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The Evaluation of “Vision” English Textbooks A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Textbook Evaluation, Vision series, Textbook, Literature review

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In the world of language teaching, textbooks have a central role; therefore, they influence the entire process of learning/teaching languages. Having them analyzed and evaluated is vital for ensuring their efficiency and alignment with the goals of language classes. Reviewing the vision series textbook evaluation studies is the purpose of this paper. Due to the extensive use of this series in Iranian high schools, students' worldviews are inevitably affected by it. Students may also be lead wrongly by biased perspectives in high school textbooks. Since these textbooks are new and taught to every Iranian student, they need continuous evaluation and analysis to achieve their specified goals. While some studies have evaluated and analyzed these textbooks, a review of published articles in this field is still lacking. Throughout the literature, 24 research articles from the last 5 years are discussed. Generally, the study found that most teachers believe Vision textbooks have adhered to the guidelines of the CLT method and are an improvement over the old English language teaching books. Several revisions have also been suggested because they believe these books have cultural shortcomings and do not allow students to become familiar with the target culture. As a final point, some implications are presented regarding the evaluation of English textbooks in Iranian contexts.

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1. Introduction

Teaching languages relies heavily on coursebooks, which are considered a pivotal component of the process (Tomlinson, 2012). Teaching and learning are primarily facilitated by coursebooks, which also serve as a source of information for teachers, helps them achieve their teaching goals and facilitate students' learning. (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Skierso (1991) argues that effective teaching can seldom be achieved without depending on textbooks.

Tomlinson and Masuhara (2001) propose textbook evaluation as a method that can be used by teachers, administrators, supervisors, and materials developers to monitor and improve the impact of materials. Zohrabi (2011) also believes that curriculums will be more effective if material evaluation is prioritized. Since no textbook can be described as flawless, evaluating textbooks is highly important to clarify the suitability of the sources and to choose the most appropriate ones (Gholami, Nikou, and Souldanpour, 2012).

Textbooks are an integral part of ELT classrooms. Assisting teachers in planning lesson plans and directing students on what to focus on are some of the most important functions they perform. As a reliable resource, textbooks save both students and teachers time and money. Using textbooks allows teachers to spend more time on teaching instead of allocating time for preparing their own materials. It helps teachers save time by eliminating the need to create materials in-house.

In Iran, it is the textbook curriculum development and planning department of the Ministry of Education that develops all textbooks taught at state schools, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. Following a number of criticisms

leveled against previous textbooks (Farhady, 2000; [Yarmohammadi](#), 2000), Ministry of Education developed Vision 1, 2, and 3 according to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles as the second three volumes of six-volume series of English for High Schools (Alavimoghadam, Kheirabadi, Rahimi, Davari, 2016-2018) designed for students in junior high schools as English coursebooks. Due to the extensive use of this series in Iranian high schools, students' worldviews are inevitably affected by it. Students may also be lead wrongly by biased perspectives in high school textbooks. This is because of rather than appreciating the differences among cultures and races, they will be led to discriminate against certain gender and promote certain cultures over others. Since these textbooks are new and taught to every Iranian student, they need continuous evaluation and analysis to achieve their best. While some studies have evaluated and analyzed these textbooks, a review of published articles in this field is still lacking, and this study attempts to fill this gap.

The researcher carried out this study to evaluate the newly developed high school English textbooks called Vision series through a literature review. To achieve the study's goal, the following question was addressed.

1. When it comes to the Vision series, how are scholars evaluating it?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers and students towards the vision series?

2. Research on textbook evaluation

While many elements contribute to the process of learning and teaching, the textbook is unquestionably one of the most fundamental ones. Sheldon (1988, p. 237) describes textbooks as "the heart" of any ELT program. The textbook is a must-have for novice

teachers, and students must also have a well-designed material to study and practice with. The purpose of textbooks is to provide students with something they can refer to if they have any difficulties understanding the materials. For both students and teachers, textbooks are crucial, because they provide a clearly defined framework in which lessons, activities, etc., are taught.

2.1 An overview of the textbook's importance

Ansary and Babaii (2003) assert that learners feel teaching without textbooks is pointless; textbooks can help learners manage learning time. Additionally, it can act as a guideline as well as a source of confidence for teachers without much experience. AbdelWahab (2013, p. 55) explains that “One fundamental function of textbooks is to provide learners with accessible, easily understood knowledge in a selected, organized and easy manner”. A textbook is an essential part of English language teaching (ELT) since it provides students with input of the language and opportunities to practice it (Richards, 2001).

According to Bahar and Zaman (2013), without a relevant textbook, no teaching-learning setting can achieve success. Furthermore, textbooks can also be used as a self-study resource. In addition to gaining experience and confidence, novice teachers can find alternative choices for their teaching materials through these sources.

Ahour and Ahmadi (2012) believe textbooks are the best materials for teaching English because they provide an easy and organized way to learn the language. Textbooks and other content materials play a crucial role not only in helping teachers to carry out their responsibilities, but also in creating a positive learning environment

(Azizfar, 2009). It is often the case that textbooks are important tools for teaching and learning languages, but the roles and usages vary between countries and educational systems (Ahmadi and Derakhshan, 2016).

In addition, Zhourabi, Sabouri, and Kheradmand (2014) argued that textbooks have the potential to be either an encouragement or a deterrent to learning, depending on the contents of the books. It is widely accepted that a number of materials are good for learning a language because they facilitate the learning process. Textbooks, however, can also have problems seen in all teaching materials. It is inevitable that all textbooks will have some limitations. Students' educational needs are not always adequately met by textbooks.

During course design, Sheldon (1988) argues that the selection of a textbook is a crucial and fundamental decision, since professional, financial, and political investment factors should be considered. As Chambers (1997) noted, textbook selection is a laborious process due to the involvement of many individuals, as well as opposing opinions concerning the textbook's use. To make sure that a textbook is effective, it does seem necessary to evaluate it once it has been chosen.

It is essential to evaluate and analyze textbooks before implementing them in an English classroom or program to ensure they are suitable for the program or class. The importance of textbook analysis and evaluating the EFL process has been highlighted in several studies (Richards, 2001; Tomlinson, 2012).

2.2 The importance of textbook evaluation

There is a substantial amount of research that indicates textbooks play a crucial role in the learning/teaching process. As Sheldon (1988) declares, the textbook is an indispensable teaching tool, since it provides students and teachers with a framework that defines lessons, activities, etc. In Ansary and Babaii (2003), textbooks claim to help students manage their learning time. Additionally, it can be a great source of confidence and guidance for inexperienced teachers.

Further, Zhouzhabi, Sabouri, and Kheradmand (2014) argue that textbooks are susceptible to being either a facilitator or a deterrent to learning, depending on their content. AbdelWahab (2013, p. 55) describes that "The primary role of textbooks is to provide learners with concrete, easily understood information in a concise, organized, and understandable manner". English language textbooks are essential to the teaching of English as a foreign language, since they provide students with input and opportunities to practice the language (Richards, 2001).

With textbooks playing such a crucial role in the educational context and contributing to beneficial outcomes in education, it makes sense to have successive evaluations of them (Nourbaran, 2017). It is highly recommended that “curriculum should place the highest priority on material evaluations” (Zohrabi, 2011, p. 214). According to Dudley-Evans and St John (2005, p. 128), “evaluation involves gathering information and evaluating the information to identify what needs to be changed”.

The textbooks used in teaching languages need to be evaluated, according to Ellis (1997). A textbook evaluation involves a direct and analytical method of

information matching. As a matter of fact, "Evaluation has long been identified as a powerful tool for improving educational quality." (AbdelWahab, 2013, p. 55).

English would be a major concern when teaching English in countries such as Iran, where it is considered a foreign language. In light of textbooks' crucial role in the educational context and their impact on education, it makes sense to evaluate them continuously (Nourbaran, 2017). There is a need for textbook evaluation in language teaching, according to Ellis (1997). "Evaluation of the educational process has long been recognized as a powerful tool for improving educational quality." (AbdelWahab, 2013, p. 55). Research on textbook evaluation in EFL contexts has been conducted by a number of Iranian researchers.

As part of Iran's materials development program, textbook evaluation has recently become one of the most challenging issues. Teachers' beliefs, course objectives, learners' needs, and the textbook's content are all taken into account when adapting the content. "The primary function of evaluation in school is to improve quality by giving feedback about classroom teaching, curriculum content, and students' learning", as described by KiaAhmadi and Arabmofrad (2015, p. 24).

Educators and pedagogical systems utilize school textbooks as an indispensable resource, according to Sanie and Vahid Dastjerdi (2018). Iran is no different from many other countries around the world where school textbooks play a vital role in language learning. As a result, it makes sense to analyze them in depth. A textbook should meet four criteria for evaluation according to Cunningsworth (1995): 1) it must meet the learners' needs, 2) it must reflect the present or future usage of the

language, 3) it must facilitate learners' learning processes without imposing rigid procedures, and 4) it must play a clear role as a teaching aid.

It is important to note that textbooks are not always perfect and may contain imperfections, according to Ansary and Babaii (2002). Thus, they propose that instructors should be able to evaluate complementary materials according to their own particular needs and contexts. Aiming to determine if the current EFL materials used in Iranian context correspond with the (ideal) model, Farhady (1995) deemed it of utmost significance to investigate and examine them. In order to prepare an EFL textbook that is both flawless and effective, we must consider both learners' and instructors' needs, attitudes, and beliefs.

2.3 Evaluation of Iranian textbooks

There have been a number of researchers in Iran who have focused on textbook evaluation in EFL contexts. Vision 1 was evaluated externally by Pouranshirvani (2017a) taking into account teachers' viewpoints. 25 senior high school teachers participated in the study by filling out questionnaires concerning the textbook's physical characteristics, objectives, and supplementary materials. The findings revealed that participants seem satisfied with the textbook's physical characteristics and objectives, but disappointed with the supplementary materials. Pouranshirvani (2017b) also evaluated Vision 1 internally. She investigated the language-teaching contents and language skills contained in the textbook in her latest study. A total of 30 educators took part in the study. It was found that while educators felt dissatisfied in some areas of the

textbook, such as socio-cultural contexts, they were, in general, interested in its content and skills.

The investigation of Prospect and Vision 1 was carried out by Ajideh (2016). It was the researcher's intent to analyze and examine how much attention was paid to culture by the developers of these textbooks. For the analysis of textbook cultural representation, he utilized Ramirez and Hall's (1990) model. The findings of his study indicate that both textbook series neglected to adequately address target cultures by adhering to the source culture, thereby preventing learners from building intercultural competence.

Based on the findings, educators and students believed that topics helped students communicate meaningfully by allowing them to work in groups and pairs. The English language was introduced to learners through a variety of activities that improved their speaking accuracy and fluency while developing speaking skills in real life. Despite some learning difficulties, learners seemed to find the tasks and exercises relevant, interesting, and motivating. Throughout the exercises, the level of difficulty increased as the exercises progressed. It was noted both by teachers and students that listening and speaking skills were highly valued over reading and writing. However, in general, it was important to assign more writing assignments. The textbook content was supported by teachers, but students were upset that the materials emphasized the use of technology for English instruction. As supporting evidence, they mentioned that in some schools, online resources and supplemental materials could not be accessed, aside from the inequality in distribution. There were positive comments from instructors regarding the face validity and layout of the main learning materials, and they said the books were clear and attractive. Still, they believed a colorful and beautiful illustration

of a real person, or a real place would make the textbooks seem more appealing, however. Unlike their educators, students did not find English textbooks to be attractive enough. A study by Yousefi, Bashirnezhad and Andi (2017) using Tomlinson's (2003) model found similar results with the English textbook "Vision 1".

For countries such as Iran, where English is considered a foreign language, the textbook issue would be a major concern when teaching English. It is important that learners learn English in Iran so that they can gain a better understanding of how the world works, to explore science, literature, and art from English-speaking countries, and to find and access English-language information sources. (Yarmohammadi, 2002). Iranian language classes have been struggling to achieve these goals, causing the national English curriculum to be carefully scrutinized in order to identify the reasons for the demotivation of learners and the failure of Iranian language programs (Yarmohammadi, 2002).

A committee of American and Iranian educationists and professors created the first English language textbooks for Iranian students in 1938. It was common practice to use English as a Foreign Language (EFL) materials from English-speaking countries before this time period. The first official English textbooks were developed in 1939 by an Iranian and an English-speaking ELT specialist team based on Direct Method (DM) and Reading Method (RM), which were trends at the time. As situational language teaching became popular, the textbooks were revised to adopt its principles (Foroozandeh, 2011). Pre-Revolutionary period materials include those from 1939-1979. After the Revolution, there were three distinct phases of English textbooks: 1982-90, 1991-2010, and the new English for School Series, introduced in 2013 and continuing to this day. English textbooks were revised for the first time after the Islamic

Revolution in 1982, and it lasted until 1990. In 1991, students interested in attending university were required to take the Pre-University level instead of Grade 4. RM and SLT methods are used in two different books that form the Pre-University English textbook in a single volume. CLT is incorporated into Prospect and Vision in the English for Schools Series, which also contains a student's book and a workbook. Junior high schools have been using Prospect 1, 2, and 3 since 2013, 2014, and 2015, respectively, whereas senior high schools have been using the Vision series since 2016 (Tavakoli, 2021).

A study by Gheitasi, Aliakbari, and Yousofi (2020) examined the cultural content of Iranian high school textbooks. Identifying the most frequent cultural references and aspects was the aim of this study. As far as cultural content is concerned, Persian was the source culture most often used in Vision ELT textbooks. Similar to that, esthetic aspects of culture were first considered, followed by sociological, sociolinguistic (pragmatic) and semantic aspects.

A study was conducted by Rahimi and Sharifian (2020) that evaluated the visuals in Vision 3. Towards substantiating this, in phase one of the research, the researchers conducted an analysis of Persian Cultural Conceptualizations (CCs) of visuals in Vision 3 using a Cultural Linguistics approach. The second stage involves semi-structured interviews with 12 graders aged 14 to 19, designed to determine whether CCs of visual artifacts can enhance students' ability to communicate in multicultural settings by enhancing their critical engagement with the materials. Based on the textbook analysis of the study, three Persian cultural schemas were found from the grade 12 EFL textbook in Iran relating to family gatherings, hijab, and blood

donations. Furthermore, interviews revealed that Iranian students' communication skills have not improved, nor have their needs been met by EFL textbooks.

3. Method

To carry out the current research, the findings of the research articles related to the evaluation of Vision textbooks in the last 5 years have been reviewed. To do so, the researcher used vision textbook evaluation, vision series, Iranian English textbook as keywords for searching in google scholar, after collecting all of the articles, 24 research articles that were in accord with the topic and goal of this research and were publishes in last 5 years were selected, and irrelevant ones were deleted. This study reviewed the theories and literature associated with textbook evaluations for Vision books. Several theoretical and experimental reviews of literature studies focused on textbook evaluation were used as the fundamental tools to elicit data for the current report. The tool of this study was primarily based on findings from previous studies regarding Iranian English textbook evaluation.

4. Results

As a result of literature review, vision textbook series fail to adequately address target cultures because they adhere to source cultures, thereby preventing learners from becoming interculturally competent (Gheitasi, et al., 2020). It was found that most participating teachers agreed with the curriculum innovation and reforms. It was reported, however, that teachers didn't feel that the experts who created these materials

considered teachers' perceptions of reform and their readiness (Masoumi Sooreh and Ahour, 2020).

Educators consider the English textbooks for Iranian high school students inadequate when it comes to communicative skills, activities, and content. Additionally, teachers noted that certain limitations make practicing communicative activities in class difficult. A better understanding of the culture of the target language can be achieved by making several changes to textbook cultural content (Khodabandeh and Mobini, 2018).

Using the perspectives of both teachers and students, Khodabandeh and Mobini (2018) examined "Vision 1". The researchers interviewed 30 males and females teachers as well as 70 students. The researchers found that it is necessary to make several changes to textbook cultural content in order to provide a better understanding of the culture of the target language. Various teachers' perspectives were examined in Masoumi Sooreh and Ahour's (2020) study of "Vision 2". A total of 45 English teachers participated in the study (22 males and 23 females). Based on the results, Vision2, with a few revisions, can be used as an 11th-grade textbook.

In a study published by Torki and Chalak (2016), the attitudes of high school teachers and students towards Iranian high school English textbooks were explored. In Isfahan, Iran, 150 male and female high school students and their teachers were given a questionnaire consisting of 45 questions regarding high school English textbooks. CLT implementation was also discussed with the participants as part of the interview process. As a result of the descriptive analysis of the data, it was found that Iranian teachers and students in Isfahan expressed positive attitudes towards English textbooks based on CLT. The majority of participants reported that Iranian high school English textbooks

currently adhere to 80 percent of CLT principles. Nevertheless, some changes may be necessary to improve their quality.

In Arkani's (2019) study, the author examines the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian high school English textbook "vision 3" to explain why students are still having difficulty mastering the language. 32 English teachers from Mashhad, Iran were randomly selected for the study. Through the Litz (2005) questionnaire and open-ended questions, the textbook was evaluated quantitatively. The checklist evaluated seven main aspects: practical considerations, layouts and designs, activities, skills, languages, subject and content, and overall consensus. Teachers' perception of these criteria was almost positive in some aspects based on the study's findings. As a result, they believe that English textbooks for Iranian high school students are inappropriate in terms of communicative skills, activities, and content. In addition, teachers pointed out that certain limitations make it difficult to practice communicative activities during class.

To determine both the challenges and difficulties associated with the new English textbooks (Vision series) and the opportunities and advantages associated with the new textbooks for teachers, Khonamri, Maziar and Dehqan (2021) conducted a survey of high school English teachers. 56 high school teachers were given a questionnaire based on Richards (2001) guidelines to evaluate textbooks. In the following round of interviews, ten experienced and novice teachers were selected. An analysis was conducted using Content Analysis on the interview data and SPSS software on the questionnaire data. Researchers found that a majority of participating teachers agreed with the curriculum innovation and reform. The teachers, however, reported that the experts who developed the materials failed to consider teachers' perceptions of the necessity of reform and their readiness for it.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In general, by examining the results of the previous researches, it can be said that most of the teachers consider Vision books to be a significant improvement over the old English language teaching books and believe that these books have adhered to the guidelines of the CLT method. Still they also believe that these books are culturally weak and cannot familiarize students with the target culture. It is better that authors make some revisions and include different cultural aspects such as: food, clothing, ceremonies and customs, beliefs and superstitions of the English-speaking people in these books for more familiarity of the learners. It is also recommended that teachers pay more attention to this point and personally focus on increasing the communicative competence of students in their classroom. In terms of appearance, design and coloring, the teachers believed that it is better to use real and more attractive pictures of people and landscapes in the book instead of painting.

The results of this research can be useful for researchers, material developers, teachers and the Ministry of Education. The authors of Vision textbooks should take advantage of the results of this research and act in order to correct and review the deficiencies raised.

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The Effect of Mobile-mediated Dynamic Assessment on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners’ Writing Skill



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