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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Introduction:

Textbook evaluation is highly crucial since it can help teachers select and adapt appropriate materials for their learners. The principal concern of researchers in the area of materials development and textbook evaluation is the extent to which materials, as the primary source of input, satisfy the needs of the EFL learners.

Tomlinson (2011) defines materials as anything which is used by the teachers or learners to help facilitate the learning of a language whereas materials development refers to anything that is done by writers, teachers and learners to provide sources of language input and exploit those sources in ways that maximize the likelihood of intake. Materials can include "textbooks, cassettes, videos, CD-Rom, dictionaries, grammar books, readers, workbooks, or photocopied exercises"(Tomlinson, 2011, p.2). The term 'textbook' is defined by Merriam Webster (2003) as "a book used in the study of a subject as one containing a presentation of the principles of a subject or as a literary work relevant to the study of a subject." This term, also called text, which is the most prevalent term to refer to a book exploited in teaching learning situation.

English language teaching has many important components, but the essential constituent to many EFL classrooms and programs is the textbook. Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p. 315) maintain "no teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook." Sheldon (1988, p.237) claims that textbooks "represent the visible heart of any ELT program." The view held by the scholars in the field stresses the importance of judicious selection and evaluation of textbooks. Sheldon (1988) discusses several reasons for material's evaluation. She holds that the selection of an ELT textbook often signals an important administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial or even political investment. Williams (1983) maintains, "Any textbook should be used judiciously, since it cannot cater equally to the requirements of every classroom setting" (p. 251). Cunningsworth (1995) discusses the reasons for materials evaluation as follows:

Reasons for material evaluation activities are many and varied. The intention to adopt new course books is a major and frequent reason for evaluation. Another reason is to identify particular strengths and weaknesses in course books already in use, so that optimum use can be made of their strong points, whilst their weaker areas can be strengthened through adaptation or by substituting material from other books (p. 14).

As Total English is one of the most widely used ELT textbooks in Iran context, the present study aimed at evaluating the textbook to shed more light on its adequacy for ELT programs for Iranian, language teachers, and students.

Chapter 2:

Literature review

2-1-Textbooks: Pros and Cons

English language instruction has many important components but the essential constituents to many ESL/EFL classrooms and programs are the textbooks and instruction materials that are often used by language instructors. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest:

"The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in [various] countries…No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook".

Sheldon (1988) suggests that textbooks not only "represent the visible heart of any ELT program" but also offer considerable advantages - for both the student and the teacher - when they are being used in the ESL/EFL classroom. As Sheldon (1988) has pointed out, students often harbor expectations about using a textbook in their particular language classroom and program and believe that published materials have more credibility than teacher-generated or "in-house" materials. O'Neill (1982) has indicated, textbooks are generally sensitive to students' needs, even if they are not designed specifically for them, they are efficient in terms of time and money, and they can and should allow for adaptation and improvisation.

Schmidt, McKnight, and Raizen (1997) identified textbooks as playing an important role in making the leap from intentions and plans to classroom activities, by making content available, organizing it, and setting out learning tasks in a form designed to be appealing to students. To make the most effective use of a textbook, however, teachers must decide which textbooks are appropriate for their needs. A teacher needs to determine the extent to which a textbook focuses on and is aligned with a coherent set of significant, age-appropriate student learning goals that the teacher, school, or district has identified as integral to the understanding of and progress in a particular academic subject. They must also assess how well a textbook's instructional design effectively supports the attainment of those specified learning goals. The only way to gain this information is through careful evaluations of textbooks and other curriculum materials. (Schmidt, McKnight, & Raizen, 1997)

Cunningsworth (1995) is the potential which textbooks have for serving several additional roles in the ELT curriculum. He argues that they are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presentation material, a source of ideas and activities, a reference source for students, a syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence. Finally, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) have pointed out that textbooks may play a pivotal role in innovation. They suggest that textbooks can

support teachers through potentially disturbing and threatening change processes, demonstrate new and/or untried methodologies, introduce change gradually, and create scaffolding upon which teachers can build a more creative methodology of their own.

Ur (1996) states the advantages of course books as follows: (a) they provide a clear framework which the teacher and the students know where they are going and what is coming next, (b) mostly, they serve as a syllabus which includes a carefully planned and balanced selection of language content if it is followed systematically, (c) they provide readymade texts and tasks with possible appropriate level for most of the class, which save time for the teacher, (d) they are the cheapest way of providing learning material for each student, (e) they are convenient packages whose components are bound in order, (f) they are useful guides especially for inexperienced teachers who are occasionally unsure of their language knowledge, (g) They provide autonomy that the students can use them to learn new material, review and monitor progress in order to be less teacher-dependent.

Despite the advantages mentioned above, textbooks might simultaneously suffer from some problems some of the important ones are discussed here. Researchers such as Porreca (1984), Florent and Walter (1989), Clarkeand Clarke (1990), Carrell and Korwitz (1994), and Renner (1997) have demonstrated that many EFL/ESL textbooks still contain rampant examples of gender bias, sexism, and stereotyping. They describe such gender-related inequities as: the relative invisibility of female characters, the unrealistic and sexist portrayals of both menand women, stereotypes involving social roles, occupations, relationships and actions as well as linguistic biases such as 'gendered' English and sexist language. Findings such as these have led researchers to believe that the continuing prevalence of sexism and gender stereotypes in many EFL/ESL textbooks may reflect the unequal power relationships that still exist between the sexes in many cultures, the prolonged marginalization of females, and the misrepresentations of writers with social attitudes that are incongruent with the present-day realities of the target language culture (Sunderland, 1992;Renner, 1997). Other theorists such as Prodromou (1988)and Alptekin(1993)have focused on the use of the target language culture as a vehicle for teaching the language in textbooks and suggest that it is not really possible to teach a language without embedding it in its cultural base. They argue that such a process inevitably forces learners to express themselves within a culture of which they have scarcely any experience and this may result in alienation, stereotyping, or even reluctance or resistance to learning.Phillipson (1992) is also wary of the complex relationship between language textbooks and the target language culture but he sees the promotion of 'Western' (British) global textbooks as government-backed enterprises with both an economic as well as an ideological agenda.

Richards and Renandya (2002) enumerate the disadvantages of textbooks as: (a) they fail to present appropriate and realistic language models,(b)They propose subordinate learner roles,(c) they fail to contextualize language activities, (d) they foster inadequate cultural understanding, (e) they fail to address discourse competence,(f) they fail to teach idioms,(g) they have lack of equity in gender representation.

A final reason for disappointment and skepticism with many ELT textbooks is the fact that they are often regarded as the "…tainted end-product of an author's or a publisher's desire for quick profit" (Sheldon, 1988). Toomany textbooks are often marketed with grand artificial claims by their authors and publishers yet these same books tend to contain serious theoretical problems, design flaws, and practical shortcomings. They also present disjointed material that is either to limited or too generalized in a superficial and flashy manner and the vast array of"…single edition, now defunct [text]books produced during the past ten years testifies to the market consequences of teachers' verdicts on such practices" (Sheldon, 1988).

Despite the fact that any textbook might be afflicted with some or at least one of the shortcomings motioned above, they still continue to be utilized as the most popular sources of transferring knowledge by all language teachers in their classrooms. However, the reduce the risk as much as possible, textbook developers and curriculum designers prefer to conduct an informative evolution before using a book.

2-2-What is Textbook Evaluation

According to Nunan (1988) materials constitute the essential parts of the curriculum. A brief review of the literature relating to materials evaluation reveals that, to date, the focus of attention has been more or less exclusively on predictive evaluation. There are two principal ways in which teachers can carry out this kind of evaluation. One is to rely on evaluations carried out by 'expert' reviewers. Journals like ELT Journal assist teachers in this respect by providing reviews of published course-books. In some cases (such as the Survey Reviews this journal provides from time to time), the reviewers identify specific criteria for evaluating materials. However, in reviews of individual course-books, the criteria often remain inexact and implicit. Alternatively, teachers can carry out their own predictive evaluations. There are numerous checklists and guidelines available to help them do so(e.g. Chambers, 1997;Cunningsworth,1984;Breen&Candlin,1987; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Littelejohn,1996; Mathews, 1985;McDonough&Shaw,1993; Shelden, 1988; Skierso, 1991; Tucker, C. A., 1975; Ur, P.1996). These instruments are generally organized in a manner that reflects the decision-making process which it is hypothesized teachers go through. Breen and Candlin (1987, cited in Ellis, 1997), for example, organize the questions in their checklist into two phases, the first of which enables teachers to address the overall 'usefulness' of the materials, while the second caters for 'a more searching analysis' based on the teacher's actual teaching situation. The idea behind these guides is to help teachers carry out a predictive evaluation systematically. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), textbook evaluation is basically a straightforward, analytical matching process.

Teachers can perform a retrospective evaluation impressionistically or they can attempt to collect information in a more systematic manner (i.e. conduct an empirical

evaluation). It is probably true to say that most teachers do carry out impressionistic evaluations of their teaching materials. That is, during the course they assess whether particular activities 'work' (usually with reference to the enthusiasm and degree of involvement manifested by the students), while at the end of the course they make summative judgments of the materials. Empirical evaluations are perhaps less common, if only because they are time-consuming. However, teachers report using students' journals and end-of-course questionnaires to judge the effectiveness of their teaching, including the materials they used.

Ellis (1997) introduces two types of evaluation namely micro-evaluation and macro-evaluation. A macro-evaluation calls for an overall assessment of whether an entire set of materials has worked. To plan and collect the necessary information for such an empirical evaluation is a daunting prospect. In a micro-evaluation, however, the teacher selects one particular teaching task in which he or she has a special interest, and submits this to a detailed empirical evaluation. A series of micro-evaluations can provide the basis for a subsequent macro-evaluation. However, a micro-evaluation can also stand by itself and can serve as a practical and legitimate way of conducting an empirical evaluation of teaching materials. A micro-evaluation of teaching materials is perhaps best carried out in relation to 'task'. This term is now widely used in language teaching methodology (e.g. Prabhu 1987; Nunan1989), often with very different meanings. Following Skehan (1996), a task is here viewed as 'an activity in which: meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome'. Thus, the information and opinion and opinion-gap activities common in communicative language teaching are 'tasks'.

Sheldon (1988) has offered several other reasons for textbook evaluation. He suggests that the selection of an ELT textbook often signals an important administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial, or even political investment. A thorough evaluation, therefore, would enable the managerial and teaching staff of a specific institution or organization to discriminate between all of the available textbooks on the market. Moreover, it would provide for a sense of familiarity with a book's content thus assisting educators in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in textbooks already in use. This would go a long way in ultimately assisting teachers with making optimum use of a book's strong points and recognizing the shortcomings of certain exercises, tasks, and entire texts. One additional reason for textbook evaluation is the fact that it can be very useful in teacher development and professional growth. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997)suggest that textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it helps them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material. Textbook evaluation, therefore, can potentially be a particularly worthwhile means of conducting action research as well as a form of professional empowerment and improvement. Similarly, textbook evaluation can also be a valuable component of teacher training programs for it serves the dual purpose of making student teachers aware of important features to look for in

textbooks while familiarizing them with a wide range of published language instruction materials.

As was previously mentioned, the most common method of executing a textbook evaluation is using a valid checklist which is constructed by famous scholars. Next section deals with what a checklist is and introduces the evaluation checklist which has been used in the current project.

2-3-Valuation Checklist

The choice of language teaching materials can determine the quality of learning-teaching procedure. As a part of the materials used in the language classroom, the textbook can often play a crucial role in students' success or failure. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to evaluate such materials based on valid and reliable instruments. One of the common methods to evaluate English Language Teaching (ELT) materials is the checklist. An evaluation checklist is an instrument that provides the evaluator with a list of features of successful learning-teaching materials. According to these criteria, evaluators like teachers, researchers as well as students can rate the quality of the material.(Souri, Kafipur, & Souri, 2011)

Many experts advocate a very detailed examination of a course book's language content, which has led to the production of extensive evaluation checklists. These include Cunningsworth (1984) who touches upon the importance of relating materials to course objectives and the learner's needs and processes. Sheldon's (1988) checklist is very expansive and attempts to assess all aspects of content including such diverse factors as graphics and physical characteristics to authenticity and flexibility.

A review of the ELT material evaluation checklists reveals that they all have a global set of features. Forinstance, Skierso's (1991) checklist considers the characteristics related to 'bibliographical data', 'aims and goals', 'subject matter', 'vocabulary and structures', 'exercises and activities', and 'layout and physical makeup'. These domains are mostly in line with those in Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist which include 'aims and approaches', 'design and organization', 'language content', 'skills', 'topic', 'methodology', and 'practical considerations'. Although the headings of the sections in the two checklists appear to be different, an examination of the items will show that they are more or less the same. For example, Skierso (1991) refers to the cost-effectiveness of the textbook in the 'bibliographical data' section while Cunningsworth considers it in the 'practical considerations' section. Similarly, Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) offer an evaluation checklist which is widely referred to for textbook evaluation and consists of five major sections including: (a) subject matter, (b) vocabulary and structures, (c) exercises, (d)illustrations, and finally (e) physical make-up. Each section is composed of several detailed strategies which can be utilized in evaluating and analyzing every textbook.

Ansary and Babaii (2002) believe that although these approaches are the most common and likely straightforward, the shaky theoretical basis of such checklists and the subjectivity of judgments have often been a source of disappointment. Perhaps,