

Research Article

THE NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TO A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK

***Maeedeh Latifi and Seyedeh Zeynab Rahmatipasand**

*Department of English Language Teaching, College of Humanity,
Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran*

**Author for Correspondence*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is an attempt to investigate the roles of authenticity, grammar and culture in language teaching materials due to the text books using in English as a foreign language classrooms from the perspective of second language acquisition theory. To do that, the researchers randomly selected 40 students of high school as participants from the high schools in Tehran, Iran. The data was collected through closed-response questions rated on a four point Likert-type scale but also open-ended questions and to analyze the data, quantitative and qualitative data analyses were applied. Due to the results the learners and practitioners' perspectives of teaching materials showed supported the foreign language textbook as a strong tool in teaching and learning. Implications of the study are further discussed.

Keywords: *Foreign Language Textbook, Second Language Acquisition, Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks play very important roles in teaching and learning English as a foreign language, they provide the main form of linguistic input (Kim and Hall, 2002). The studies previously done on EFL textbooks have focused on the authenticity of language samples included in textbooks as well as explanations of appropriate usage. Sheldon states that textbooks are considered as the most important material of any English language teaching program (1988:237) and they are almost universal elements in this era (Hutchinson, 1994), but the studies and researches on the roles of EFL textbooks in teaching and learning a foreign language still apparently exists. There are some criticisms about the presentation of language including grammatical forms and techniques which refer to the use of the invented scripts and intuition to create and explain language samples. "Only through materials that reflect how we really speak, rather than how we think we speak, will language learners receive an accurate account of the rules of speaking in a second or foreign language" (Boxer and Pickering, 1995).

According to Richards (2005), there are four elements to develop effective instructional materials: 1) Teacher, 2) Learners, 3) Contextual variables, and 4) Theory of language learning and language use. He also differentiates three types of language practice which define the kinds of activities often featured in communicative textbooks:

1. Mechanical practice refers to controlled activities that involve repetition and substitution drills. They are designed to practice the use of particular grammatical items. In many textbooks, this practice demands sentence completion (usually with grammar activities in isolation), but lacks authentic language negotiation,

2. Meaningful practice refers to activities in which language still is controlled and "students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice",

3. Communicative practice embodies those activities in which language "is not totally predictable." Language production at this level is more spontaneous and authentic, because meaning negotiation takes place "within a real communicative context" and "real information is exchanged" (Richards 2005).

According to him, these practices approve communicative language learning in the EFL context. In addition to these communicative role of textbooks, Kramersch (2003) claims "the term "authentic" has been used as a reaction against the prefabricated artificial language of textbooks and the dialogues implemented in language classrooms." However, in a research done by Berry (2000) and Kim and Hall

Research Article

(2002), the results showed that for communicative purposes there was a little change in the authenticity of communicative language samples.

Wong (2003) studied on pedagogic techniques to investigate which structures of the input are more considerable for second language learners. Patricia (2001) claims "most teachers depend on textbooks - often as a required tool - because they provide content and activities that shape what happens in the classroom." González (2006) refers to the three reasons because of which textbooks became alternatives: 1) they are *apparently* eclectic alternatives to save time and money, 2) they include pictures and graphic materials that may be more efficient than the teacher's descriptions, and 3) they contain all kinds of objects that may be difficult to bring into the classroom. According to Di Vito (1991) states, "The typical foreign language learner, when presented with any particular grammar rule, has no real-life notion of frequency of occurrence, functional range, or social appropriateness". Therefore, one of the most important roles of teachers and textbooks, especially EFL textbooks, is to make students be familiar with the culture aspects and information to address people, express their feelings and ideas, etc. . .

About textbooks tasks McGrath states "The narrow concern with *text* authenticity that characterized the early years of the communicative movement has since given way to a concern for the nature of the *tasks*" (2002:114). There is a distinction between 'real-world' tasks and traditional 'pedagogic' tasks. The former "requires learners to approximate, in class, the sorts of behavior required of them in the world beyond the classroom" (Nunan, 1979).

Ellis (2002a) found out that input alone could not be enough to achieve second language objectives; furthermore, due to the results gained from the studies on audiolingual method in such classrooms, the failure of this method revealed that only production practice only was also insufficient. Therefore, a need for teaching and learning grammar is demanded. "Grammar instruction should only make students aware of a target structure; it should not make them practice it. Cognitive understanding of the feature is more important than production. Finally, formal instruction must occur during CLT (to avoid crossing the fine line with traditional grammar instruction -TGI)" (Fotos and Ellis, 1999).

The researcher of the current study hopes that to reveal how foreign language textbook design can be adjusted with SLA research through authenticity of the language, the culture, the roles of grammar and the tasks from teachers and students' point of view.

Statement of the Problem

One of the problems of teaching English as a foreign language is the same textbooks under the provisions of the institutes published as the materials. These kinds of materials may cause the Iranian teachers not to be corresponding to their own beliefs. Another problem is lack of students' motivation because of joining heterogeneous classes where the materials may be boring or not to be interesting for them. It leads they perform not eagerly and learning not to be done as it must.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to find an effective remedy for making the teaching and learning English as a foreign language more qualified for students' of Iranian institutes of English language by revealing the roles of authenticity, grammar and culture in language teaching materials due to the text books using in classrooms to increase the percent of success for teachers and students.

Research Questions

This study asks the following research questions:

1. What is the role of authenticity in language teaching materials?
2. What is the role of grammar instruction in FL textbooks?
3. What is the role of culture in language teaching materials?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods

Research Design

In the present study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data was used to improve an evaluation of data analysis and to be sure one method can be completed by the help of another one. There are several

Research Article

reasons to combine the methods of surveying and analyzing the gained data: (1) enrichment, (2) examination, (3) explanation, and (4) triangulation (Carvalho and White, 1997).

This study was an attempt to provide a comprehensive improvement of EFL textbooks through teachers and students' point of views by applying integrated mixed methods approach (Bazeley, 1999) based on the premise that confidence in findings is increased if diverse forms of data support the same conclusion (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Huberman and Miles, 1994).

In the present study, finally, the data of the current research project was also triangulated by using multiple sources (i.e., teachers and students) in order to avoid biases interjected by people in different roles (Brown, 2006).

Participants

Participants were initially 20 English teachers and 50 English students (male and female with the age range of 12-15 students and 28-35 teachers) from the four institutions in the southeast and northeast of Mazandaran, and Gilan in Iran. From among these teachers and students, 12 teachers and 30 students were randomly selected. All of the participants were non-native speakers of English language.

Instruments

The instrument of the study for collecting data was two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students, consisted of 20 closed-response questions rated on a four point Likert-type scale and 10 open-ended questions which were prepared by the researcher. The questions were all related to the textbooks taught in the above mentioned English language institutions, such as Interaction, TopNotch, Interchange, Headway. The combination of closed-response and open-ended questions addresses the issue of internal validity of the questionnaire.

The data from the closed-response questions were submitted to a series of analyses that generated descriptive statistics. The data from the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an effort to analyze the data gained from the teachers and students' points of view towards the different aspects of the English materials in EFL textbooks, descriptive statistics were computed to determine the mean scores and percentages of the questionnaire categories and items. Then, the data were examined according to each of the three research questions. By using Huberman and Miles' framework, for analyzing the open-ended questions qualitatively, the processes of data reduction, data display, and the drawing of conclusion were applied (Huberman and Miles, 1994).

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire

Category	Number of Items	Alpha Cronbach
authenticity	10	0.852
grammar & Structures	10	0.769
culture	10	0.758
Total	30	0.910

Cronbach Alpha is used for measuring reliability, and an internal consistency of 0.70 or above is required. The alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire (30 items) was at 0.910, which is considered a high level of reliability. Cronbach Alpha was also run for the categories of the questionnaire: the alpha

Research Article

coefficients were at 0.852 for authenticity, 0.769 for grammar and Structures, 0.758 for culture. Table 1 shows the alpha coefficients of the questionnaire categories.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviation, and percentages of the participants' responses on the questionnaire

Category	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
authenticity	2.69	0.43	54.75
grammar and Structures	3.81	0.42	77.25
culture	3.71	0.11	75.25
Total	3.74	0.41	75.85

As table 2 shows, the overall frequency of teachers' and students' responses to the questionnaire items was 75.85 %. The participants showed positive views towards the different aspects of the English materials. The highest score was related to 'grammar and structures', 77.25% (high), followed by 'culture', 75.25% (high); 'authenticity', 54.75% (low).

The answer of the first question: What is the role of authenticity in language teaching materials?

The results of the current research project showed that the authenticity of teaching materials was not a problem for most of the teachers and students as participants. What was important was that the materials made students motivate to involve them. It was revealed that for the reasons of being beneficial or even detrimental, the participants (teachers and students) for any reasons such as being beneficial or detrimental were pleased with those EFL textbooks used in the mentioned institutions and felt satisfied in most EFL textbooks although some lack of success in meaning-based activities.

The answer of the second question: What is the role of grammar instruction in EFL textbooks?

The achieved results revealed that teachers and students are satisfied with the amount of grammar in EFL textbooks. In fact, there was no complaint about the amount of unnecessary grammatical and structural rules or the so much importance given to grammar in the textbooks. It was preferred that grammar explanations should be in English in EFL textbooks for all levels of learners. Both teachers and students had no any complaint about the amount of unnecessary rules or the importance given to grammar was given.

Although there was a satisfaction with the quantity of grammar covered in the EFL textbook, teachers didn't believe that grammar should be the most important and main part of teaching materials while students preferred the most focus on grammar in textbooks. Furthermore, according to teachers and students as participants of the study, the *organization* of the grammar rules couldn't ensure students' readiness to acquire new grammatical features.

The answer of the third question: What is the role of culture in language teaching materials in EFL textbooks?

Based on the present study, the results gained from the data related to some teachers revealed a certain degree of unwillingness to teach culture in general because of not being familiar with the cultural content of the EFL textbook used in Iranian institutions. Furthermore, the teachers claimed that often the cultural content was overgeneralized that it made an obligation search for text and images to *add* information or to *replace* culture topics in their textbook. In addition, the students showed so much interest to the Personal anecdotes that teachers added to the cultural content of the EFL textbook.

Research Article

Conclusion

The present study by investigating the teachers and students' ideas about teaching materials revealed that what powerful tool the EFL textbooks are. EFL textbooks consist of a major component of EFL teaching in a very positive way as well by providing the bases of English language learning in classrooms. They also help novice teachers with appropriate guidance in lesson planning.

In spite of the fact that EFL textbook is important to promote language learning, but it cannot be considered as the *key* of successful learning without the presence of a great English teacher.

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