Evaluation of Two General English Textbooks: New Interchange 2 vs. Four Corners 3

Hadi Hamidi

Department of English Language, Khazar Institute of Higher Education, Mahmoudabad, Iran

Mehri Bagheri

Department of English Language, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran

Maryam Sarinavaee

Department of English Language, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran

Akram Seyyedpour

Department of English Language, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran

Abstract—**Textbooks play a crucial role in language classrooms and educational programs all over the world. Choosing appropriate general English textbooks has always been a mind-boggling issue in Iranian English language institutes. This study aimed at evaluating two popular English textbooks including New Interchange 2 and Four Corners 3 in order to show their similarities and differences in terms of subject matters, vocabulary, structure, exercise, illustration, and physical make up. These English textbooks were compared and contrasted and their weaknesses and strengths were explained in terms of the mentioned criteria based on Daoud and Celce-Murcia's (1979) checklist. This evaluation was done by four English language teachers. The findings of the research revealed that there was no significant difference between the two mentioned textbooks; however, in some cases Four Corners 3 was found to be better than New Interchange 2.**

Index Terms—**Four Corners 3, general English textbooks, New Interchange 2, textbook evaluation**

I. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks play an important role in English language classes. As they are one of the most essential elements of second language teaching program. They can be significant resources for educators in helping learners to learn second language. And they are considered as a basis of education and the main resources of information. They may encourage or discourage learners according to teaching materials. Learners can promote in language learning gradually by using textbooks. Textbooks are type of program for teachers which lead them manage their time to improve English language learning in the L2 classes. There have been controversial ideas about the role of EFL textbooks in second language teaching and learning all over the world. In Iran many studies have been done on textbook evaluation. Based on Nunnan (1988), words, materials and course books are the most crucial elements in the curriculum and lubricate the wheels of learning.

According to McDonough and shaw (2003), we have to evaluate materials in some situations. Textbook evaluation is very useful in that it allows the teachers or language instructors to choose the best possible book for their language learners. As English is an international language, it is one of the ways of communicating in the areas of politics, economy and education. English is the best way to communicate with all people all over the world and it is the major language which is used for international trade and academic situation that is why people tend to learn English as a second language in their countries particularly in Iran (Wong, 2010, as cited in Gholami, Rimani Nikou, & Soultanpour, 2012). So, textbooks play a major role in language learning.

In the process of language teaching and learning, textbooks have a high position in this regard. According to Richards (2010), textbook is considered as the major source of contact that EFL learners have with the language. In fact textbooks are important resources which help EFL learners to learn English in EFL contexts. But textbooks rely on the educational environment in which they are used. Today textbooks are considered as the main factors in English language teaching. Furthermore, based on Dubin and Olshtain (1986), textbook is the tangible factor which provides many teachers and learners with language course face validity. As textbooks are important in learning, their quality should be taken into account. Since no textbook can be qualified, therefore textbook evaluation is used to find out its suitability. As to the significance of textbook evaluation in the field of ELT, the researchers qualitatively analyzed the two general English textbooks; Four Corners (3) and New Interchange (2). The evaluation was based on the checklist developed by Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979).

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

A. Text Book Evaluation

Textbook is too significant in language classroom in every educational institute around the world. According to Lamie (1999), the necessity of textbooks goes on to grow, and publishing companies are responsible for new versions. Razmjoo (1999) states that students who involve in text books feel safe and successful. Based on Cunningsworth (1995), text books are too effective to be known as self-directed learning which is the source to present materials by the teacher, source of opinions and tasks, and source of reference for learners which can help the experienced teachers. Daoud and Celcer-Murcia (1979) argue that information on text book is so helpful that becomes the teacher's duty to choose the text book, she/he teaches in an institute. Cunningworth (1999) and Ellis (1997) discuss about three various kinds of material evaluation. They declare that the predictive or pre-use is the most typical kind of evaluation which is organized to experiment the potential performance of text book. The in-use evaluation is the other kinds of textbook which is organized to experiment the material that is recently being used.

Richards (2001) states that the huge amount of materials which get the form of printed, non-printed, or both construct the language teaching materials around the world. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994) textbook has a great role in educational system that can be described as a vehicle for teachers to make support and relief. Based on Allwright (1981), textbooks cannot fulfill the changing needs of students and classes and they do not depend on their learning styles. Graves (2000) believes that text books provide a course syllabus, the student's security and already- made materials for instructors which make easier the teaching task. Nunan (1988) believes that materials make the most important part of curriculum. A short review of literature relating to materials evaluation shows that the main focus has been on predictive evaluation. According to Ellis (1997), there are two types of evaluation namely micro-evaluation and macro- evaluation. A macro evaluation is related to general assessment of whether materials are effective or not but in micro evaluation, the teacher chooses a special activity to be regarded to empirical evaluation.

Ur (1996) introduces some advantages of textbooks such as giving a framework, playing a role as a syllabus, preparing ready text for class and so on. In spite of advantages, textbooks have some disadvantages too. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), textbooks include some disadvantages such as inability to introduce suitable language models, making cultural misunderstanding and so on.

B. Evaluation Checklist

The quality of learning-teaching procedure as Najafi Sarem, Hamidi, and Mahmoudi (2013) stated, can be demonstrated by the type of language teaching materials. As a part of the materials applied in the language classroom, the textbook has an important role in students' success or failure. Once a textbook is chosen, it should be evaluated by standard or reliable checklists based on acceptable criteria so that the strong and weak points of the textbook are determined (Hamidi & Montazeri, 2014; Hamidi & Montazeri, 2015). So certain attention must be paid to evaluating English language teaching materials using standard checklists which are instruments that provide the evaluator with a list of features of successful learning –teaching materials. Based on Souri, Kafipur, Souri (2011), regarding these criteria, the quality of the material may be evaluated by evaluators such as teachers, students and researchers. A very detailed examination of a course book's language content is advocated by many experts, which causes the production of extensive evaluation checklist. In developing checklist, we have two important things. One of them is finding out the evaluative criteria that make up the main skeleton of any checklist and according to which textbook are evaluated. The other important step is the level of major or weight of every criterion (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2012).

Checklist may be of equal-weight or optimal-weight schemes. In an equal-weight scheme equal-weights are assigned to each criterion but in an optimal-weight scheme different weights are assigned to each criterion. Most checklists available in the literature follow an equal weight scheme (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2012). Global characteristic of checklists are disclosed based on reviewing ELT text book evaluation checklists for example Skiero's (1991) checklist pertains features such as; bibliographical data; aims and goals, subject matter , vocabulary and structures, exercises and activities, layout and physical makeup. Skiero's (1991) and Cunningworth's (1995) checklists share some characteristics which the latter one involves objectives and approaches, pattern and organization, language content, skills, topic, methodology, practical considerations. However, the aforementioned checklists have parts with different heading. An investigation of the items will demonstrate that they are approximately the same. For instance, in bibliographical data, Skiro (1991) mentions the cost-effectiveness of the textbooks, but Cunningworth (1995) refers to them in the practical considerations part. Similarly, another textbook evaluation checklist offered by Daoud and Celce-Morcia (1979), involves five main parts; such as (a) subject matter (b) vocabulary and structures, (c) exercises, (d) illustrations, and finally (e) physical make up. Each part consists of various small features techniques that can be applied in textbook evaluation. Based on Mukundan and Nimechi (2012), in order to provide a checklist some points must be considered including validity, reliability, and practicality. A checklist must be reliable; that is every person should understand. A checklist must be valid and related to what is being evaluated and also practical if it is short, it should easy to use and easy to interpret the results.

C. Related Studies

Numerous studies have been carried out internationally to explore textbook evaluation. Although literature on evaluation of Four Corners series is rare there are many researches on evaluation of Interchange series. For instance, a comparative study done by Razmjoo (2007) in which high school text books and Interchange series were analyzed.

Razmjoo (2007) found that unlike the EFL private institute textbooks that indicate the CLT principles to a great extent, English high school textbooks in Iran are not contributing to CLT implementation. Additionally, Sahrahgard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi (2009) investigated an in-depth examination of the third edition of Interchange. They noticed that New Interchange 3rd edition had some weaknesses such as dearth of reference to teachers and students. Ignoring the significance of self-directed activities in completing a task and overreliance on input, improvement techniques are the other shortages of these series. But, these series also involve some positive aspects such as their great focus on group work and meaningful interaction. Riasati and Zare (2010) evaluated the New Interchange textbooks from Iranian EFL teachers' point of view. They came to conclusion that the usefulness and appropriateness of the textbooks were recognized by most teachers. Despite the merits, these series had some weaknesses such as lack of testing exercises, and insufficient number of teacher's manual. In another study, Alirezaee, Kouhpaeenejad, and Mohammadi (2012) evaluated the New Interchange 3rd edition and the Top Notch 2nd edition. Their findings revealed that there was no significant difference between the two series. Soleimani and Dabbaghi (2012) evaluated the New Interchange series. The results showed that the books enjoyed enough pragmatic input for language learners to deal with their basic communicative needs. Pedagogically the findings of the study involved using EFL materials which provided learners with enough pragmatic input. The results of a study by Moradi and Afraz (2013) which evaluated speech acts and language functions in high school textbooks and the New Interchange series showed that variety of language functions used in the Interchange series while in the high school textbooks they were shown unequally and some of them repeated throughout the books that didn't follow a particular pattern. Roohani, Taheri, and Poorzangeneh (2014), conducted a study about evaluation of two ELT textbooks (Four Corners, book 2 and Four Corners, book 3) according to Bloom's revised taxonomy (BRT). They investigated the degree to which these two books could indicate the 6 cognitive categories of the BRT (i.e. remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating) in their activities. The findings showed that the processes of remembering and understanding were prevalent in these textbooks. Also, Roohani et al.' (2014) findings showed that the aforementioned books couldn't engage learners so well in the activities requiring higher levels of cognitive ability, prerequisites of autonomous language learning. All of the above studies done to help curriculum developers, teachers, and students used different procedures. This study aims at evaluating the two English textbooks including Four Corners 3 and New Interchange 2 in order to find out the similarities, differences, weaknesses, and strong points.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study had no participants, but it had four evaluators. The evaluators of this study were three female EFL teachers having M.A. degree and one Ph.D. holder in TEFL. The two English language textbooks, Interchange 2 and Four Corners 3 which are commonly used in the private English language institutes in Iran were evaluated based on the textbook evaluation checklist developed by Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) (see Apendix A & B). The checklist which consists of five parts contains several questions each of which considers a certain aspect of the textbook. The questions were clear and straightforward and they were addressed qualitatively. The four evaluators worked together and tried to reach a consensus for the comparison and contrast and shared their views on the results as well.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

What comes below is a qualitative analysis and comparison of the two general English textbooks (New Interchange 2 vs. Four Corners 3).

A. Subject Matter

1. Does the subject matter cover a variety of topics appropriate to the interests of the learners for whom the textbook is intended(urban or rural environment; child or adult learners; male and/or female students)?

Both books cover a variety of topics related to young and adult learners, male and female students. These topics are appropriate to the interests of the learners for whom the textbook is intended, but none of these books have considered the rural environment just urban environment and mechanical life.

2. Is the ordering of materials done by topics or themes that are arranged in a logical fashion?

In both books the ordering of materials done by topics or themes that are arranged in a logical fashion, but in New Interchange 2 the students can understand the topics better than *four corners* 3 because all the topics are related to the subjects. But in Four Corners we can see topics which are related to the subjects.

3. Is the content graded according to the needs of the students or the requirements of the existing syllabus (if there is one)?

In Four Corners 3 the content is arranged according to the requirements of the existing syllabus but in New Interchange 2 the content is arranged according to the needs of the students. Scope and sequence that is related to Four Corners 3 is clearer than the plan of New Interchange 2.

4. Is the material accurate and up-to-date?

The materials in Four Corners 3 are newer than the materials in New Interchange 2. Four Corners 3 takes newer topics into consideration.

B. Vocabulary and Structures

1. Does the vocabulary load (i.e. the number of new words introduced every lesson) seem to be reasonable for the students of that level?

The number of new words introduced in every lesson seems to be suitable for the students of that level both in Four Corners 3 and New Interchange 2.

2. Are the vocabulary items controlled to ensure systematic gradations from simple to complex items?

Vocabulary items have systematic gradations from simple to complex in both books.

3. Is the new vocabulary repeated in subsequent lessons for reinforcement?

The new vocabulary items are not repeated in subsequent lessons in both books.

4. Does the sentence length seem reasonable for the students of that level?

The length of sentences in New Interchange 2 and Four Corners 3 is reasonable for the students of that level.

5. Is the number of grammatical points as well as their sequence appropriate?

The number of grammatical points in Four Corners 3 is more appropriate than New Interchange 2 because the sequence of grammatical points is in order.

6. Do the structures gradually increase in complexity to suit the growing reading ability of students?

In comparison with Four Corners 3, the structures in New Interchange 2 increase in complexity more to suit the reading ability of the students because New Interchange 2 starts with simple structures to complex structures but in Four Corners 3 the complexity of structures are equal.

7. Does the writer use current everyday language, and sentence structures that follow normal word order?

The writers use current everyday language and sentence structures in both books.

8. Do the sentences and paragraphs follow one another in a logical sequence?

The sentences and paragraphs follow one another in an appropriate way in both books.

9. Are linguistic items introduced in meaningful situations to facilitate understanding and ensure assimilation and consolidation?

In both of these textbooks linguistic items are introduced in meaningful situations which provide learners with language samples to work that learners may encounter outside the classroom. These items help learners understand and ascertain assimilation and consolidation.

C. Exercises

1. Do the exercises develop comprehension and test knowledge of main ideas, details, and sequence of ideas?

Exercises increase learners' comprehension and evaluate the knowledge of main ideas and details in two books.

2. Do the exercises involve vocabulary and structures which build up the learner`s repertoire?

Exercises of two books cover vocabularies and structures which improve learners' knowledge adequately.

3. Do the exercises provide practice in different types of written work (sentence completion, spelling and dictation, guided composition)?

The exercises provide different types of written work such as sentence completion and guided compositions in both books but the writers of two books ignore exercises about spelling and dictation. The writers don't mention the rules of composition writing except some questions as a hint.

4. Does the book provide a pattern of review within lessons and cumulatively test new material?

Four Corners 3 doesn't provide review within lessons but New Interchange 2 provides it.

5. Do the exercises promote meaningful communication by referring to realistic activities and situations?

The exercises increase meaningful communication by using realistic activities and situations in both books.

D. Illustrations

1. Do illustrations create a favorable atmosphere for reading and spelling by depicting realism and action?

Illustrations of two books create a favorable situation for reading and spelling by showing realism and action. Both writers draw learners' attention by real examples.

2. Are the illustrations clear, simple, and free of unnecessary details that may confuse the learner?

Illustrations of both books are clear, simple, and free of unnecessary details so students are not confused by the illustrations.

3. Are the illustrations printed close enough to the text and directly related to the content to help the learner understand the printed text?

The printed illustrations of New Interchange 2 and Four Corners 3 are so close to the text and related to the content.

E. Physical Make-up

1. Is the cover of the book durable enough to withstand wear?

The cover of two books is not durable enough to withstand wear.

2. Is the text attractive (i.e., cover, page, appearance, binding)?

Page and appearance of both books are good but the cover of Four Corners 3 is better and more attractive than New Interchange 2.

3. Does the size of the book seem convenient for the students to handle?

The size of both books is not convenient enough for all students.

4. Is the type size appropriate for the intended learners?

The type size and font of both books are appropriate and easy to read.

The Four Corners series are newer in comparison to the New Interchange series. Although the authors have kept many features of the New Interchange series, they have modernized the Four Corners series in terms of pictures, dialogues, reading comprehension, and choice of vocabulary. Hamidi and Asadi (2015) found the same results comparing simultaneously Four Corners 1 and Top Notch Fundamentals A using the present checklist. The findings showed that both textbooks were almost the same in most parts. In comparison to Top Notch, Four Corners did not contain appropriate illustrations and physical make up, but as a dominating EFL textbook, it was flexible enough to be used. One reason for Four Corners to be used more could be its lower price (nearly half) comparing to Top Notch. Hamidi, Montazeri, Alizadeh, and Rezaie (2015) comparing Four Corners (1) and Top Notch Fundamentals (A) concluded that the two books almost did not differ based on Daoud and Celce-Murcia's (1979) checklist, though they both had some strengths and weaknesses.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at evaluating two series of ELT materials namely Interchange 2 and Four Corners 3, by means of a checklist adopted from Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) in terms of subject matter, vocabulary and structure, exercises, illustrations and physical make up. After conducting the evaluation, the results of the study were analyzed. As it was revealed by analyzing the data, Four Corners 3 and Interchange 2 both showed some weaknesses and strengths in some of the mentioned criteria. The study showed that in terms of subject matter, Four Corners 3 included more interesting subjects than Interchange 2, but in Interchange 2 students had better understanding of the topics as they were more related to the subjects. In addition, the contents in Four Corners 3 were clearer than the contents in Interchange 2. In terms of vocabulary and structure, there was no significant difference between these two textbooks. However, the number of the grammatical points mentioned in these books was different. The authors of Four Corners 3 used appropriate sequence of structural points. Another issue was the exercises; the writers of Interchange 2 could better consider structural rules in the textbook. Despite the fact that Four Corners 3 had better subject matter and content than those of Interchange 2, the latter book provided students with better exercises such as better and more different types of written work, vocabulary, structure, and meaningful communication. Both textbooks could satisfy students with favorable and clear illustration that were directly related to the content. It can be argued that the authors of Four Corners 3 could better draw learners' attention by employing more attractive and convenient texts and by regarding general physical make up. However, we should notice that there was no significant difference between these textbooks in terms of physical make up.

This study also has some limitations that should be taken into consideration. The first limitation is that the present study compared only one of the books of the Four Corners series with one of the books of the New Interchange series. Another limitation was that students' opinions were not considered. The present study may help instructors and materials developers improve the textbooks and remove the shortcomings of the textbooks regarding the similarities and differences between two English textbooks of Four Corners 3 and New Interchange 2. Additionally, teachers can identify the learners' problems in different parts of the books by considering the similarities and differences between these two textbooks.

APPENDIX. SAMPLE CHECKLIST FOR TEXTBOOK EVALUATION (DAOUD & CELCE-MURCIA, 1979)

Daoud, A., & Celce-Murcia, M. (1979). Selecting and evaluating a textbook. In M. Celce-Murcia and L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 302- 307). Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

0= totally lacking, 1= weak, 2= adequate, 3= good, 4= excellent

Items to examine	0	1	2	3	4
A. Subject matter					
1. Does the subject matter cover a variety of topics appropriate to the interests of the learners for whom the textbook is intended(urban or rural environment; child or adult learners; male and/or female students)?					
2. Is the ordering of materials done by topics or themes that are arranged in a logical fashion?					
3. Is the content graded according to the needs of the students or the requirements of the existing syllabus (if there is one)?					
4. Is the material accurate and up-to-date?					
B. Vocabulary and structures	0	1	2	3	4
1. Does the vocabulary load (i.e. the number of new words introduced every lesson) seem to be reasonable for the students of that level?					
2. Are the vocabulary items controlled to ensure systematic gradations from simple to complex items?					
3. Is the new vocabulary repeated in subsequent lessons for reinforcement?					
4. Does the sentence length seem reasonable for the students of that level?					
5. Is the number of grammatical points as well as their sequence appropriate?					
6. Do the structures gradually increase in complexity to suit the growing reading ability of students?					
7. Does the writer use current everyday language, and sentence structures that fallow normal word order?					
8. Do the sentences and paragraphs follow one another in a logical sequence?					
9. Are linguistic items introduced in meaningful situations to facilitate understanding and ensure assimilation and consolidation?					
C. Exercises	0	1	2	3	4
1. Do the exercises develop comprehension and test knowledge of main ideas, details, and sequence of ideas?					
2. Do the exercises involve vocabulary and structures which build up the learner`s repertoire?					
3. Do the exercises provide practice in different types of written work (sentence completion, spelling and dictation, guided composition)?					
4. Does the book provide a pattern of review within lessons and cumulatively test new material?					
5. Do the exercises promote meaningful communication by referring to realistic activities and situations?					
D. Illustrations	0	1	2	3	4
1. Do illustrations create a favorable atmosphere for reading and spelling by depicting realism and action?					
2. Are the illustrations clear, simple, and free of unnecessary details that may confuse the learner?					
3. Are the illustrations printed close enough to the text and directly related to the content to help the learner understand the printed text?					
E. Physical make-up	0	1	2	3	4
1. Is the cover of the book durable enough to withstand wear?					
2. Is the text attractive (i.e., cover, page, appearance, binding)?					
3. Does the size of the book seem convenient for the students to handle?					
4. Is the type size appropriate for the intended learners?					

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Hadi Hamidi has been teaching English for about four years at different universities at B.A. and M.A. levels and has supervised a couple of master's theses. He has carried out a number of researches, translated a couple of articles, and presented a number of papers in different conferences and seminars inside the country. His areas of interest include CALL, language assessment, and research statistics. He is currently the manager of www.iranelt.com which is the first technical and educational English language teaching website worldwide aimed at helping the ELT community.

Mehri Bagheri has been teaching English for about 6 years at Abrar English language institute, Sari, Iran. She received her M.A. degree in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Sari branch, Sari, Iran. Her areas of interest are syllabus design, ESP, and discourse analysis.

Maryam Sarinavaee has been teaching English for about 13 years at Abrar English language institute, Sari, Iran. She received her M.A. degree in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Sari branch, Sari, Iran. Her areas of interest are teaching methodology and Psycholinguistics.

Akram Seyyedpour has been teaching English for about 3 years at Adib-Daneshavaran English language institute. She received her M.A. degree in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Sari branch, Sari, Iran. Her areas of interest are teaching methodology, classroom management and syllabus design.