

Forms and functions of International and Local EFL Workbook Activities

Danial Shirzadi*

shirzadidanial@yahoo.com

Hushang Yazdani

h-yazdani@araku.ac.ir

Abstract

English language teaching market (ELT) inundated with course book packages containing a student's book, a teacher's guide, workbooks, CD's, videos, and test materials. A host of researchers have focused on course book evaluation and analysis and considered the selection and evaluation of materials as an essential procedure in order to enhance outcomes for the learners who use them. This study thrusts to analyze different types of activities included in the elementary and pre-intermediate work books of five widely-used international workbooks and two newly developed national workbooks, prospect and vision series, in Iran. In international workbooks there was a shift from elementary to intermediate level leading to developing learners' proficiency. However, this study showed no dynamic patterns of activities in the vision and prospect workbooks within the four activities form and three functions. Suggesting that learners are at elementary level of developing their linguistic competence within workbook milieu and this lack of harmony can have a bad effect on their language proficiency growth.

Key Words: Activity, Evaluation, Workbook, Proficiency.

1. Introduction

English language teaching market (ELT) inundated with course book packages containing a student's book, a teacher's guide, workbooks, CD's, videos, and test materials. Text books and instructional materials used by language teachers are one of the most essential components of many English classrooms (Litz, 2005).

Ur (1996) listed merits of course books as:

A: They provide a clear framework within which everyone knows where to go

B: They serve as a syllabus including planned and balanced selection of language content

C: They provide readymade texts and tasks

D: They are useful guidance and support

E: They are cheapest way of providing learning material for learners

F: They enhance learners' autonomy

Cunningsworth (1995) noted that although the course books designed for general market, they will not meet particular demands of a certain groups of learners. A host of researchers have focused on course book evaluation and analysis and considered the selection and evaluation of materials as an essential procedure in order to enhance out comes for the learners who use them. However there is a shortage of studies that focus on the value of workbooks accompanying them.

Although workbooks are one major part of course book package, they do not receive due attention because they are thought to be “extra exercises”, they are not exactly and systematically corrected and given feedback by teachers and they are not often taken seriously in class in terms of teaching and testing (Baleghizade & Aghazadeh, 2014).

To fill this research gap, the present study aim to analyze five international and two local work books. Vision and prospect, the newly published packages that are one of instances deserving further investigation because of its wide readers, users and publications. This study thrusts to analyze different types of activities included in the elementary and pre-intermediate work books of five widely-used international work books and two newly developed national work books, vision and prospect series, in Iran. In order to fulfill this goal, the following are the research questions:

- 1) What is the frequency of different forms of activities in 7 series workbooks?

- 2) Is there any significant difference among categories of forms of activities used in the 7 series workbooks?
- 3) To what extent are the activities in the prospect and vision series balanced with in the new grid regarding their forms and functions?
- 4) Are the exercises in the workbooks in a balanced position? Do they provide students with all types of activities?

2. Literature review

Course books are a pivotal element in teaching-learning encounters. They partly dictate what is taught, in what order, how as well as what learners learn. Yet, whether they are a help or a hindrance to teaching and learning has aroused considerable controversy among applied linguists and ELT practitioners. Moreover, producing a well-designed and marketable product that takes into account global and local realities of contexts is a difficult challenge.

Skierso (1991) and Chall and Conard (1991) employed Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain to assess textbooks. According to Umer Azim (2005), Chall and Conard use Bloom's Taxonomy and a "Question Complexity Rating Scale" to evaluate textbook activities. These improvements and amendments refer to a paradigm shift to the process of learning versus the product of learning which implies focusing only on outcomes may not always address all the EFL learner's needs.

The long-running debate on the role of course books in a language course has not settled yet. Some practitioners endorse using and adhering to the textbooks. Richards (2001) believes that instructional materials including textbooks act as a major component in most language programs. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) claim that teaching-learning situation is not complete without its relevant textbook. Likewise, Riazi (2003) contends that textbooks are the second most important factor, surpassed only by the teacher in language education and continues that the teacher must

know how to use their materials and how useful they can be. Ur (1996) also states that textbooks provide a clear framework. Sheldon (1988) infers that they constitute the visible heart of any ELT program. It makes clear what is coming next and learners know the future path. McGrath (2002) believes that a textbook is useful since it establishes the direction, content, and to a certain degree how the lesson is to be taught. He also asserts that teachers' images reflect their attitudes and beliefs toward textbooks which will influence the textbook use by them. The proponents of using textbook believe that without it a learner is out of focus and teacher-dependent. They stress the particular importance of textbooks in providing security, guidance, and support, especially for novice teachers.

Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) recommended that textbook evaluation supports instructors transfer further than blurred calculations and it supports them to attain convenient, precise, organized, and circumstantial perceptions into the global natural surroundings of textbook material. Textbook evaluation, therefore, can theoretically be a predominantly useful means of accompanying accomplishment research over and above an arrangement of qualified authorization and enhancement.

This section discusses previous studies that deal with analysis of exercises in books that are relevant to this study. Like the current study, they also deal with the analysis of questions, exercises and tasks in books for English instruction.

Alcala (1971) analyzed questions in 3rd and 4th-grade social studies textbooks according to Bloom's taxonomy. Her results showed that out of a total of 1108 questions, 482 were knowledge level questions, 31 were synthesis level, and 49 were evaluation level. She consequently concluded that lower level thinking questions appeared at the highest frequency.

Abu Halu (1986) analyzed social studies textbooks for 4th, 5th, and 6th grades in Jordanian elementary schools. The study used a questionnaire that was examined by education experts. Results showed that the textbooks placed the greatest emphasis on the knowledge level and less emphasis on higher level thinking.

Haghverdi and Ghasemi (2013) evaluated American English File series of ELT textbook, by the use of Littlejohn (1998) evaluative framework to perceive what the unequivocal sorts of the book are, what educational tenets it has, whether it is in agreement with its appealed intentions, and what its virtues and drawbacks are. To this end, Nine ELT specialists and ten ELT instructors facilitated the investigator ratio the evaluative checklists. The outcomes of the probe display that though numerous inadequacies were found in American English File, but they are consistent with the objectives established by its authors.

Choosing a particular book in the language classroom signals an executive decision behind which lies a professional and financial investment. In a language classroom, the learners' attitudes toward the materials used fluctuates between the idea that they are valid and useful sources, and time-saving tools which can help them learn in a better way, and, on the other hand, the idea that masses of rubbish are packed together to be sold in the market. Whilst there is a dearth of empirical evaluation on these book series' workbooks; therefore, there seems to be a need for this study to see how well the ELT materials workbooks are designed to fulfill the needs of Iranian ELT students.

3. Method

3.1. Materials

The elementary and pre intermediate workbooks of five international and two local work books were selected (the selection was a result of a meticulous content analysis of all workbooks, performed by two experts and experienced teachers. One of them is a PhD candidate and the

other one is MA holder of TEFL) and the whole exercises were exactly examined to determine their effectiveness and distribution in providing an array of activities to help students improve their English language skills.

The packages are:

Work Book	Author	Year	level
American English File	Oxenden & Latham-Koeinig	2009	Elementary & pre intermediate
English Result	Mckenna	2008	elementary
Interchange	Richards	2005	Elementary & pre intermediate
New Headway	Soars & Soars	2006	elementary
Top Notch	Saslow & Ascher	2006	Elementary & pre intermediate
Iran ELT program	Prospect 3	Alavi Moghaddam, Kheirabady, Rahimi, Alavi & Mashkouh	2015 Elementary
	Vision 1	Alavi Moghaddam, Kheirabady, Rahimi & Davari	2016 pre intermediate

3.2.Theoretical framework

3.2.1. Forms of activities

Nation and McAlister (2010) classified activities in to four types:

1) Experience activities :

Teachers and material designers aim to control the language, ideas and skills so that they will become familiar and easily recognizable for learners. Simplified and graded reading texts can serve the purpose. Additionally, previous lessons or activities within a lesson can provide the skills required to perform the activity. Warm-up and warm-down activities are two instances. This type of activity includes three features:

A: teacher control over language, skills and ideas to make learning easier

B: previous lessons or activities within a lesson

C: teachers helping to share and retrieve earlier experiences.

2) Shared activities:

They involve working in groups in which they can carry out what they could not achieve by working individually.

3) Guided activities:

They require learners to perform already partially completed tasks. For instance, substitution, matching, repetition, ordering activities, etc. they are language focused instruction. They are used as a means of preparing learners for meaning-focused experience activities.

4) Independent activities:

Unlike the three activities, this activity requires learners to work with no assistance or preparation. They should be able to draw on their skills and other resources to control their own learning. For example writing a letter or reading a newspaper.

3.2.2. Functions of activities

Delving into a host of activities from different workbooks reveal that they serve three main functions:

1) Emphatic functions:

Some of the activities in the workbooks require students to emphasize and repeat what they learn in the student books. These activities include explicit and implicit learning

through form-focused and meaning-focused activities in the work book. One example from top notch workbook and student book (2009) is presented:

In student book:

“Grammar practice: complete the questions and answers. Use contractions when possible” (p. 7).

In work book:

“Complete the sentences. Use contractions” (p. 9).

2) Complementary function:

The second category of activities is to complete what is presented in the student book without any or insufficient activities and students are referred to follow it in their workbooks. This type of activity is an internal part of presented point in the student book. One example from top notch is presented:

In the student book (p. 86):

Vocabulary, drink and food, non-count nouns. Listen and practice.

Drink: 1) water 2) coffee 3) tea

In the work book (p. 60):

Count or non-count: write a, an or x before each food or drink

1) tea

2)rice

3)banana

4)meat

3) Expansive function

The last group focuses on activities require students to develop the ability to acquire information that is not necessarily found in the workbook but they have to acquire it out of class. Hyland (2004) and Nunnan (1989) stated that classroom instruction itself is not sufficient for development of English competence. These groups of activities engage students in out of classroom learning and enhance their language development like extensive reading, extensive listening, project work, dialog journals and online activities.

3.3. Data Coding and analysis

The following grid was devised based on aforementioned categories to evaluate each activity's position regarding its form and function. Then, the frequency of each activity form and function was calculated in all workbooks separately. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, Cohen's kappa coefficient was run to calculate the presence of each category using two independent inter-raters ($r=0.91\%$). At last, the findings would be compared using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests will show the significance level of observed differences.

Table1. Developed grid to evaluate formal and functional categories of activities

function	emphatic	Complementary	expansive	total
experience				
shared				
guided				
independent				
total				

4. Results

To answer the first research question (What is the frequency of different forms of activities in 7 series workbooks?), the researchers assigned each activity of the mentioned workbooks to a category regarding their forms. The obtained results from the data analysis are summarized in the following tables:

Table2. Elementary workbooks

Course books	American English file		English results		Interchange		New headway		Top notch		Prospect 3		total	
Activity types	No.	f. %	No.	f.%	No.	f.%	No.	f%	No.	F%	No.	f.%	No.	f.%
experience	3	2.7	16	4.5	15	11.1	4	2.9	15	17.6	15	15.6	68	7.5
shared	0	0	1	0.2	5	3.7	3	2.1	3	3.5	0	0.0	12	1.3
guided	106	97.2	280	82.3	91	67.4	112	81.7	52	61.1	75	78.1	716	79.2
independent	0	0	44	12.5	24	17.7	18	13.1	15	17.6	6	6.2	107	11.8
total	109	99.9	340	99.5	135	99.9	137	99.8	85	99.8	96	99.9	903	99.8

Table 3. Pre-intermediate workbooks

Course books	American English file		English results		Interchange		New headway		Top notch		Vision1		total	
Activity Types	No.	f. %	No.	f.%	No.	f.%	No.	f%	No.	F%	No.	f.%	No.	f.%
experience	4	2.6	1	0.5	8	4.8	6	3.7	9	6.5	7	10.4	35	4.0
shared	0	0	1	0.5	3	1.8	2	1.2	3	2.1	0	0	9	1.0
guided	108	72	163	85.7	134	81.7	128	81	100	72.9	60	89.5	693	80.0
independent	38	25.3	25	13.1	19	11.5	22	13.9	25	18.2	0	0	129	14.8
total	150	99.9	190	99.8	164	99.8	158	99.8	137	99.7	67	99.9	866	99.8

Table 2 and table 3 show the descriptive data about the frequency and forms of exercises in 5 different international English series' workbooks and that of two Iran's ELT program (prospect 3 and vision 1 series workbooks). As it is demonstrated, the total frequency of exercises in prospect and vision series workbook is lower than all other six international workbooks (f= 96 and 67, respectively). This can be considered as a sign of lack of exercises in this series. The highest frequency of activities can be seen in English Results series workbook (elementary level:

340 and pre-intermediate level: 190) following by Interchange (elementary level: 135 and pre-intermediate level: 164), New Headway (elementary level: 137 and pre-intermediate level: 158), American English File (elementary level: 109 and pre-intermediate level: 150) and Top Notch (elementary level: 85 and pre-intermediate level: 137) series.

As far as types of activities are concerned, guided activities has got the highest frequency (elementary level: 716 and pre-intermediate level: 693) followed by independent (elementary level: 107 and pre-intermediate level: 129) and experience (elementary level: 68 and pre-intermediate level: 35) activities. Shared types are activities happened to be pretty rare (elementary level: 12 and pre-intermediate level: 9) in all.

To answer the second research (Is there any significant difference among categories of forms of activities used in the 7 series workbooks?) question two chi-square tests were run to investigate the significance of observed difference. The results are shown in the following tables.

Table 4. Chi-square Test for the Frequencies of forms of activities in pre-intermediate workbooks

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	51.615 ^a	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	52.005	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.678	1	.031
N of Valid Cases	903		

As indicated by table 4 the obtained sig (0.000) < 0.05 and df= 6 show that the observed differences between the frequency of four categories of activity forms in elementary workbook series is significant.

Table 5. Chi-square Test for the Frequencies of forms of activities in pre-intermediate workbooks

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.331 ^a	4	.001
Likelihood Ratio	19.602	4	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	.577	1	.448
N of Valid Cases	866		

As shown in the above table, df of 4 and sig (0.001) < 0.05 indicate that the differences of observed frequencies of four categories of activity forms in pre-intermediate workbook series is significant.

An analysis of form and function of prospect and vision series workbook has been done to answer the third research question of the present study (To what extent are the activities in the prospect and vision series balanced within the new grid?). The data suggest that besides a lack of balance in the form of exercises in Iran's ELT series workbooks, there is an unbalanced pattern of function as well. All the exercises in vision series have been assigned to the emphatic function and there was no exercise with complementary and expansive functions which brings an urgent need of revision to the scene. The results of this analysis are summarized in tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Activity function and activity types in the prospect 3 workbook.

	emphatic	Complementary	expansive	total
experience	15	0	0	15
shared	0	0	0	0
guided	51	18	6	75
independent	0	0	6	6
total	66	18	12	96

Table 7. Activity function and activity types in the vision1 workbook.

function type	emphatic	Complementary	expansive	total
experience	7	0	0	7
shared	0	0	0	0
guided	60	0	0	60
independent	0	0	0	0
total	67	0	0	67

To answer the fourth research question (Are the exercises in the workbooks in a balanced position? Do they provide students with all types of activities?), the results suggest that there is a lack of shared types of activities in all workbooks. Furthermore, shared and independent types of activities have not been used in prospect and vision series workbook which can be mentioned as point of unbalanced position of exercises in these workbooks. Surprisingly, prospect 3 workbook contained a low frequency of independent type activities which are totally missing in vision1 workbook while the latter meant to serve higher levels proficiency.

5. Discussion

The general results showed that both elementary and intermediate workbooks provide learners with guided activities. Including that this type of activity is pre dominant and this is true of the prospect and vision workbooks with emphatic function. The second prominent activity is independent in international workbooks while in prospect and vision workbooks, the experience activity is the second with emphatic function.

The first part of this finding about international workbooks is in line with Baleghizade and Aghazade (2012) while the second part, which is about Iranian ELT workbook series, of finding is in contrast with their study. this different pattern of distribution can be explained by the fact that the writers of prospect and vision work book did intended to assign students to do their activities independently while they were given activities requiring them to have equal access to the same information and to work with pre communicative activities (Littlewoods, 1981). Littlewoods (1981) added that learners are allowed to perform the task with apparent fluency because preparation and control that has preceded them. Students do many guided activities and then experience activities, unlike international workbooks that foster autonomy and independence in language learning (Benson, 2011). Therefore less authentic resources and also lesser interest and pleasure (Benson, 2011) for the prospect and vision workbook readers. These observed occurrences for each activity can be explained by the reason that most activities in these workbooks are intended to reinforce learners understanding and producing of language skills by providing them with an array of various types of guided activities with emphatic function.

As Littlewoods (1981) asserted pre communicative activities provide partial control over linguistic forms and communicative activities following it with spontaneous and personalized

production. There is no evidence of shared and independent categories in Iran's ELT workbook series because it is at the elementary level focusing on linguistic competence which is somehow a problematic viewpoint and the results of the present study suggest a revision to that.

A shift from guided to independent activities when the workbooks get more complex from elementary to pre intermediate levels is reasonable. However, the data showed that in prospect and vision workbooks there is not remarkable change and the number of activities is far fewer than that of international workbooks. The dominant pattern in the prospect and vision is different from international workbooks. In other words, this series do not trigger learners to do varied activities with other functions.

The last research question dealt with a balanced distribution in the new grid. The data revealed that majority of activities are guided with emphatic function. The pattern of activities in prospect and vision workbooks is not dynamic and not progressive, unlike the international workbooks that showed a reasonable pattern from guided to independent activities. This observed occurrence may be explained by a number of purposes. As well as consolidating understanding and providing scaffolded practice opportunities (Ellis, 1996). It also involves structural drills and semi-structured productive activities to allow proceduralization of grammar and lexical patterns and their rehearsal promote longer term retention of such structure in long term memory (petty, 2014) which is in line with studies by Ellis (1996) and Ellis & Sinclair (1996). There were not activities with complementary and expansive functions, showing that the activities were only repeating and emphasizing what students learn in the student book.

Conclusion

This study evaluated international and local workbooks with four activity forms and three functions. This study aimed to determine whether the activities in the workbooks are effective in having balanced activities. In international workbooks there was a shift from elementary to intermediate level leading to developing learners' proficiency. However, this study showed no dynamic patterns of activities in the vision workbook within the four activities and three functions. Suggesting that learners are at elementary level of developing their linguistic competence within workbook milieu and this lack of harmony can have a bad effect on their language proficiency growth. The findings of the present study suggest that reconsideration should be applied in order to balance the types and functions of vision series workbook.

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