

Textbook Evaluation from EFL Teachers' Perspective: The Case of Connect Series

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Abstract. The current study was an attempt to evaluate Connect series which is widely taught in English language institutes in Iran. Connect series is an EFL textbook in four levels of beginning, high beginning, intermediate, and high intermediate being taught to young adolescents. The purpose of this study was to know the educational value and appropriateness of these course books from the teachers' perspective. In fact, the main objective of this research was to answer two questions: 1-What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs towards Connect Series' appropriateness in the Iranian EFL context? 2-What are the strengths of Connect series from the perspective of Iranian EFL teachers? To answer the questions, 67 EFL instructors from different language institutes in Shiraz participated in this study and answered the textbook evaluation checklist developed by Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2011). Descriptive statistics were carried out to interpret the data. The findings revealed that Iranian EFL teachers generally had a positive perspective towards Connect series. Moreover, it was indicated that Connect series contains a wealth of strength points. Accordingly, the authors recommend Connect series in the EFL context of Iran as an effective textbook series.

Keywords: Checklist, connect series, EFL, evaluation, teachers' perspective, textbook

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1. Introduction

According to Crystal (1997), English is a global and international language that plays a significant role in individuals' lives. Cook (2008) also points out English as the only "hyper central language" in the world, which in today's globalized world is an absolute necessity for learning English. Accordingly, people make every endeavor to obtain mastery of English. In recent years, learning English has gained a lot of attention in Iran too, which leads people to attend English classes. There are different factors that affect learning a language in various educational contexts, such as teachers, learners, and textbooks; among which textbooks play a considerably significant role, due to the fact that they can convey a great deal of knowledge and information to the learners (Baker, Dubin, & Olshtain, 1989). Hutchinson and Torres (1994) describe that textbooks have a very important and positive role to play in teaching and learning. It is crystal clear that choosing an appropriate textbook is vital. Learning can become more interesting when a proper textbook is used considering that learners can be engaged during the lesson and acquire useful knowledge from the input. Mikk (2000) also says the most essential function of a textbook is to motivate students to learn.

Cunningsworth (1995) argues that textbooks are designed to give cohesion to the language learning and teaching process through direction, support, and specific language-based activities to provide learners with more practice and facilitate and hasten the learning process. According to Edge and Wharton (1998) textbooks offer an easily accessible source of ELT materials for teachers to focus on doing the actual work of teaching and avoid dissipating their energy by preparing teaching materials. They also mention that textbooks are beneficial for inexperienced teachers who have relatively low confidence to convey ELT lessons communicatively.

Sheldon (1988) believes that "textbooks do not only represent the visible heart of any ELT program but also offer considerable advantages" (p.237). Clandfield (2010) also states that textbooks are beneficial instruments for ELT since they offer a motivational structure for students and teachers to follow. They act as a good time saver for teachers and

offer a source of methodology and ideas for them.

According to what was mentioned above, it is clear now that the suitability of a textbook is of great importance. Mukundan (2010) explains that the suitability of the textbook is significant. He states that a proper textbook can ease the teacher's way of teaching; he clearly knows what and how to teach. Thus, Textbook evaluation is salient and cannot be neglected in light of the mentioned reasons. Mukundan (2010) believes it is essential to conduct ELT textbook assessment to be assured that ELT textbooks can efficiently provide achieving teaching goals.

Littlejohn (1998) points out that material evaluation helps us observe inside the materials and have more control over their use and design. Brown (1995) defines evaluation as the systematic analysis of relevant information needed to enhance the quality of the curriculum and contribute to its effectiveness in the context of a particular institution.

Readickins and Germanie (1992) state that there is a need to evaluate language teaching methods, materials, effectiveness and also how materials are presented, the types of learning tasks used, and the way the courses are designed. They define evaluation as how one can gain a better understanding of what's effective, what is not. This study also seeks to evaluate the textbooks of Connect series from the teachers' viewpoint to see how useful and suitable they are. Connect series is an American English as foreign language textbook for young adolescents written by Richards, Barbisan, and Sandy (2004). It is widely taught in English language institutes in Iran as an EFL textbook in four levels of beginning, high beginning, intermediate, and high intermediate.

This study aims at evaluating Connect series, which has been taught in many Iranian institutes, to figure out the strengths of the series. Since these books are taught to teenagers in most institutes in Iran, they can form the basis of students' English language knowledge in this country. Therefore, evaluating the strengths of these books may help teachers and owners of language institutes to choose the right materials to teach English. In other words, the purpose of the current research is to answer the following questions:

1. Is Connect Series an appropriate EFL textbook in the Iranian EFL context based on Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs?
2. If the answer to the first question is positive, what are the strengths of Connect Series from the perspective of Iranian EFL teachers?

2. Literature Review

As the wrong selection of textbooks can have a negative impact on both teaching and learning, and it can also squander financial resources (Mukundan, 2009; Sheldon, 1988), selecting an appropriate textbook that meets the needs of learners in the target context has been constantly taken into consideration and many studies have been done in this regard, some of which are reviewed below:

Ayman (1997) has evaluated Bilkent Academic Studies in English 3 (BASE 3) to assess teachers' and learners' views on the effectiveness of the given textbook after classroom use. The result of this study indicates that both students and teachers have positive views towards the book. However; a few negative points have been mentioned, including the inadequacy of the content and ineffectiveness of the teacher's book.

Melo (2003) analyzed a textbook series called 'True Colors', which was taught in Brazil. She discovered that the teachers were not satisfied with these books for two reasons. The first reason was that the books were boring for students because of the repetitious lessons. The second reason was that the books did not have enough exercises.

In another study, Terry (2003) evaluated IELTS preparation materials and detected that the books did not reinforce the learners' motivation due to the fact that they were not visually attractive. Moreover, he indicated that the materials did not provide the learners essential knowledge which they required to achieve academic goals.

Jahangard (2007) evaluated four EFL textbooks that have been taught in Iran high schools. The researcher pointed out that the tasks topics of each lesson were fascinating so they absorbed learners in EFL classes. However, there were some negative points in these books too. Firstly, the listening skill was neglected. Secondly, some new vocabularies were not properly contextualized. Finally, the researcher recom-

mended that high school textbooks should be examined more deeply by a group of experts in the field.

Kirkgoz (2009) has assessed three English textbooks which are used in Turkish state primary schools. To conduct the evaluation, the researcher has used questionnaires to collect students' and teachers' perceptions regarding different aspects of the course books. In addition, they have been interviewed to gain more insights into using the course books. The results of this study indicate that both teachers and students are satisfied with the textbooks.

Sahragard, Rahimi, & Zaremoayeddi (2009) studied New Interchange books (Third Edition) based on Little John's framework (1998). The study attempted to discover the pedagogic values of the newest version of the Interchange series to assess if the mentioned books conformed to the objectives considered for them, and to figure out the strengths and weaknesses of the series. The results of this research indicated that the book was not that successful in satisfying its objectives.

Riazi and Mosalanejad (2010) have examined the type of learning objectives represented in Iranian senior high school and pre-university English textbooks using Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives. They noticed text length and logical sequence of difficulty.

Tok (2010) investigated the advantages and disadvantages of a pre-intermediate textbook called 'Spot On' which was used in primary schools in Turkey. To conduct the evaluation, a five-point Likert type scale was used to examine the textbooks' design, layout, activities, and tasks, language type, subject, content, skills, and whole aspect. According to this study, Spot-On textbook had both positive and negative points.

Alavinia and Siyadat (2013) conducted a survey to assess the characteristic of four series of English textbooks taught in different institutions in Iran based on a checklist prepared by Cunningsworth (1995). To approach the aim of the study, 320 male learners from Azerbaijan were asked to evaluate American English File, American Cutting Edge 1, American Headway 1, and New Interchange 1. The result of the study indicated that American English File 1 was the most effective textbook compared to the other three ones due to having some features such as attractive coverage, up-to-date materials, and appropriate websites.

Sabzalipour and Mousavi (2013) evaluated the English textbook taught at Iranian first-grade high schools. The researchers asked 237 students from four high schools to answer the 41-item questionnaire. The objective of the study was to figure out the students' perspectives towards the textbook. The results showed a great degree of satisfaction which was due to the communicative effectiveness of the textbook.

Hamidi, Montazeri, Alizadeh, and Rezaie (2015) conducted a study to evaluate two EFL textbooks named Four Corners 1 and Top-Notch Fundamentals A which have been taught in Iranian institutes. The result revealed that both textbooks offered different attractive topics, logical material order, and their contents were accurate, up-to-date and graded based on students' needs. In addition, the pictures of both books were appealing and motivating. However, the synonyms or antonyms and meaning of unknown words were ignored in both textbooks. On the other hand, Four Corner and Top Notch were distinct in some aspects. In terms of exercises, Four Corners (1) was more comprehensive. It was also more expanded in activities than Top Notch Fundamental. There was no review in the Four Corners workbook, while Top Notch Fundamental had a thorough review.

Babaii (2016) evaluated ten EFL/ESL textbooks and offered a list of characteristics of a suitable textbook, as follow:

1. Dissemination of vision (theory or approach) about the nature of language;
2. The nature of learning and how the theory can be put to applied use;
3. Stating purpose(s) and objective(s) for the total course and individual units;
4. Selection and its rationale for coverage, grading, organization, and sequencing;
5. Teacher's satisfaction with the syllabus for providing a guide book, advice on the methodology and explaining theoretical orientation, and keys to the exercises and supplementary materials;
6. Learner's satisfaction with the syllabus for giving piecemeal, unit-by-

unit instruction and clear instructions for exercises.

Torki and Chalak (2017) evaluated the English textbook taught at Iranian high schools. To achieve the objectives of the study, 150 students and teachers were asked to answer 45 items of the questionnaire which were developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996). The result of this study revealed that most participants contended that the textbook adequately reflected communicative language teaching (CLT). However, they surmised that there is a need to further develop and revise the textbook.

Zare-Behtash and Banaruee (2017) made a comparative evaluation of two ESL textbooks named New Headway advanced series and Iran Language Institute (ILI) advanced 1 which was taught in Iranian institutions. The evaluation was done based on the five Cs standards and seven curricular components. The evaluation pointed out that New Headway advanced was more beneficial & acceptable than the ILI advanced in light of the design, originality, organization, performance, practicality, and appeal. New Headway advanced had a congruent syllabus of all integrated material. However, the ILI basis was centered on reading and writing which were not suitable for transactional and interactional learning purposes.

3. Methodology

The present study is of quantitative and non-experimental nature; there is no manipulation of independent variables and to collect necessary data, checklists have been used.

3.1. Participants

The population from which the participants have been selected for this study includes male and female Iranian EFL teachers who are all native speakers of Persian. To conduct the study, sixty-seven male and female EFL teachers from different language institutes in Shiraz participated in this study. They all graduated from Teaching English as a Foreign Language and had 2 to 21 years of teaching experience. Hence, they are all experienced in teaching all levels of Connect series and so are able to evaluate the textbooks.

3.2. Instruments

The main instrument in the present research is a checklist which is developed by Nimehchisalem and Mukundan (2013) and is based on 39 items under two main categories of general attributes and teaching-learning content. It is also organized in 14 dimensions that determine teachers' perspectives towards the use of "Connect series" which are syllabus and curriculum, methodology, suitability to learners, physical and utilitarian attributes, efficient layout supplementary materials, general content, listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and exercises. These items are based on a Likert scale of five points (Never True, Rarely True, Sometimes True, Often True, Always True). The reliability of the checklist was established and checked using SPSS, and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .84. Moreover, two experts were asked to confirm the validity of the checklist. The checklist consists of two parts. Part A is used to gather demographics such as gender, degree, and years of teaching experience. Part B, as mentioned carries 39 items to evaluate teachers' attitudes toward the use of Connect series.

3.3. Materials

The materials used in the current study are Connect English series textbooks. These textbooks have been taught in Iranian institutes for many years. Connect series was written by Richards, Barbisan, and Sandy in 2004 and published for young adolescents in four levels (beginning, high-beginning, intermediate, high-intermediate). It includes the following components, all of which have been chosen for evaluation:

1. Student's book
2. Workbook
3. Teacher's book
4. Compact disk

This series consists of four books which each includes eight units containing four lessons. After each unit, there is a review part and after every two lessons, there is a mini-review. There is also a part which is

called 'Get Connected' containing a reading, a listening, and a writing section. The authors of the Connect series claim that all four skills are covered in these textbooks and their topics and dialogues are fun and motivate the learners.

At the end of each book, there are three sections: vocabulary practice, a theme project, and a word list. In the vocabulary practice, learners are given exercises through which they can practice the words of all units. The theme project is a part that asks students to make a personal information poster based on different subjects learned in each unit. The word list includes the keywords and phrases in the student's book.

The authors of the book have claimed that Connect Series encourages learners to interact with each other in English due to interesting topics, context, and appealing reading as well as accurate grammar, clear vocabulary presentations, and appropriate exercises. They also claim that these books contain graded syllabus and multi-skills.

3.4. Data collection procedures

As specified before, the data collection procedure of the current study was of a quantitative nature. A survey technique was used to ask teachers' opinions about Connect series by using the checklist which was designed by Nimehchisalem and Mukundan (2013).

To collect the necessary data, the checklist was sent to 135 English foreign language volunteer teachers who had the experience of teaching Connect series textbooks at different levels in different language institutes of Shiraz. Among 135 teachers, 53 of them did not return the checklist and 15 checklists were not filled completely.

At the top of the checklist, the participants were provided with information on the goals of the study and how to complete the checklist. The participants were requested to finish the checklist carefully and honestly and they were assured that their information would remain confidential.

3.5. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics including percentages regarding the answers to the checklist questions was utilized to see the extent to which Connect series textbooks have satisfied the teachers' expectations.

4. Results

As mentioned earlier, this study aims at investigating Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs towards Connect Series' appropriateness and its strengths in the Iranian EFL context. To this end, a 39-item questionnaire developed by Nimehchisalem and Mukundan (2013) is used to investigate the participants' beliefs towards Connect series. The results of the data gathered via the checklists are reported in table 1 below:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (percentage) of the Teachers' Beliefs

		Never true	Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true	Always true
I. General attributes						
A. The book in relation to syllabus and curriculum						
1. It matches the specifications of the syllabus.	P	0	0	10.4	62.7	26.9
	F	0	0	7	42	18
2. Overall, the book has a nice feel.	p	0	9.0	20.9	53.7	16.4
	F	0	6	14	36	14
B. Methodology						
3. The activities can be exploited fully.	P	3.0	1.5	35.8	46.3	13.4
	F	2	1	24	34	9
4. Activities can work well in most classroom situations.	P	0	19.4	13.4	53.7	13.4
	F	0	13	9	36	9
C. Suitability to learners						
5. It is compatible with the background knowledge and level of students.	P	0	16.4	10.4	41.8	31.3
	F	0	11	7	28	21
6. It addresses learning targets.	P	0	4.5	20.9	58.2	16.4
	F	0	3	14	39	11
D. Physical and utilitarian attributes						
7. It is appropriately priced.	P	0	19.4	20.9	52.2	7.5
	F	0	13	14	35	5
8. Its layout is attractive.	P	0	20.9	23.9	38.8	16.4
	F	0	14	16	26	11

9. It indicates the efficient use of text and visuals.	P	0	11.9	32.8	35.8	19.4
	F	0	8	22	24	13
E. Efficient layout of supplementary materials						
10. The book is supported by suitable materials, like a workbook, audio, or multimedia.	P	0	6.0	17.9	38.8	37.3
	F	0	4	12	26	25
11. The book is supported by other materials like review and test units.	P	0	13.4	16.4	43.3	26.9
	F	0	9	11	29	18
12. There is a useful teacher's guide to aid the teacher.	P	4.5	23.9	17.9	17.9	35.8
	F	3	16	12	12	24
II. Teaching-learning content						
F. General content						
13. Tasks move from simple to complex.	P	0	6.0	9.0	59.7	25.4
	F	0	4	6	40	17
14. Tasks are varied.	P	0	0	22.4	50.7	26.9
	F	0	0	15	34	18
15. Tasks support teaching objectives.	P	0	0	23.9	47.8	28.4
	F	0	0	16	32	19
16. The language in the textbook is natural and real.		0	9.0	19.4	44.8	26.9
17. The material is fairly recent.	P	13.4	10.4	32.8	31.3	11.9
	F	9	7	22	21	8
G. Listening						
18. The book has appropriate listening tasks with well-defined goals.	P	0	4.5	25.4	56.7	13.4
	F	0	3	17	38	9
19. Tasks are authentic or close to real language situations.	P	9.0	0	29.9	40.3	20.9
	F	6	0	20	27	14

20. Various listening contexts such as formal vs. informal contexts are considered.	P	9.0	6.0	9.0	50.7	25.4
	F	6	4	6	34	17
H. Speaking						
21. Activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication.	P	0	4.5	31.3	35.8	28.4
	F	0	3	21	24	19
22. Individual, pair, and group work are given equal emphasis.	P	0	0	34.3	64.2	1.5
	F	0	0	23	43	3
I. Reading						
23. Length is appropriate.	P	0	0	20.9	56.7	22.4
	F	0	0	14	38	15
24. Difficulty level is appropriate.	P	0	0	28.4	43.3	28.4
	F	0	0	19	29	19
25. Texts are interesting.	P	4.5	11.9	31.3	32.8	19.4
	F	3	8	21	22	13
J. Writing						
26. Tasks have achievable goals and take into consideration learner capabilities.	P	0	9.0	26.9	50.7	13.4
	F	0	6	18	34	9
27. Tasks are interesting.	P	4.5	11.9	34.3	38.8	10.4
	F	3	8	23	26	7
K. Vocabulary						
28. The load (number of new words in each lesson) is appropriate to the level of students.	P	0	7.5	11.9	44.8	35.8
	F	0	5	8	30	24
29. There is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book.	P	0	1.5	20.9	64.2	13.2
	F	0	1	14	43	9
30. New words are sufficiently repeated and recycled across the book.	P	0	19.4	41.8	32.8	6.0
	F	0	13	28	22	4
31. Words are contextualized.	P	0	0	29.9	43.3	26.9
	F	0	0	20	29	18

L. Grammar								
32. Grammar is contextualized.	P	0	7.5	26.9	50.7	14.9		
	F	0	5	18	34	10		
33. Grammar items are repeated throughout the book.	P	0	4.5	38.8	31.3	25.4		
	F	0	3	26	21	17		
M. Pronunciation								
34. Tasks are useful.	P	0	11.9	31.3	23.9	32.8		
	F	0	8	21	16	22		
35. Tasks are interesting.	P	0	28.4	29.9	37.3	4.5		
	F	0	19	20	25	3		
N. Exercises								
36. They have clear instructions.	P	0	11.9	17.9	46.3	23.9		
	F	0	8	12	31	16		
37. They are adequate.	P	0	4.5	37.3	46.3	11.9		
	F	0	2	25	31	8		
38. They are interesting.	P	0	23.9	22.4	46.3	7.5		
	F	0	16	15	31	5		
39. They help students with mixed abilities.	P	0	23.9	23.9	43.3	9.0		
	F	0	16	6	29	6		

Note. P= percentage, F= frequency

From the results depicted in Table 1, it can be inferred that the teachers agree with almost all the statements in the questionnaire. Concerning the general attribute, the majority of the participants believe that the Connect series matches the specifications of the syllabus (62.7%) and has a nice feel (53.7%). In addition, based on the responses to the methodology section of the questionnaire, a high percentage of the teachers believe that the activities included in the Connect series can often be exploited fully (46.3%) and activities can often work well in most classrooms situations (53.7%).

Regarding the suitability to learners, from the results depicted in Table 1, it can be inferred that most of the teachers (41.8%) agree that Connect series is always compatible with the background knowledge and level of students. A substantial percentage of the teachers (58.2%) also show that Connect series often addresses learning targets.

In the physical and utilitarian attributes section, the majority of teachers have selected 'often' to verify the Connect series in terms of the appropriate price (52.2%), the efficient use of text and visuals (38.8%), and also attractive layout (35.8%).

As evident in the table, in terms of the efficient layout of supplementary materials, a large percentage of teachers have selected 'often' (38.8%) or 'always' (37.3%) for item 10 suggesting that based on the teachers' responses, Connect series is supported by suitable materials, like workbook, audio, or multimedia. An overwhelming majority of the teachers (43.3%) also think that this series is supported by other materials like review and test units. Furthermore, this series includes a useful teacher's guide, according to 35.8% of the participants. It is worth noting that 23.9% of teachers believe that the teachers' guide is rarely useful.

For the teaching-learning content of the textbooks, a significant percentage of the participants believe that tasks include moves from simple to complex (59.7%) and support teaching objectives (47.8%). They also agree that Connect series include varied tasks (50.7%). In contrast, teachers' responses to Item 17 (the material is fairly recent) are inconclusive. In Item 17, a high percentage of teachers have selected 'sometimes' (32.8%) or 'often' (31.3%), 13.4% and 10.4% of them have chosen 'never' and 'rarely', respectively, meaning that some of the participants believe that the material presented in Connect series is not recent.

As seen in Table1, in the listening section, most of the teachers have selected 'often' suggesting that from the teachers' perspective, the listening tasks included in Connect series are appropriate for well-defined goals (56.7%), authentic or close to real language situations (40.3%) and representative of both formal and informal contexts (50.7%).

Similarly, 'often' is chosen by most of the teachers in Items 21 and 22 meaning that based on the teachers' perspectives, the speaking activities of Connect series initiate meaningful communication (35.8%) and

emphasize the individual, pair, and group work equally (64.2%).

By selecting 'often', a considerable percentage of the teachers agree that the length (56.7%) and difficulty level (43.3%) of the reading material is appropriate. The responses to Item 25 also reveal that 32.8% of the participants believe the reading texts of Connect series are interesting, while some teachers disagree on this statement by choosing 'never' (4.5%) or 'rarely' (11.9%).

In the writing section, the pattern of the responses indicates that the writing tasks mostly have achievable goals and take into account learners' capabilities (50.7%). In Item 27 (writing tasks are interesting), 38.8% and 34.3% of the teachers have selected 'often' and 'sometimes', and some teachers have chosen 'rarely' (11.9%) and 'never' (4.5%).

Concerning the vocabulary in Connect series, the results represented in Table1 demonstrate that most of the participants have selected 'often' in Items 28 (the number of new words in each lesson is appropriate to the level of students), 29 (there is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book) and 31 (words are contextualized). It can be inferred that the participants almost agree with the statements of Items 28, 29, and 31. In Item 30 regarding the sufficient repetition of new words across the book, the pattern of responses shows that 41.8% of the teachers have chosen 'sometimes'.

With respect to the teachers' responses to the grammar section, it can be inferred that grammar is mostly contextualized (Item 32) and grammar items are almost repeated throughout the Connect books (Item 33). In the pronunciation section, 32.8% and 37.3% of the teachers have selected 'always' and 'often' in Item 33 and 34, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the teachers consider the pronunciation tasks of Connect series to be useful and almost interesting.

According to Table1, the majority of the participants (46.3%) think that the exercises included in the Connect series are almost adequate (Item 37) and interesting (Item 38) and have clear instructions (Item 36). In addition, based on the teachers' responses, the Connect series exercises are almost helpful for students with mixed abilities (Item 39).

Connect series matches the specifications of the syllabus (62.7%) and has a nice feel (53.7%). In addition, many classroom situations may

benefit from the activities presented in Connect series (53.7%). Connect series is suitable for learners because it addresses learning objectives (58.2%). This series is also appropriately priced (52.2%).

The presentation of tasks is the other strength of Connect series. Tasks of the Connect series are presented based on their difficulty, moving from simple to difficult (59.7%). They are also presented in diverse forms (50.7%).

The strengths of Connect series in terms of the content also include the appropriateness of listening tasks (56.7%) and presentation of different listening contexts such as formal vs. informal contexts (50.7%). In the speaking activities, Individual, pair, and group work are given equal emphasis (64.2%).

Furthermore, the presentation of reading texts with appropriate length (56.7%) and the inclusion of writing tasks with achievable goals (50.7%) are considered as other strengths of Connect series. The results also show that the good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary (64.2%) and proper contextualization of grammar are both considered as the strengths of the Connect series (50.7%).

5. Discussion

In light of the findings, the questions of the study can be answered and discussed now. The first question in this study is “what are Iranian EFL teachers’ beliefs towards Connect Series’ appropriateness in the Iranian EFL context?”

The results reveal that the teachers hold positive thoughts towards the appropriateness of Connect Series in the Iranian EFL context. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the teachers believe Connect Series is appropriate in terms of the syllabus and curriculum as the book matches the specifications of the syllabus and has a nice feel. In terms of methodology, it is proper too. Based on its methodology, the activities can be exploited completely and well enough in most classrooms. The series is compatible with the background knowledge and level of the students and it addresses learning targets; as a result, it is quite suitable for learners. Connect series is also appropriate in terms of physical and

utilitarian attributes; it is appropriately priced and its layout is attractive enough. It also indicates the efficient use of text and visuals. This textbook has an efficient layout of supplementary materials as it is supported by suitable materials like a workbook, audio, multimedia, review section, and test units. There is also a useful teacher's guide to aid the teacher. Concerning teaching-learning content, the teachers believe that the general content of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks of the books is appropriate; the tasks move from simple to complex and are varied and support teaching objectives. The language is natural and real and the material is recent. In listening parts, the tasks have well-defined goals which are authentic or close to real language situations. There exists both formal and informal context. In speaking sections, the activities initiate meaningful communication and the individual, pair, and group work are given equal emphasis. The length and the difficulty level of the readings are appropriate and the texts are interesting. The writing tasks are interesting and they have achievable goals which consider the learners' capabilities. The appropriateness of the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation parts and exercises of the book is also proved by the teachers. They believe that the vocabularies and grammar are appropriate to the level of the students and there is a good distribution of vocabulary load and grammar across chapters and the whole book; besides, new words and grammar items are contextualized and sufficiently repeated across the book. The appropriateness of the pronunciation part is also due to the interesting and useful tasks. The exercises also have clear instructions; they are adequate and interesting and they help students with mixed abilities.

The second research question in this study asked: What are the strengths of Connect series from the perspective of Iranian EFL teachers?

The pattern of responses to the questionnaire shows that the majority of the teachers consider the following issues as the strengths of Connect series:

- The book matches the syllabus and has a nice feel.
- It includes appropriate activities and diverse tasks which meet the

students' needs and teaching objectives.

- It presents different listening contexts which are authentic or close to real situations.
- It emphasizes individual, pair, and group work speaking activities that initiate meaningful communication.
- It encompasses reading texts with appropriate length and difficulty level which are interesting enough.
- It has interesting writing tasks with achievable goals which help students produce and practice the language in the best way.
- It presents vocabulary and grammar items based on the difficulty level and contextualizes them properly.
- Therefore, based on the teachers' point of view, connect series presents diverse and valuable activities and tasks which match the specifications of the syllabus. This characteristic of Connect series matches the concept of a good textbook presented by Kirkgoz (2009). According to Kirkgoz (2009), good textbooks help transform the instructions in the syllabus into a rich source of information.

Based on the results of the present study, the teachers concede that Connect series encompasses appropriate listening tasks with well-defined goals representing various contexts such as formal vs. informal contexts. Cunningsworth (1984) considers the presentation of different contexts as an important characteristic of the appropriate EFL materials. He argues that a useful set of materials develops learners into people who can handle different contexts by making them aware of different communicative strategies with different suggestions for activities that require the use of language in different contexts.

6. Conclusion

The present study has investigated Iranian EFL teachers' ideas towards Connect Series' appropriateness in the Iranian EFL context. The results of the current study provide evidence that most teachers believe in the

usefulness of Connect Series in the EFL context of Iran. Moreover, concerning the strength of the Connect books, the results reveal that these books correspond to the syllabus, include appropriate exercises and varied assignments, present various listening contexts, emphasize individual, pair, and group work speaking activities, include reading texts of acceptable length and writing tasks with attainable goals, present vocabulary dependent on difficulty level, and contextualize the grammar points.

As stated earlier a plethora of studies have been conducted to evaluate EFL textbooks in the context of Iran (Alavinia & Siyadat, 2013; Birjandi & Alizadeh, 2013; Hamidi et al., 2015; Soleimani & Dabbaghi, 2012). These studies indicated that EFL textbooks used in the context of Iran encompass up-to-date materials (Alavinia & Siyadat, 2013; Hamidi et al., 2015), critical thinking skills (Birjandi & Alizadeh, 2013), accurate content, and logical material order (Hamidi et al., 2015), and useful pragmatic input (Soleimani & Dabbaghi, 2012). The findings of the present study also show that Connect series as one of the most widely used EFL textbooks in the context of Iran serves as an appropriate source for ideas for classroom activities, and a proper reference source for learners on grammar and vocabulary.

The findings of this study also confirm Clandfield's (2010) opinion. He argues that appropriate textbooks are helpful resources for English language teaching in that they provide a framework for teachers to pursue and provide attractive, inspiring, and varied material, serve as a fantastic timesaver for teachers, and provide a source of ideas and techniques for them.

Therefore, taking into account both the importance of textbooks as stressed by various scholars (e.g. Gurung, Landrum and Daniel, 2012, Khoo and Knight, 2015) and the appropriateness of Connect series as shown by the results of the present study, the authors recommend Connect series in the EFL context of Iran as an effective textbook series.

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