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Probing into the Communicative Nature of Speaking Activities in Two Books: *Vision 1* versus *Solutions Elementary*

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ABSTRACT

Since the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), textbooks in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have sought to align with its principles in order to gain wider acceptance and credibility. On the other hand, enhancing speaking skills within the school context in Iran has become a pressing demand. A critical component in facilitating the attainment of this ambitious objective is the effective development and utilization of appropriate instructional materials. This study seeks to critically evaluate the efficacy of Vision 1, a domestically developed coursebook implemented in Iranian high schools, in comparison to the international standard exemplified by Solutions Elementary (E.). To this end, four evaluative criteria were utilized: the communicative nature of speaking tasks, alignment with the Weak or Strong version of CLT, the type of prompts used for eliciting speaking, and the frequency of speaking activities. Methodologically, content analysis was conducted, and the degree of inter-coder agreement was quantified using Cohen's Kappa. Subsequently, the obtained data underwent statistical scrutiny, encompassing both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Non-parametric Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were employed to discern statistically significant disparities between the two textbooks concerning the specified criteria. Outcomes indicated significant differences in all the four criteria used. Overall, Solutions E. exhibited superiority over Vision 1 in terms of both quantity and diversity of speaking activities. The activities in Solutions E. are more communicatively oriented, fostering willingness to communicate in the target learners. Recommendations were posited to ameliorate Vision 1, particularly in the sphere of speaking skill development in Iranian context.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, educational reforms in language teaching have placed considerable emphasis on communicative language teaching (CLT) and its extensions in what came to be known as Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Task-supported Language Teaching (TSLT) (Ellis, 2024) Content-Based Instruction (CBT) and participatory approach (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), a methodology that prioritizes interaction as the primary means of language learning. CLT emerged in response to the limitations of traditional language instruction, which often focused heavily on grammar and vocabulary in isolation. Instead, CLT promotes the integration of all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and aims to prepare learners for real-life communication through meaningful engagement in the target language (Littlewood, 2013).

However, there is some notable uncertainty in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) about what exactly CLT is, how practical it is to implement it in varying contexts and whether it is necessarily superior to more traditional approaches. (Littlewood, 2013; Kumarvadivelu, 2006). CLT is often considered indefinable due to its varying interpretations and implementations, especially regarding the distinction between its Strong and Weak versions. The Strong version posits that language learning should occur solely through communication, while the Weak version allows for a balance between communicative activities and explicit grammar instruction (Littlewood, 2013). Additionally, the 1990s saw extensions of CLT that integrated sociocultural aspects and task-based approaches, complicating its practical application across different contexts. This variability has led to uncertainty in SLA about the effectiveness and superiority of CLT compared to traditional methods, highlighting the challenges educators face in applying its principles consistently and effectively.

On the other hand, the successful implementation of CLT is highly dependent on contextual realities. In the Iranian EFL context, several structural and systemic challenges limit the effective realization of CLT principles. Firstly, as English is rarely used for real communication outside the classroom, students often lack intrinsic motivation to learn the language for communicative purposes. Additionally, public school classes are typically large and heterogeneous, making it difficult for teachers to provide sufficient opportunities for meaningful speaking practice. A further constraint is the limited instructional time – usually restricted to two or three hours per week – which is insufficient for developing all four language skills effectively. Perhaps most critically, the assessment system predominantly relies on written exams that emphasize vocabulary and grammar, with oral skills, particularly speaking, largely overlooked in both classroom evaluation and high-stakes testing (Maghsoodi & Vahdany, 2024). Given these constraints, textbooks—being a central element of language instruction—must be particularly robust and well-designed to support the development of productive skills like speaking in such a challenging educational environment.

The *Visions Series (*Alavimoghaddam, et al., 2016), developed for Iranian high school students, represents a significant attempt to implement CLT principles in English language education. Launched approximately a decade ago, the series aims to shift away from rote learning and grammar memorization prevalent in earlier textbooks. By integrating CLT principles, the *Visions Series* claims to enhance the development of communicative competence, allowing students to engage in meaningful conversations and develop practical linguistic skills.

Nevertheless, while the introduction of the *Visions Series* signifies an important step towards modernizing English language instruction in Iran, research investigating the actual implementation of CLT within these textbooks remains limited. Scholars have pointed out that there is often a gap between theoretical guidelines for CLT and the reality of how it is incorporated into classroom practices and materials (Richards, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Littlewood, 2013). Due to variations in the understanding of CLT and its development since its emergence, there is a pressing need for transparent interpretation and analysis of textbooks through cross-comparative analysis. This approach can reveal how theoretical developments can be integrated for practical purposes in language teaching materials.

Moreover, understanding how CLT manifests in specific skills, particularly speaking, in the Iranian context has not been thoroughly examined. The integration of speaking skills in language learning is critical, as it is a fundamental aspect of communicative competence. Research shows that effective speaking instruction involves not

only the practice of vocabulary and grammar but also the use of strategies for interaction, negotiation, and the social aspects of communication (Nunan, 2003). Yet, there is a lack of investigation into how the speaking activities in the *Visions Series* align with CLT principles.

Since the publication and implementation of the *Vision Series* in Iranian high schools, several studies have been conducted to evaluate these newly developed materials (Torki & Chalak, 2016; Sooreh & Ahour, 2020; Shahmohammadi, 2018; Nejati et al., 2018, among others). However, these studies predominantly employed a survey-based approach, lacking focused scrutiny on specific language skills. They relied heavily on questionnaires completed by teachers and students. While such data *may* provide valuable insights from the consumers' perspective, they fail to assess the materials from the more technical standpoint of material development or SLA research.

The present study offers a significant contribution to the field by focusing specifically on the skill of speaking, meticulously analyzing related activities through the lens Communicative Approach. By operationalizing the concept of communicativeness from a new perspective, this study aims to bridge theoretical understanding with practical application in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Moreover, the evaluation of the domestic *Vision Series* against an international standard, such as the *Solutions* coursebook (Falla, & Davies, 2017), unveils subtle yet critical nuances regarding the materials' potential to facilitate effective speaking practice. This comparative analysis highlights areas of strength and areas for improvement, thus providing valuable insights into the efficacy of the *Vision Series* in fostering speaking skills within the Iranian EFL landscape.

Evaluating *Vision 1* against an international counterpart like *Solutions E.* is justified for several reasons. Firstly, an international comparison allows for benchmarking against global standards, offering insights into the alignment of local teaching materials with international best practices. Secondly, it provides a broader perspective on the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of *Vision 1*. Such an evaluation can highlight potential gaps or strengths in the domestic material, helping educators and policymakers in Iran make informed decisions about the suitability and relevance of *Vision 1* in preparing students for global communication. It ensures that the local curriculum meets not only national standards but also international expectations, thereby enhancing the overall quality of English language education. Furthermore, both books target a similar audience in terms of age (teenagers) and proficiency level (elementary).

As such, due to the scarcity of comparative textbook evaluation research in this area, the current study compares the portrayal of speaking activities in the two textbooks *Solutions E.* and *Vision 1*. So, four questions were posed in this research as follows:

1. How do the two books *Solutions E.* and *Vision 1* compare in terms of the communicative nature of speaking activities?

2. How do the two books *Solutions E.* and *Vision 1* compare in terms of speaking prompts?

3. How do the two books *Solutions E.* and *Vision 1* compare in terms of quantity of activities for developing speaking skill?

4. How do the speaking activities in *Vision 1* and *Solutions E.* compare in their alignment with the principles of the weak and strong versions of CLT?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Communicative Approach in Material Development

Since its inception, CLT has undergone significant evolution over the years, as noted by Richards and Rodgers (2014), who outline three developmental stages. Initially, the focus was on creating a syllabus aligned with the concept of communicative competence, leading to the organization of syllabuses around notions and functions instead of grammatical structures (Wilkins, 1976). The second stage emphasized identifying learners' needs,

advocating for needs analysis as a crucial element of communicative methodology (Munby, 1978). In the third stage, attention shifted to specific classroom activities that support communicative methodology, including group work, task-based learning, and information gap activities (Prabhu, 1987).

Littlewood (2013) distinguishes between a Weak and Strong version of CLT. The Weak version views language as a tool for communication, prioritizing functional use over grammatical accuracy and influencing methodologies like role-plays and authentic tasks (Morrow & Johnson, 1981). The Strong version emphasizes language learning through communication itself, promoting natural acquisition over explicit teaching, as seen in Krashen and Terrell's (1983) *natural approach* and Prabhu's (1987) *communicational language teaching*. Others advocate a balanced view, supporting focus on form within CLT (Richards, 2005) or explicit grammar instruction through consciousness-raising activities (Ellis, 2009).

2.2. Task Types in Communicative Approach

In the current post-method era, the pursuit of a singular best method has shifted towards a situated, context-sensitive approach that emphasizes the need for particularity, practicality, and possibility, as outlined by Kumaravadivelu (2006). This perspective encourages educators to adopt strategies that are tailored to the specific needs of their students. In this context, Littlewood (2013) presents a model that illustrates a continuum of communicativeness, allowing teachers the flexibility to choose methods that best satisfy their students' requirements. Littlewood's Communicative-Oriented Language Teaching (COLT) framework blends classroom experience with modern language teaching theory to promote communicative competence. It introduces a continuum from analytic learning—focused on language forms—to experiential learning, which emphasizes real-life communication. The model outlines five stages of language activities, progressing from controlled, form-based tasks to authentic, unpredictable interactions such as creative role-plays and discussions, highlighting a shift toward meaningful, spontaneous language use (Littlewood, 2013).

In addition, SLA research distinguishes between focus-on-forms (FonFs) and focus-on-form (FonF), each with important pedagogical implications (Long, 2015; Ellis, 2016, 2024). FonFs emphasizes explicit instruction on isolated language elements, while FonF embeds corrective feedback within meaningful communication tasks to promote fluency and implicit learning. Studies show FonF fosters both accuracy and real-world application better than FonFs alone (Long, 2015; Norris & Ortega, 2006). Ellis (2003) further distinguishes between focused tasks— structured for specific forms—and unfocused tasks, which allow incidental learning through authentic communication. Together, these frameworks highlight the need to balance accuracy with meaningful language use to support communicative competence.

2.3. Related Studies on Vision Series

The Vision textbook series, implemented in Iranian high schools as part of an educational reform, has been the subject of a growing yet still limited body of research. While existing studies provide preliminary insights into the design, implementation, and reception of these textbooks, much of the literature remains descriptive, relying heavily on perception-based methodologies. A critical review of this literature reveals both methodological limitations and conflicting findings regarding the textbooks' alignment with CLT principles and their responsiveness to local needs.

Some studies have generally reported positive attitudes toward the Vision textbooks. For example, Torki and Chalak (2017) concluded that a majority of teachers and students perceived the series as reflecting CLT principles and found them satisfactory overall. However, this broadly favorable view is contradicted by other findings. Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2016) reported teachers' dissatisfaction with the treatment of reading and writing skills, which calls into question the depth of communicative orientation, especially given that CLT emphasizes balanced development across all four language skills. Similarly, although Nejati et al. (2018) found a reasonable alignment between the activities and CLT principles, the term "reasonable" itself invites scrutiny in terms of how thoroughly these principles are integrated and practiced.

More critically, Pouranshirvani's (2017) internal evaluation of Vision 1 highlights dissatisfaction with the sociocultural content, suggesting a possible mismatch between the localized materials and the broader intercultural communicative competence expected in CLT frameworks. This critique aligns with Yaminia and Barjesteh's (2016) study, which found that localized materials, including Vision, often failed to foster students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and presented numerous challenges for teachers, such as the marginalization of teacher input in material development and the imbalanced treatment of skills. These findings point to a disconnection between textbook policy (localization) and communicative pedagogy goals.

Sooreh and Ahour (2020) provided a more nuanced evaluation of *Vision 2*, identifying strengths in grammar and vocabulary presentation but noting the need for improved content in listening and speaking activities—areas often underrepresented in traditional Iranian classrooms. The study called for enhancements to make the book more engaging and communicatively effective, reinforcing earlier concerns about the limitations of Vision in addressing core CLT objectives.

While existing studies on the Vision series highlight general approval and adherence to formal criteria, they often lack depth, relying on checklists or surveys that overlook how textbooks mediate interaction or promote meaningful language use. Crucially, few draw on SLA theories, creating a gap between evaluation and evidence-based pedagogy. Moreover, the scarcity of comparative analyses with international CLT-oriented materials limits insights into how Vision aligns with global standards. This underscores the need for theoretically grounded, comprehensive evaluations that assess not just surface features but also pedagogical affordances and assumptions.

3. Method

3.1. Design of the Study

This study applied a descriptive and comparative approach to collect the data. A content-analysis of the textbooks in question was carried out in light of three criteria explained below. Descriptive and inferential statistics were then applied.

3.2. Materials

The materials of this study were Iranian High School English book for grade 10, *Vision 1,* and an international course book entitled *Solutions E.*

Vision 1 is the first book from the senior high school English book series published in 2016. It consists of two books, the student book and the work book. The student book contains four lessons sequenced based on situations and topics. The work book includes exercises related to different parts of the book. Additionally, *Solutions E.* is the name of a five-level book series produced and published by Oxford University Press in 2017. Both series have been designed as integrated course books involving all four skills and subskills. Moreover, the comparability of *Solutions E.* to *Vision 1* is justified by another crucial factor—the target learners' age group. In fact, the contents in both books have been specifically crafted for teenagers and young adults. On the other hand, the expected proficiency level for these books is elementary or pre-intermediate.

3.3. Criteria for Evaluating Speaking Activities

Drawing on the related literature in SLA, more specifically Task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2003, Ellis 2016; Ellis, 2024; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), the present research employed three sets of criteria namely the communicative nature of the activity, type of prompts, and the quantity of relevant activities in the two books under investigation. Each criterion is detailed below.

3.3.1. Communicative Nature of the Activity

The authors of the *Vision Series* assert that the book follows the principles of CLT. Therefore, one of the main goals of this study is to examine how extensively CLT is integrated into the design of speaking activities in *Vision 1*, in comparison to *Solusion E*. Activities in CLT are generally known as tasks. According to Ellis (2016), for a language-teaching activity to be a 'task' it must satisfy the following criteria:

1. The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (semantic as well as pragmatic meaning)

2. There should be some kind of 'gap' (information gap)

3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.

4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).

Accordingly, the speaking activities in the two books in question are evaluated and labeled in four different categories based on the extent to which the speaking activity could actually satisfy these four criteria:

1) Form-focused exercise: These are activities with a central grammar focus which is explicitly presented and practiced orally. They can be either contextualized or decontextualized. Audiolingual mechanical pattern-practice drills are a prototype of such activity (Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2024).

2) Comprehension-based activity: The follow-up reading or listening-based questions can provide some opportunities for speaking. They might include summarizing, paraphrasing or answering referential or inferential questions based on the information they have read or listened to. While such activities are meaning-focused, they do not involve spontaneous information gap as in real life communication.

3) Focused tasks: They are designed to provide opportunities for contextualized communication using a particular grammar structure implicitly. For instance, using conditional structure type (II), the students are invited to share their personal views on what they would do, if they won a lot of money in a lottery (Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2024).

4) Unfocused task: These are activities that simulate real-life communication and satisfy all the four criteria mentioned above. There is no particular focus on eliciting a grammar structure and the learners are free to use any linguistic resources available to them to express their meaning. For example, in an opinion-gap activity, the learners are asked to share their views on different social issues such as globalization, global warming, or generation gap. A reasoning-gap activity wherein the learners express their views, like solving a riddle, based on the given information is another example (Larsen-freeman and Anderson, 2011)

We can draw a diagram to specify the degree of communicativeness of these four types of activities from the least communicative on the left to the most on the right.
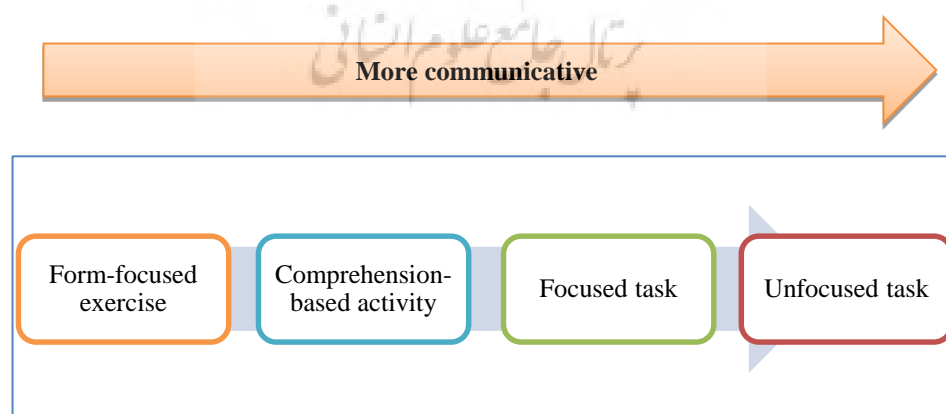

Figure 1. Spectrum of Communicativeness of the Speaking Activities

3.3.2. Prompt Types

The second criterion pertained to the variety of prompts employed to stimulate speaking practice. An examination of the two books under scrutiny highlighted a range of prompt types utilized for this purpose as listed in table 1 below.

Table 1
Distribution of Various Prompt Types within each Textbook

Type of Prompt	Definition
Form-based	A specific grammar structure is given as a cue.
Example	*Change the following sentence into passive form orally.*
Topic-based	A topic often related to reading or listening text is given for discussion.
Example	*What are some endangered animals in your country? Talk about them.*
Picture-based	One or a series of pictures are given for description. They can tell a story or present a riddle as well.
Example	*How is picture A different from picture B. Work in Pair.*
Function-based	This activity revolves on carrying out a particular language function.
Example	*Practice apologizing for being late for an appointment.*
Game-based	The students are engaged in playing a verbal game.
Example	*In a guessing game, the class tries to guess what the teacher or their partners in pair have in mind.*
Text-based	Following a reading or listening passage some comprehension-based or text-based questions are asked.
Example	*Where does the dialog take place? Why do you think so?*
Role-play based	The learners are given different roles to play or act out following the examples in the book.
Example	*The students are asked to pair up and act out a conversation as shop assistant and customer. They may be given different flash cards with different information about the role they are supposed to play.*

3.3.3. Quantity of Speaking Activity

The third criterion employed in this study focused on the frequency of speaking tasks, reflecting the extent of practice opportunities available to learners. As existing literature on SLA has predominantly emphasized the quality of practice, the importance of quantity in enhancing skills has often been overlooked in empirical studies.

The quantity of speaking practice is especially crucial for Iranian EFL learners for three main reasons. First, due to limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments in Iran, classroom interaction serves as the primary avenue for developing oral skills. Second, the real-time, psycholinguistic demands of speaking require frequent practice to build learners' confidence and competence (Bygate, 1998). Third, CLT emphasizes fluency over accuracy during communicative tasks, encouraging learners to negotiate meaning even at the cost of non-communicative errors (Selinker & Gass, 2008; Skehan, 2014). Kumaravadivelu's (2006) post-method pedagogy further underscores the need to maximize such practice opportunities to foster fluency.

Therefore, the third evaluation parameter for assessing the capacity of the textbooks to foster speaking skills revolves around the quantity of speaking exercises provided.

3.3.4. Adherence to the Weak or Strong Version of CLT

Following the literature on CLT and its development (Littlewood, 2013 Ellis, 2016), first, the criteria for operational definition of the two versions were determined as displayed in table 2 below:

Table 2

Criteria for Defining the Weak and Strong CLT

	Criteria	Weak version	Strong version
1	Focus on Grammar vs. Communication:	Activities include explicit grammar instruction or correction.	Activities encourage natural communication without focus on grammar.
2	Use of Authentic Materials:	Some use of structured or scripted materials.	Predominantly uses authentic, real-life materials.
3	Task Complexity:	Tasks are structured and follow a clear format.	Tasks are open-ended and foster spontaneous interaction.
4	Learner Autonomy:	Teacher-led with limited learner choice.	Learner-driven with opportunities for negotiation.
5	Interaction Types:	Pair or group work with clear roles	Natural conversational exchanges among peers

After that, a percentage-based rating scale ranging from 0% to 100% was employed to assess the adherence of textbook exercises to the weak and strong versions of CLT. Each exercise was evaluated by two raters, who assigned a percentage which indicated the extent to which the focal exercise aligned with either of the two versions of CLT. For instance, an exercise could be rated as 30% Weak and 70% Strong to suggest the relativity of the judgment. As many as 20 speaking exercises from the two books (8 from *Vision 1* and 12 from *Solutions E.*) were selected using stratified purposive sampling from the textbooks. To minimize subjectivity in the ratings, interrater reliability was established. After all the selected exercises were rated, the average percentages attributed to each book were measured and presented in the corresponding table.

3.4. Procedure

To conduct a comparative analysis of the two course books under study, the researchers first conducted a comprehensive review of various course books, including the two specific volumes under examination. The goal was to scrutinize the nature and instructional approach of speaking activities presented by the authors. The resulting inventory encompassed a wide range of activities, which were meticulously examined and categorized into seven types based on the types of prompts used (Table 1).

Furthermore, by referencing relevant literature in SLA, such as works by Ellis (2003, 2024) and Larsen-Freeman (2011), among others, four distinct types of speaking activities were identified along a continuum of communicativeness, ranging from less communicatively-oriented to more communicatively-oriented, as illustrated in Figure 1. Additionally, the third criterion for analysis and assessment focused on the opportunities for practicing and developing speaking skills embedded within the first two units in each book.

Subsequently, a content analysis was performed on the initial two units of each book, with inter-coder reliability calculations undertaken to verify the accuracy of the coding. The findings from this analysis were then presented in quantitative format. Afterwards, a comparative examination of the data was conducted, leading to a discussion of the outcomes.

3.5. Data Analysis

The study employed Cohen's Kappa for Inter-Coder reliability analysis to assess the consistency of ratings between multiple coders. This statistical measure is commonly used in research to evaluate the agreement between two or more observers or raters.

Additionally, the researchers utilized the Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test to determine whether the two books being compared exhibited statistically significant differences in terms of the nature of speaking activities, prompt

types, and the frequency of these activities. The Chi-Square test is a widely used statistical method that assesses whether there is a significant difference between the observed frequencies in a dataset and the frequencies that would be expected under a specific distribution or hypothesis.

4. Results

This study was an attempt to make a comparison between the speaking sections of two textbooks, namely *Vision 1.* and *Solutions E.* based on three criteria. Content analysis of the textbooks was made and the data obtained from the textbook analysis were fed into the statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 26 for the analysis. Descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics were performed to summarize the data and provide answer to the research questions. The results of the analyses are presented in the following sections.

4.1. Inter-Coder Reliability Analysis

The process of corpus analysis was done over two units of *Solutions E.* and two units of *Vision 1.* Inter-coder reliability was examined by estimating the degree of the agreement between the two coders. Cohen's Kappa was computed to measure the degree of the inter-coder agreement between the two coders. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Cohen Kappa for Inter-Coder Reliability Analysis

	Symmetric Measures					
	Value		Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement (nature of speaking activities)	Kappa		.722	.219	2.850	.004
	Kappa		.500	.187	2.887	.004
Measure of Agreement (prompt types)	Kappa		.742	.237	2.918	.004
Measure of Agreement (adherence to weak vs. strong CLT)	Kappa		.732	.211	2.855	.004

Kappa Measure of agreements for all coding processes was statistically significant ($p \leq .05$) implying that there was a strong association between the two coders.

4.2. Data Analysis

To analyze the difference between the two books regarding the nature of speaking activities, the distribution of various types of speaking tasks within each textbook was examined. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4
Distribution of Speaking Tasks within each Textbook

Type of Speaking Task	Solutions E.	Vision 1
Form-focused	2 (6.45%)	3 (33.33%)
Focused Task	22 (70.97%)	3 (33.33%)
Unfocused Task	5 (16.13%)	1 (11.11%)
Comprehension Check	2 (6.45%)	2 (22.22%)
total	31 (100%)	9 (100%)

According to the findings in Table 4, *Solutions E.* and *Vision 1* show a notable disparity in the approach to eliciting oral production. *Solutions E.* notably incorporated a significantly higher number of focused tasks compared to *Vision 1*, indicating a stronger emphasis on communicative strategies and a more implicit approach to introducing grammatical structures. Conversely, *Vision 1* employed an equal number of form-focused tasks as focused tasks, hinting at a gradual transition from conventional grammar instruction towards practical application within real-life

contexts. Additionally, *Vision 1* demonstrates a scarcity of unfocused tasks, with only one present in two units, further underlining this trend in its instructional focus. Furthermore, both textbooks show a diminished emphasis on comprehension checks aimed at stimulating oral output.

A Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test was conducted to assess whether the distribution of speaking tasks varied significantly between the two textbooks, with the detailed outcomes provided in Table 5.

Table 5
Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test for the Frequency of Speaking Tasks

	Speaking Tasks
Chi-Square	68.000
df	7
Asymp. Sig.	.000

The Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test showed a significant difference in the frequency of speaking tasks between the two textbooks ($\chi2 = 68.000$, df = 7, p = .000). Consequently, the first null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting that *Solutions E.* and *Vision 1* employ different approaches to speaking skill development in language learning in terms of using type of speaking tasks.

To investigate the difference in the type of prompts for speaking practice between the two books, the distribution of various prompt types within each textbook were examined. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Distribution of Various Prompt Types within each Textbook

Type of Prompt	Solutions	Vision
Form-based	2 (6.45%)	2 (22.22%)
Topic-based	9 (29.03%)	4 (44.44%)
Picture-based	4 (12.90%)	1 (11.11%)
Function-based	10 (32.26%)	0 (0.00%)
Game-based	3 (9.68%)	0 (0.00%)
Text-based	2 (6.45%)	2 (22.22%)
Role-play based	1 (3.23%)	0 (0.00%)
Total	31 (100%)	9 (100%)

As shown in Table 6, *Solutions E.* provides a variety of prompt types for speaking practice, which can be useful for learners with different learning styles and preferences. In *Solutions E.,* the emphasis is mainly on function-based and topic-based prompts. In contrast, *Vision 1* includes a more limited range of prompt types and mainly focuses on topic-based prompts (44.44%).

Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test was run to see if the frequency of prompt types significantly differed across the two textbooks. The results are given in Table 7.

Table 7
Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test for the Frequency of Prompt Types

	Prompt Types
Chi-Square	26.000
df	10
Asymp. Sig.	.004

The Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test revealed a statistically significant difference ($\chi 2 = 26.000$, df = 10, p = .004). This indicates that the distribution of prompt types significantly varies between the two textbooks.

To assess whether there is a statistically significant difference between the two books in the total frequency of speaking activities included in the textbooks, Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test was run. The results are given in Table 8.

Table 8
Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test for the Frequency of Speaking Activities

	frequency of speaking activities
Chi-Square	12.100
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.001

The Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test revealed a statistically significant difference ($\chi 2 = 12.100$, df = 1, p = .001). This indicates that there is a significant variation in the total number of speaking activities included in the two textbooks. The following bar graph visually displays the difference in the frequency of speaking activities between the two books.
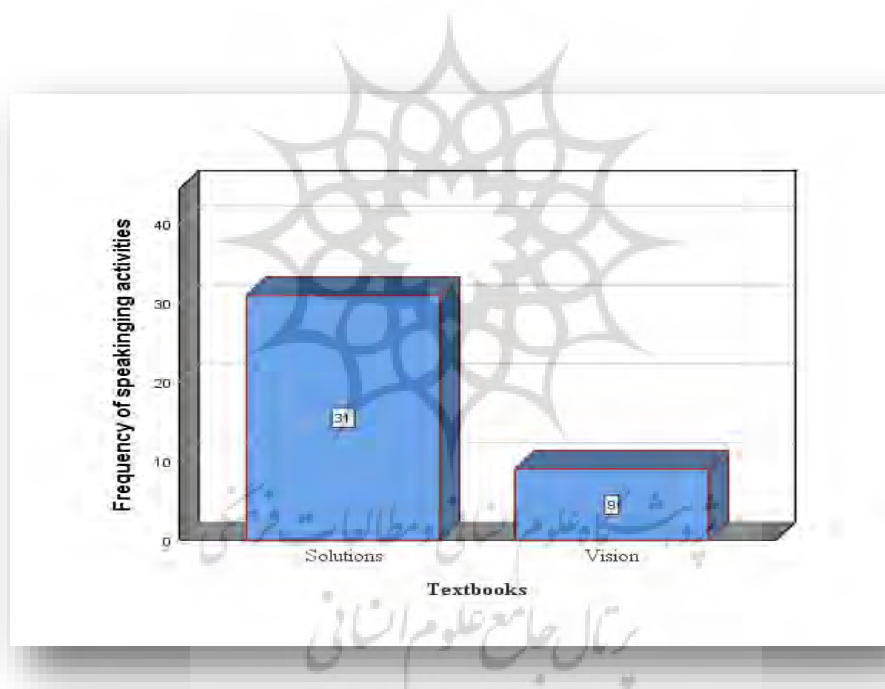
Figure 2. Bar Graph for the Frequency of Speaking Activities

As shown in Figure 2, *Solutions E.* offers many more opportunities for students to engage in speaking practice. In contrast, *Vision 1* includes fewer speaking activities and the students have limited exposure to speaking opportunities.

4.3. Content Analysis
The picture below demonstrates a typical exercise for listening and speaking exercises in *Vision 1*.

Figure 3. Extract from Vision 1; page 31

Following the listening exercise centered on the theme of travel and visiting various places, the instructions for the subsequent speaking activity encourage learners to engage in pair work where they discuss their weekend plans. During this conversation, students are guided to use specific phrases and the future tense, either through "will" or "to be going to," which were introduced earlier in the grammar section.

While the point of departure in this exercise is a relatable real-life topic – weekend plans – students are constrained to using selected vocabulary and grammar structures. This approach aligns with what Scrivener refers to as "restricted output," which can also be categorized as guided or controlled speaking practice. The design of the activity is straightforward, providing a clear framework for students to follow.

The complexity of the task is intentionally kept low, minimizing cognitive demands and allowing students to focus on the language structures at hand without straying beyond the confines of what has been taught. As a result, this exercise exemplifies a weaker version of CLT, where the emphasis lies more on form than on the spontaneous use of language. While it facilitates language practice, it may not fully encourage the development of fluency and creative communication skills expected in stronger CLT approaches.

Figure 4 below illustrates another example of a communicative task conforming to weak version of CLT. In this exercise the students are instructed to talk about what they were doing at a specified time in the past which elicits formation of sentences in past progressive tense. As such, we may conclude that this exercise is primarily a grammar exercise within a pseudo-communicative frame. The pre-speaking exercise in the form of listening practice provides a model for what the students are expected to say. One issue which reduces the spontaneity of these exercises is the little room for negotiation of meaning and reciprocal exchanges. It seems that the students are only expected to construct single sentences in the desired grammatical structure.

Figure 4. Extract from Vision 1; page 88

In the other book, *Solutions E.,* the distribution of exercises is more balanced in terms of adherence to the two versions of CLT. The image below illustrates four speaking exercises taken from the textbook *Solutions E.* This segment focuses on the theme of family and household responsibilities. One prominent feature of this page is the variety of speaking exercises, which provide numerous opportunities for students to practice their speaking skills.

Figure 5. Excerpts from Solutions E. Unit 2, page 11

Exercise 1 delves into exploring potential family relationships among individuals depicted in the accompanying picture. This task appears to be a problem-solving activity that does not prescribe specific answers, thereby fostering a negotiation of meaning among participants. The absence of linguistic constraints encourages learners to express their thoughts creatively and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The third exercise posing the question if they are interested to have a large family offers an opinion gap activity centered around a thought-provoking topic, also lacking strict linguistic restrictions. This format aligns with the strong version of CLT, emphasizing authentic communication and interaction.

In contrast, exercises 10 and 11 are notably more structured. These exercises provide participants with predefined sentence structures, as well as specific vocabulary and phrases to use. This leaves little room for the negotiation of meaning, aligning them more closely with the weak version of CLT, where the emphasis is on controlled practice rather than spontaneous language use.

A striking difference between *Solutions E.* and *Vision 1*, lies in the diversity and frequency of speaking exercises. Based on the examples identified, *Solutions E.* significantly surpasses *Vision 1* in offering a broader range of speaking activities. This abundance not only enriches the learning experience but also better prepares students for real-life communication scenarios.

The findings regarding the extent to which the two textbooks in question adhere to either the weak or strong version of CLT is summarized in table 9 below.

Table 9
Adherence to the Weak and Strong Version of CLT

	Num. of exercises	Weak	Strong
Vision 1	8	80%	20%
Solutions E.	12	65%	35%

As the table indicates, both textbooks lean toward the weak version of CLT, which emphasizes structured, controlled, product-oriented communicative practice. However, *Vision 1* shows a stronger tendency toward this approach compared to *Solution E*. In contrast, *Solution E.* incorporates a more balanced set of exercises, reflecting a blend of the weak and strong versions of CLT.

5. Discussion

The present study sought to perform a comparative analysis between two English textbooks: *Vision 1*, a locally-developed textbook utilized in grade 10 high schools in Iran, and *Solutions E.,* an internationally recognized textbook commonly employed in the private sector for teaching English to students of the same age group. This comparative evaluation encompassed four interconnected parameters: the nature of speaking activities, the types and diversity of speaking prompts, the overall quantity of speaking tasks, and the alliance with the weak or strong version of CLT. These parameters were considered as indicators of the opportunities provided for practicing speaking skills.

The results indicated significant disparities between the two textbooks across all the four specified criteria. Regarding the first parameter, the nature of speaking activities, *Vision 1* contained an even distribution between form-focused exercises and focused tasks, each constituting 33% of the activities. In contrast, *Solutions E.* predominantly featured focused tasks, making up 70.97% of the speaking activities, while form-focused exercises only represented 6.45% of speaking practice. Form-focused exercises typically align with traditional language teaching methods, whereas focused tasks emphasize practicing specific language structures within communicative contexts, prioritizing meaningful communication. Consequently, *Solutions E.* appears more aligned with CLT principles, whereas *Vision 1* seems to retain elements of traditional methodologies despite claims made by the

authors of the *Vision Series* regarding their syllabus type.

The limited inclusion of unfocused tasks in *Vision 1*—with only one found across two units—indicates an ongoing emphasis on form-focused practice, challenging previous claims about the book's communicative orientation. This finding contrasts with Shahmohammadi (2018), who reported that the junior high school English series in Iran followed CLT principles, and with Nejati et al. (2018), who found a good CLT alignment in the *Prospect* Series. It also partially diverges from Khodabandeh and Mombini (2018) and Pouranshirvani (2017), who viewed *Vision 1* as well-balanced across language skills. However, it supports the observations of Mirzaei and Tabatabaei (2017), who emphasized the need for major improvements in the speaking components of Iranian textbooks, as well as findings by Yaminia and Barjesteha (2016) and Sooreh and Ahour (2020), who called for more engaging and communicative activities.

Before drawing definitive conclusions about the alignment of research studies within similar domains, it is important to consider certain factors and exercise caution. Previous studies have predominantly consisted of internal evaluations of individual textbooks, primarily evaluated from the perspective of experienced teachers who have previously used older locally developed textbooks that were grammar-centered and focused primarily on reading skills. It is essential to acknowledge that the new series of textbooks have been significantly redesigned, with a focus on different skills and activities that more closely adhere to CLT principles in material development.

However, in comparison to *Solutions E.*, *Vision 1* does not fully meet the criteria associated with CLT, despite showing promising elements like the integration of authentic visuals and inclusion of all four language skills, including speaking. Furthermore, the current research delved into the speaking skill in *Vision 1* from a less-explored angle with a higher level of technical detail and explicitness. By drawing upon literature in SLA, this study closely examined the communicative nature of the speaking activities, considering the quantity of speaking activities as a key measure of adequacy. In contrast, previous research studies took broader perspectives, encompassing all aspects of the material in a single study from less technical viewpoints of practicing teachers and learners. Consequently, the outcomes of this study are not directly comparable to those of previous studies.

Based on the findings, there is a notable divergence and diversity in the types of prompts present in the two books under examination. *Solutions E.* demonstrates a commendable level of diversity in prompt types aimed at enhancing speaking practice. Implementing game-based and role-play prompts, in particular, can infuse an element of enjoyment and relevance for teenagers. Encouraging learners to adopt new personas, thereby stimulating their imagination, can offer an exhilarating experience within the learning environment.

Vision 1 offers a narrow range of prompt types, often tied to reading passages and abstract themes like endangered species or environmental conservation, which may be too complex for teenagers and hinder their willingness to communicate. Some prompts lack clear communicative purpose or mismatch the language objectives, such as using future tense for present-oriented topics (p.31). In contrast, *Solutions E.* tailors its prompts to adolescents' cognitive and social interests—covering relatable themes like family, celebrities, and personal items—making speaking tasks more engaging and accessible.

This observation can be further substantiated by consulting relevant literature in the field of interaction analysis and Halliday's Functional Linguistics (Kumarvadevelu, 2006). In *Vision 1*, the speaking tasks predominantly prompt the *ideational function*, which involves conveying information about the world—such as scientific concepts, societal issues, and natural phenomena. These tasks can be too challenging for youngsters and teenagers due to the requirement for deep and wide knowledge of the world to articulate complex ideas effectively. Conversely, *Solutions E.* has strategically opted for topics that are more likely to elicit the *interpersonal function* of language. By emphasizing managing relationships, expressing emotions, and navigating social interactions, these tasks are more relatable, manageable, and appealing to the target age group. The focus on personal experiences, social dynamics, and emotions in interpersonal interactions enhances engagement and facilitates meaningful communication among learners in *Solutions E.*

The third research question examined the quantity of speaking activities in the two textbooks, revealing a notable gap: *Solutions E.* included 31 speaking tasks in the first two units, while *Vision 1* had only nine. Given speaking's complex, real-time nature (Bygate, 1998) and the limited opportunities for oral practice outside the classroom in Iran, this disparity is concerning. To support learners' communicative development, textbooks must offer abundant

speaking practice. This aligns with Kumaravadivelu's (2006) post-method pedagogy, which emphasizes maximizing practice, and with insights from Content-Based Instruction, which values extensive speaking exposure (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

The analysis of the fourth research question indicated that both *Vision 1* and *Solutions E.* leaned toward the Weak version of CLT, which prioritizes structured communicative practice to support grammatical accuracy alongside developing communicative competence – an approach suitable for the low proficiency level of the target learners. However, *Solutions E.* showed a more balanced application of CLT principles by integrating a broader range of task types, including more open-ended, process-oriented activities that support incidental grammar learning. This variation aligns with Littlewood's (2013) COLT model, as *Solutions E.* spans a wider section of the communicative continuum, offering both analytic and experiential learning opportunities.

In sum, the results underscore the need for *Vision 1* to more fully embrace CLT-aligned pedagogy by expanding the quantity and quality of speaking activities and diversifying task types to include more open-ended, interpersonal, and learner-centered communication. The textbook currently fails to engage learners in authentic language use (Ellis, 2024), which is essential for building fluency, confidence, and real-world communicative competence. Incorporating more experiential, interaction-driven tasks—such as information gaps, problem-solving, role plays, and debates—could bridge this gap and foster meaningful output (Richards, 2005). Furthermore, the use of topics grounded in learners' sociocultural realities and personal interests is crucial for stimulating motivation and WTC (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Addressing this requires a shift from abstract, ideational content (e.g., environmental conservation or astronomy) toward more personally relevant, relatable themes. Specifically, adjusting topics and prompts to better match the developmental stage, social interests, and emotional needs of teenage learners is vital for enhancing their socio-affective engagement and increasing their WTC (Alemi, et al., 2013)

6. Conclusion

This study compared *Vision 1*, a locally developed textbook, with the international *Solutions E.*, focusing on speaking skill development across four dimensions: task type, CLT alignment, prompt variety, and activity frequency. *Solutions E* outperformed *Vision 1* on all fronts, offering a more communicative, interactive, and learner-centered approach. However, the analysis was limited to two units and only one skill, suggesting the need for broader studies that include the full series, other language skills, and classroom-based data like teacher and learner feedback.

The findings highlight the need for *Vision 1* to incorporate more varied, interactive speaking tasks rooted in task-based learning principles, and to contextualize them in culturally relevant, communicatively rich scenarios. Teachers should be supported in supplementing textbooks and using digital tools to promote oral practice. Notably, the lack of video materials in the Vision series limits learner engagement; incorporating video prompts could help shift perceptions of English from an academic subject to a communicative tool. Regular textbook revisions informed by empirical research and stakeholder input are essential for keeping materials relevant and effective in Iran's evolving EFL context.

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