% and 21%, respectively. So, paying equal attention to oral and written forms of output from the learners, the book expects the learners to focus more on written or spoken structures which are in the form of words, phrases, or sentences rather than extended output in the form of a composition or a lecture.

Table 5. Task analysis–content–input to the learners

Input to learners	Frequency	Percentage
Written words/phrases	402	33.6%
Graphic	372	31%
Oral extended discourse	138	11.5%
Written extended discourse	120	10%
Sounds/music	90	7.6%
Oral words/phrases	66	5.5%
Total	1198	100%

Table 6. Task analysis–content–output from learners

Expected output from learners	Frequency	Percentage
Written words/phrases	**213**	**35.9%**
Oral words/phrases	**175**	**29.5%**
Oral extended discourse	**124**	**20.9%**
Written extended discourse	**81**	**13.65%**
Total	**593**	**100%**

4.3.3 Source

This part of TAS examines where the content comes from. It is clear that Top Notch provides a great amount of materials and contents for lessons itself (53.3%). Learners are the next source of content with 32.8%, and finally, 13.9% of content or topics are supplied by the teacher. As the percentages show the textbook doesn't provide opportunities for the teachers to supplement the main coursebook by materials selected by them. It seems Top Notch demands teachers to be abided by their guidebook and other components. (see Table 7)

4.3.4 Nature

In this section of task analysis the type of content as required in the operation and which is the focus of the learning activity is studied. Table 8 shows that tasks which have personal opinions and ideas of learners as their focus have the first rank in the selected textbook (31.8%). Those which have personal information have 21% proportion. Fact, fiction, and metalinguistic knowledge are three kinds of nature which are almost equal with 17%, 16.1%, and 15.1% respectively. These results imply that the proportions of the nature types of the content of tasks are somehow equally distributed except for tasks which need personal opinion of learners to be done.

Table 7. Task analysis–content-source

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Materials	468	53.3%
Learners	288	32.8%
Teacher	122	13.9%
Total	878	100%

Table 8. Task analysis–content-nature

Nature	Frequency	Percentage
Personal opinion	273	31.8%
Personal information	180	21%
Fact	146	17%
Fiction	138	16.1%
Metalinguistic knowledge	130	15.1%
Total	857	100%

5. Results

According to Littlejohn (1998), the 'design' of a textbook relates to thinking underlying the materials. In this part the results of the evaluations done by the raters on design matters are presented in the form of two tables. Total scores and proportion percentages of each section are presented in Table 9 and the detailed total scores and proportion percentages of each question are presented in Table 10.

As table 9 shows, Top Notch scored the highest, 80.5% of the optimum scores (58 out of 72) among all the subsections, which means raters believe

all three kinds of participation exist appropriately in Top Notch tasks. *Principles of sequencing* which relates to the sequencing the content of the materials, achieve the second higher score which is 79.1 percent of the optimum proportion (57 out of 72). *Role of the material as a whole* receive 78.4% of the optimum score (113 out of 144) and this suggests that the raters all agree that the tasks and topics of each lesson are appropriate to keep the pace of each class session lively and also materials can appropriately provide a route for teaching and learning English. The received score regarding *subject matter* and its focus is 78% of the optimum score (75 out of 96). This implies that the evaluators find the topics of the texts (i. e. the themes of the units) and the activities related to them fairly interesting, affectively motivating and lively and varied. *Classroom roles of teachers/learners*, and *types of teaching/ learning activities* both received 77.6% of the optimum scores. The scores show that Top Notch textbooks are considered to be somehow successful in offering appropriate tasks which direct the learners to move from controlled to free practice. Also, the evaluators rate Top Notch textbooks as relatively successful in assigning active roles to the learners in learning and participating in classroom events and supervising role to the teacher. *Learner roles in learning* got 75.8 percent of the optimum scores (91 out of 120), showing Top Notch textbooks are somehow successful in enabling students to have daily confirmation of their progress, and to practice conversations and manipulate them. *Principles of selection* obtained 74 percent of the optimum score (71 out of 96). This shows that the evaluators believed that task developers of Top Notch provide tasks which are highly practical and are along with the new principles of teaching and learning. Finally, Top Notch scored 72.3 percent of the optimum score (52 out of 72) on *aims and objectives*. This amount shows that in evaluators' beliefs, Top Notch is somehow successful in preparing the students for being communicatively competent as the aim of the textbook.

Table 9. Total score and percentages for design

gn	Total	Proportion
s and objectives	52	72.3%
ciples of selection	71	74%
ciples of sequencing	57	79.1%
ect matter and focus of subject matter	75	78.1%
s of teaching/learning activities	93	77.5%
cipation	58	80.5%
sroom roles of teachers and learners	56	77.7%
ner roles in learning	91	75.83%

Table 10. Detailed total score and percentage for design

Items	Total	Proportion	Items	Total	Proportion
1	22	91.6%	19	18	75%
2	15	62.5%	20	19	79.1%
3	15	62.5%	21	18	75%
4	17	70.8%	22	21	87.5%
5	18	75%	23	16	66.6%
6	15	62.5%	24	18	75%
7	21	87.5%	25	22	91.6%
8	18	75%	26	18	75%
9	16	66.6%	27	14	58.3%
10	23	95.8%	28	17	70.8%
11	18	75%	29	20	83.3%
12	15	62.5%	30	22	91.6%
13	24	100%	31	19	79.1%
14	18	75%	32	18	75%
15	20	83.3%	33	21	87.5%
16	17	70.8%	34	15	62.5%
17	16	66.6%	35	19	79.1%
18	22	91.6%	36	21	87.5%

6. Discussion

Based on the claims of the authors of Top Notch, it is an English course following communicative approach. There are some explicit principles in communicative approach and the researcher tries to investigate whether the results of evaluation are in line with the principles of communicative approach or how much Top Notch, is in harmony with the latest developments in the field of language pedagogy in terms of communicative language teaching.

In the case of *turn-taking* results show that the majority of Top Notch tasks cater for more involvement of the learners in classroom events and demand the learners to use the language and express themselves rather than to be just a listener and inactive and this is one of the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) according to Larsen-freeman who believes that "Students should be given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions. (Larsen-freeman, 1986, p. 126)

Top Notch mostly tries to draw on meaning as the basis for the learning task and this can be seen as one sign of success for the textbooks. As Cummins & Davison believe "CLT means an exclusive focus on meaning and it is an approach to L2 instruction that focuses on meaning to the exclusion of any attention to language form". (Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. 275)

Regarding the importance of meaning-focus activities, Brown (2006) also states that one of the characteristics of CLT is: "language techniques are designed in away to engage learners in the functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learners to accomplish those purposes." (p. 241)

Different mental operation may be used while the learners participate in

language learning tasks and this diversity of mental operations is as a result of the complexity of human mind. Some kinds of mental operations that Top Notch tasks pat more attention to are *building text, retrieving from long term memory, draw on prior knowledge, decoding semantic meaning,* and *relate sounds to objects*. It's worth mentioning that some of these are principles of CLT.

For instance, *building text* refers to producing a longer stretches of spoken or written discourse. This kind of tasks enables students to use all his/her linguistic and world knowledge to express their ideas or feelings via foreign language and to produce a piece of meaningful discourse. According to Larsen-Freeman, one of the targets of CLT is that "students should work with language at the discourse level……..and whenever possible, authentic language-language as it is used in real context-should be used". (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p.125)

Richards & Schmidt (2002) believe that: "one of the principles of communicative language teaching is that communication involves the integration of different language skills." (p. 90)
It is worth mentioning that the results of evaluation show that Top Notch pays somehow equal attention to the four skills and this is a sign of success for the textbooks.

 In the case of *source* Top Notch tasks provide a great variety of contents from different sources which contain systematic practice of practical language. In addition, Top Notch provides content in such a way as to help students develop a cultural fluency by creating an awareness of the varied rules across cultures. Of course, some tasks require learners and teachers to contribute to the development of the content for the class by using their background knowledge, previous information and their opinions.

Moreover, the teacher acts as a facilitator in setting up communicative activities and as an advisor during the activities which is one of the explicit features of new methods in language teaching.

In the *nature* of the task content there is a desirable amount of *fiction* which can be mentioned as a major type of materials content (see McKay, 2001). Mckay (2001) enumerates three major arguments in favor of using literary works, including short stories and tales, as content of language teaching materials: "first because literary texts depend on how the language is used to create a particular effect, literature demonstrate for the learners the importance of form in achieving specific communicative goals. Second, using literature as content in the L2 classrooms provide an ideal basis for integrating the four skills, and third, in an area when English is used in a great variety of cross-cultural involvements, literary texts are valuable in raising students' and teacher's cross-cultural awareness" (p. 319). This shows that Top Notch tasks paid a desirable attention to the high motivational value of stories or anecdotes as the main reading passages of the lessons.

Although the results of the study seemed to reveal that Top Notch textbooks stood up reasonably well to a detailed and in-depth analysis, they have some shortcomings like other textbooks available in the market. For instance, one of the explicit drawbacks of Top Notch which is against the principles of CLT is that most of the tasks in Top Notch demand learners to participate individually and a much smaller proportion of tasks involve learners in pair/ group activities which is one of the targets of communicative approach. As Richard & Rodgers (2001) state, in CLT, "students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writhing." (p. 157)

It's worth mentioning that, in comparison with other textbooks that are utilized in private institutes of Iran (e.g. New Interchange) and public high schools of Iran, Top Notch is more comprehensive and more in harmony with the latest development in the field of language pedagogy in terms of CLT and represent the CLT principles to a great extent. As it was mentioned in the Literature review of this study, Iraji and Zare-Moaayedi (2007) in two different studies criticize New Interchage because the series do not follow the principles of communicative-based approaches as the author has claimed are the objectives set for them.

Also, in another study Razmjoo (2007) criticizes English textbooks of Iran's public high schools since they are reading and grammar-based, students' needs are not taken into account, decision makers attach high importance to universality (centrality) rather than locality, and teachers don't have voice in the decision making process.

7. Conclusion

In this part, the study seeks answers to the three research questions stated before.

1) How are the widely used intermediate top notch in line with the objectives set for them?

Based on the claims of the authors of Top Notch, it is a communicative English course for adults and young adults which prepare students to interact successfully and confidently with both native and non-native speakers of English. Also, Top Notch brings students to a high of communicative competence. According to the results of TAS (table 1 to 8) and Design part (table 9 and 10) now we can state that Top Notch is almost successful in fulfilling its claimed objectives. As Design evaluation results show, the

raters mostly believe (more than 70%) that Top Notch is appropriate and successful in its design. However, there are some shortcomings in Top Notch that must be taken into consideration by its authors to achieve a textbook which is more in line with the intended goal.

2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of intermediate top notch?

The results presented in the form of tables and graphs show that Top Notch has the following weaknesses:

• The textbook under analysis surprisingly doesn't apply an inductive approach toward grammatical structures, or if it applies, this is not that obvious within its tasks structure. (Table 3)

• Near half of the tasks in Top Notch demand learners to participate individually simultaneously. Only 26 percent of tasks involve learners in pair/group activities which is one of the targets of communicative approach. This can be referred to as a drawback for a textbook which aims to follow communicative approach. Group/pair work tasks reduce the traditional student-teacher polarity, providing greater opportunity for the negotiation of meaning and language acquisition during student-student interaction. (Table 4)

• Written words/phrases/sentences have the first and dominating rank in the distribution. This implies that oral inputs should receive more attention in Top Notch series. Besides, Top Notch doesn't have a satisfactory amount of sounds and music source of input which are as important as graphics and illustrations in encouraging and motivating learners. (Table 5)

• Top Notch expects the learners to produce written or spoken structures which are in the form of words, phrases or sentences rather than extended

output as when the student is supposed to write a paragraph or give a description orally. (Table 6)

• For the majority of activities, the textbook specifies its own texts as the source of content and does not provide so many opportunities for the teachers to supplement the main textbook by materials selected by them and based on their background knowledge. (Table 7)
The strengths of Top Notch are as follow:

• Top Notch tasks more often encourage students to use the language and more importantly they require them to express themselves than to be an inactive listener. In other words, Top Notch purveys more involvement of the learners in the classroom activities. (Table 1)

• Top Notch mostly tries to draw on meaning as the basis for the learning task. Since one of the targets of Top Notch is to develop a communicative competence achieved by enhancing comprehension that needs attention to meaning, the results can be seen as one sign of success for this textbook. Attention to the relationship between meaning and form is also more prevalent in Top Notch than focusing just on the form of language. (Table 2)

• Top Notch tries to relate the new teaching points to the previous ones in the unit and also to the points learned in prior units. This characteristic gives the textbook more consistency and continuity. Furthermore, it helps the students associate the new information to the old information in their minds. (Table 3)

• Top Notch includes activities which use auditory and visual channels for giving input to the learners are somehow exist in Top Notch.

This is an advantage of the textbook since making use of all sensory channels in learning involves the students more actively in the process of learning and also enhances the variety and consequently the motivation of the students. (Table 3)

• Paying attention to graphic forms of input is considerable in Top Notch. The graphic form of input could help students to learn and memorize new materials more easily. It also makes the textbook lively and motivates students to study it more enthusiastically. (Table 5)

• Top Notch tasks provide a great variety of contents from different sources which contain systematic practice of practical language. In addition, Top Notch provides content in such a way as to help students develop a cultural fluency by creating an awareness of the varied rules across cultures. Of course, some tasks require learners and teachers to contribute to the development of the content for the class by using their background knowledge, previous information and their opinions. (Table 7)

• Tasks in Top Notch are of various natures and almost every kind of tasks are included in Top Notch series. Both fact and fiction with almost equal proportion are included in the tasks. Metalinguistic knowledge which helps learners to arrive at knowledge of forms, structure and other aspects of language through reflecting and analyzing the language is also included. In addition, Top Notch tries to motivate students by encouraging them to add information and opinion of their own to those presented in the textbook. (Table 8)

3) What are the explicit features of Intermediate top notch?

Over three million students worldwide have learned English using the Top Notch

program. Intermediate Top Notch is a three-level communicative course for adults and young adults. Designed for international communication, it sets a new standard using the natural language that people really use. It contains practical tasks, purposeful content, and authentic language. Regarding its physical make-up, Top Notch series has appropriate size and weight, attractive layout, durability, high quality of editing and publishing, and appropriate title. Regarding its administrative concern, Top Notch series is appropriate for different cultures, religions, and cultures. Furthermore it has appropriate price, compared to the other available ELT textbooks in the market. One of the innovative features in Top Notch series is the attachment of workbook and student's CD-ROM to the textbook. The workbook and students' CD-ROM which includes a variety of exciting activities such as speaking practice, interactive workbook, games and puzzles, and Top Notch pop lyrics are attached to the end of the each level's textbook. There are some other supplementary materials and components such as: teacher's edition and lesson planner, class audio program, class audio program, Top Notch TV, Copy and Go (prepared class activities for each lesson), assessment package, course placement test, and a companion website including more exercises for students and more resources for teachers.

8. Implications of the Study

The results of the study have some implications for the teachers of English who teach intermediate levels of Top Notch and also for the materials writers who developed the textbooks. This study implies that when teaching the textbooks (Top Notch), the teachers are suggested to consider the shortcomings of the textbook and try to alleviate or compensate for these drawbacks by supplementing, modifying and adapting problematic aspects of the textbook.

Materials writers who developed the textbooks (Top Notch) may infer from the results of the present study that they have been successful in devising the textbooks which are in line with the instructional goals set for them, but they are suggested to consider the pitfalls of the textbook under analysis to provide a full-fledged one.

Also the results of the study may help different English language institutes and also students in choosing a right coursebook.

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