# Evaluation of the Iranian Eleventh Grade High School English Textbook (Vision II) from EFL Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract – This study aimed at evaluating the English textbook taught at Iranian high schools for the eleventh grade. To do the research, 30 female and male high school teachers who taught the eleventh grade high school English text book in Masjed Solayman, Khuzestan were selected to participate in this study. The participants were selected from different high schools such as Pardis and Bentolhoda high schools in Masjed Solayman. Having selected the teachers, they were asked to complete a textbook evaluation questionnaire. Next, the teachers' responses were analyzed using the SPSS software. The results revealed that the content and the shape of the textbook were appropriate for the eleventh grade high school students. In addition, the objectives of the textbook did correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school. On the other hand, the teaching aids of the textbook did not correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school.

*Keywords*: language teaching materials, evaluation, textbook evaluation, materials evaluation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the process of teaching and learning, textbooks are of great value and effect. Textbooks are considered an essential component of any English as a foreign language (EFL) course so that the use of EFL published materials is more widespread than ever (Zohrabi, Sabouri, & Behroozian, 2012). In practice, textbooks serve teachers with guidelines concerning syllabi, teaching methodologies, and the materials to be taught. In order to select the best appropriate text, material developers should pay special attention to developing teaching materials. Textbooks are valuable in each language classroom, have several roles in English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum, and help the process of language teaching and learning. A textbook has a very virtual role in teaching and learning of English. Textbooks are the main sources that can transfer the knowledge and information to the learners in an easy and organized way (Ahour & Ahmadi, 2012).

Zohrabi, Sabouri, and Kheradmand (2014) comment that "textbooks are one of the elements that may promote or discourage learners depending on their materials. They are a kind of support for both teachers and learners. Textbooks provide students a kind of consistency" (p. 95). They have an important influence in the instructional process. ELT textbooks have a major function in the second/foreign language teaching and learning domain. Sheldon (1988) states that textbooks represent the visible heart of any ELT program. Textbooks

are an almost universal component of English language teaching. ELT textbooks play the role of a teacher, a map, a resource, a restrictor, and function as an ideology (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Textbooks hold a paramount status as an indispensable ingredient of language teaching profession; therefore, appraising and evaluating them seems to be imperative to assure their efficiency and consistency with the objectives defined and expected of the course. Constant evaluation of textbooks to see if they are appropriate is of great importance. This process enables us to make informed decisions through which student achievement will increase and educational programs will be more successful (Zohrabi, Sabouri, & Behroozian, 2012). According to Ahour and Ahmadi (2012), textbooks give suitable knowledge to the learners.

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest that "the textbook is an almost universal element of English language teaching and no teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook" (p. 320). Textbooks as good assistants of the teachers help students learn different subject matters. They are the building blocks of school instruction (Azizifar, Koosha, & Lotfi, 2010).

Richards (2001) suggests that textbooks play two roles in different situations: they may be the basis for the content of the lesson in some situations, and may be a complement to the teacher's instruction in other situations. So any ELT program can be represented in textbooks, and most of the language input given to the students in the classroom comes from textbooks, too. In many EFL contexts, including Iran, the textbook may serve as the main source of contact learners have with the language, in addition to the input provided by the teacher.

Subsequently, in order to choose an applicable textbook that fulfills the needs of the learners according to their culture, textbook evaluation is required. Textbooks evaluation is an essential aspect in EFL teaching. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), evaluation is defined as "the systematic gathering of information for purposes of decision making" (p. 206). Ellis (1997) explicitly states that language teachers are faced with the task of choosing what teaching materials to use. The teachers are required to accomplish a predictive evaluation of the materials available to them to determine which are best appropriate to their objectives. Next, when the language teachers have used the materials, they may feel the need to undertake a further evaluation to determine whether the materials have 'worked' for them. This constitutes a retrospective evaluation. Several textbooks are produced annually across the globe and this wide range of textbooks are designed mainly for ESL/EFL situations. This variation leads to some confusion among teachers, especially those with little or no experience. Even experienced teachers might find it a daunting task to select a textbook for their target groups. Chambers (1997) says that selection of materials to be used jointly in an ELT class should be selected by as wide range of users as possible. Therefore, selection and evaluation of textbooks are interrelated and considered to be a real problem for teachers and curriculum developers as well. Those who are working in textbook selection should bear in mind the target learners' needs and level, and a collective decision should be reached before prescribing a textbook. Selection, as I have noted above, involves evaluation in the first instance. Teachers are to go through the textbook and some checklists have to be satisfied regarding the students' needs, the objectives of the course, and the context in which the textbook is to be taught. Whether evaluation takes place at the time of selecting the textbook or in a later stage, that is, after teaching it for a long time, it is a time-consuming task and it has to be done carefully and patiently. Anyway, the

main purpose of selection and evaluation is to enhance the conditions of English language teaching (ELT).

#### 2. RELATED STUDIES

Different research studies have been conducted to evaluate textbooks. Amerian (1987, cited in Razmjoo, 2007) carried out a comparative study of the first two books of Right Path to English and Books One and Two of the Graded English series based on Tucker's (1975) model. Tucker (1975) proposes four main categories for evaluating a textbook. These are based on four linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical principles. He uses three scales for rating in his model: The Value Scale (VS), The Merit Scale (MS), and The Value Merit Product (VMP). Amerian's study showed no significant differences between the two series. This was due to the fact that the two series represented the structural syllabus and design.

Ansary and Babaii (2002) examined a corpus of 10 EFL/ESL textbook reviews in addition to 10 EFL/ESL textbook evaluation checklists. Then, they made a list of the common core features of standard EFL/ESL textbooks. The main categories were outlined as approach, content presentation, physical make-up, and administration. They further divided each set of main features of EFL/ESL textbooks into a number of subcategories. In the conclusion, it was mentioned that not all of these characteristics would be present in each and every textbook. Moreover, Yarmohammadi (2002) analyzed the senior high school textbooks based on a modified version of Tucker's model. He came to the conclusion that these textbooks suffer a lot of shortcomings, including the following:

- a) They are not authentic.
- b) English and Persian names are used interchangeably.
- c) Oral skills are ignored.

At the end, Yarmohammadi proposed some remedial suggestions for these shortcomings.

Amalsaleh (2004) adopted Van Leeuwen's model (1996) in order to evaluate three types of textbooks, including junior and senior high school textbooks with respect to the presence of social factors. The results revealed that the textbooks demonstrated a deferential representation of social factors. Junior and senior high school textbooks tended to shape normative perspectives towards gender-specific issues and class relations in which a middle-class urban male was considered to be the norm. This paper tried to evaluate an ESP textbook written for bachelor students of physics entitled 'English for the Students of Physics' which was prepared by Center for Studying and Compiling University Books in Humanities (SAMT).

Sajjadi and Hadavi Nia (2011) tried to evaluate an ESP textbook written for bachelor students of physics entitled English for the Students of Physics which is prepared by SAMT. The research was based on qualitative and quantitative research techniques and included two steps. First, internal, external, and overall evaluation of the book was carried out based on McDonough and Shaw's (1993) model. In the second step, the perceptions of six teachers toward different aspects of the textbook were elicited using 22-item textbook evaluation questionnaire. The results revealed the appropriateness of the textbook used by bachelor students of physics. Suggestions were offered for the future revision and/or designing textbooks.

Shafiee Nahrkhalaj (2012) examined the merits and demerits of EFL textbooks and explained two different sorts of textbooks used in Iran: global materials and institutional or inhouse materials. In this study, Shafiee Nahrkhalaj presented a framework with a two-phase scheme for evaluation which contained whilst-use and post-use evaluation. To obtain greater reliability, each norm was analyzed at a time by using planned instruments. He chose Top Notch series (Salslow & Ascher, 2006) which has recently become very popular in main cities of the country. The textbook was evaluated using a checklist in two phases. The first phase included the attractiveness and the availability of the materials, the suitability of the exercises and tasks, the practicality of the textbook, the effectiveness in facilitating short-term learning, the clarity of instructions, and the comprehensibility of the text. In phase two, long-term effects of the materials on the students were examined. Twenty teachers who had experience in teaching Top Notch series completed the questionnaire which included questions about the effects of using the material. With regard to the result of his study, the textbooks helped the learners find their aims to a great extent and it could improve the linguistic proficiency of the learners. Based on the teachers' opinions, it was concluded that all skills were covered in this textbook.

Davari, Iranmehr, and Erfani (2013) conducted a research study on Payam Nour University (PNU) ESP textbooks. The research intended to critically evaluate the current status of the Iranian ESP textbooks developed and published by PNU, as the second ESP textbook developer in the Iranian academic setting. The study tried to: (1) study the importance of ESP materials development and evaluation; (2) introduce the essential drawbacks which PNU textbooks suffer from; and (3) present some practical suggestions and solutions to tackle the significant problems and drawbacks of such ESP textbooks. Danaye Tous and Haghighi (2014) did another research study on ESP textbooks of Payame Noor University. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the ESP textbook "English for the Students of Computer Engineering" taught at Payame Noor University in Astane (Guilan province, Iran). Findings indicated that despite having pedagogical values, the textbook was not very good according to design and organization, language content and exercises, skills and strategies, practical considerations, and illustrations.

Because English is a very important part of the academic education of Iranian students, English textbooks have great effect on their future academic and professional progress. For that reason, the analysis of language teaching materials (the English textbooks) should be taken into consideration by language teachers and the researchers in the domain. Many studies (e.g., Amirian, & Tavakoli, 2009; Baleghizadeh, & Rahimi, 2011; Danaye Tous, & Haghighi, 2014; Davari, Iranmehr, & Erfani, 2013; Eslami-Rasekh, 2010; Jahangard, 2007; Manoochehri, & Nemati, 2016; Razmjoo, 2007; Riazi, & Mosallanejad, 2010; Sahragard, Rahimi, & Zaremoayedi, 2009; Sajjadi & Hadavi Nia 2011; Salehi, Davari, & Yunus, 2015) have been conducted on analyzing English Textbooks. However, to the best of researcher's knowledge, no research study has attempted to analyze the new English textbook for eleventh grade in Iranian high schools. For this reason, the present study was designated to evaluate the eleventh grade English textbook based on some well-known course book evaluation criteria.

The significance of this study is to inform the probable weaknesses and challenges of the new English textbook for eleventh grade in Iranian high schools from the perspective of EFL teachers. As a result, teachers, students, researchers, and material developers can benefit from the findings of the current research.

In the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), there are many textbooks in the market places. The English teachers have to take into account the necessary factors involved in selecting appropriate textbooks. It seems that making a good choice is a challenge to the teachers. Due to the policy in the ministry of education in Iran, the EFL teachers have to adapt the eleventh grade English textbook *for their students*. Therefore, the findings of this study can be beneficial for teachers because they can make an informed choice. Further, this study may draw the attention of material developers to the importance of a well-designed textbook for the eleventh grade high school students. In order to conduct the research, four research questions were formulated:

**RQ1:** Is the content of the textbook appropriate for the eleventh grade high school level?

**RQ2**: Is the shape of the textbook appropriate for the eleventh grade high school level?

**RQ3**: Do the objectives of the textbook correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school?

**RQ4**: Do the teaching aids of the textbook correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school?

The above research questions were put into the following research null hypotheses:

**H01:** The content of the textbook is not appropriate for the eleventh grade high school level.

**H02**: The shape of the textbook is not appropriate for the eleventh grade high school level.

**H03**: The objectives of the textbook do not correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school.

**H04**: the teaching aids of the textbook do not correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school.

#### 3. METHODOLOGY

## 3.1. Participants

The participants of the present study were 30 high school teachers including 20 female and 10 male teachers who taught the eleventh grade high school English text book in Masjed Soleiman, Khuzestan, Iran. The teachers varied in age from 30 to 45 years old and they had the same native language which was Persian. A total number of 22 participants were educated in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) during their higher education while the other 8 teachers were educated in English literature and translation studies. The teachers were selected from two high schools, including Pardis and Bentolhoda high schools in Masjed Solayman. The selected teachers had been teaching the eleventh grade English text book in Masjed Solayman for several years.

#### 3.2. Instruments

The questionnaire was the one prepared by Beydokhtinezhad, Azarnoosh, and Abdolmanafi-Rokni (2015). Beydokhtinezhad et al. adopted this questionnaire from a checklist by Tomlinson, et al. (2002) and a course book assessment instrument by Al-Hajailan (2003). The questionnaire has an introductory part aimed to gather the participants' demographic information. This 34-item questionnaire consists of seven parts relating to:

- a) Physical appearance,
- b) Content of the book,
- c) Language skills,
- d) Language elements,
- e) Activities,
- f) Supplementary materials, and
- g) Objectives.

Each of these parts contains five or six items. The questionnaire is a five-point Likert scale instrument and the scales range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It should be noted that the researcher omitted the some sections of the original form of the questionnaire. Therefore, the final questionnaire used in this study consisted of 21 items. The participants were asked to fill the questionnaire based on the extent to which they agreed with the questionnaire's statements. The "strongly agree" choice received 5 points and the "strongly disagree" option received 1 point.

## 3.3. Design

The current study evaluated the English textbook taught at Iranian high schools for the eleventh grade. Therefore, this study was a descriptive and survey research in nature.

## 3.4. Evaluated Material

The English text book in the present study was called "Vision 2: English for Schools". The textbook was written by Alavi Moghaddam, Kheirabadi, Rahimi, Davari (2017).

#### 4. RESULTS

## 4.1. Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire sections (i.e., contents, shape, objectives, and teaching aids) were estimated based on score from 15 subjects similar in characteristics to target subjects.

Table 1: Piloting of the Instruments

Instruments	No. of Items	'r'
Contents	6	0.744
Shape	5	0.795
Objectives	5	0.812
Teaching Aids	5	0.768

Based on the results from Table 1, the instrument's sections used in the present study had acceptable range of reliability.

## 4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Frequency Distribution of the Sample

In Table 2, the frequency and percentage of the participants in each group are presented.

Table 2: Distribution and Frequency Percent of the Participants

Sample	Frequency	Frequency Percent	Cumulative Frequency Percent
Female Teachers	20	66.66	66.66
Male Teachers	10	33.33	100
Sum	80	100	

As can be seen in Table 2, 66.66 percent of the participants were female high school teachers and 33.33 percent of the members of the present study were male teachers.

# 4.3. Descriptive Statistics for the Questionnaire Scores

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Questionnaire Scores

Sections	Subjects	Items	Mean	Min	Max
Content	30	6	22.15	9	28
Shape	30	5	21.50	6	25
Objectives	30	5	20.95	7	22
Teaching Aids	30	5	14.84	8	23

Based on the results shown in Table 3, the mean of the teachers' scores toward content, shape, objectives and teaching aids were 22.15, 21.50, 20.95, and 14.84 respectively.

## 4.4. Data Normality

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run to examine the normality of data distribution.

Table 4: Normality Test of Data Distribution

	Kolmogorov- Smirnov				
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Sig.			
The Questionnare Scores	0.194	0.215			

According to the results presented in Table 4, as the significance level of the teachers' scores toward the questionnaire's variable was greater than 0.05 (p> 0.05), it was concluded that the teachers' scores had a normal distribution.

## 4.5. Hypotheses Testing

In order to test the hypotheses, a series of *one-sample t-tests* were used. In one-sample t-test, if the significance level is greater than error value 0.05 (sig > 0.05) and also the t-statistics is less than 1.96 (t < 1.96), it can be concluded that the related hypothesis cannot be rejected. 1.96 is the approximate value of the 97.5 percentile point of the normal distribution used in probability and statistics.

Testing Hypothesis 1

Table 5: One-sample Statistics for the Content

	N	Items	M	SD	SEM
Content	30	6	22.15	1.41	2.985

Table 6: One-sample Test for the Content

	Test Value = 3							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Lower	Upper		
Content	10.015	29	0.000*	0.78449	1.4256	2.8546		

<sup>\*</sup>P < 0/05

Table 6 shows the significance level was 0.000 (p = 0.000) and it was less than the error value (p < 0.05). In addition, the t-statistics was 10.015 which was greater than 1.96 (t > 1.96). Moreover, it was observed that the mean of the participants' scores in the content items was 22.15 which was greater than "18". Based on the findings, the teachers believed that the content of the book was appropriate for the eleventh grade high school level.

Testing Hypothesis 2

Table 7: One-sample Statistics for the Shape

	N	Items	M	SD	SEM
Shape	30	5	21.50	0.625	1.415

Table 8: One-sample Test for the Shape

		Test Value = 3							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Lower	Upper			
Shape	11.2545	29	0.000*	0.47851	0.2154	3.9825			

<sup>\*</sup>P < 0/05

Table 8 shows the significance level was 0.000 (p=0.000) and it was less than the error value (p<0.05). In addition, the t-statistics was 11.2545 which was greater than 1.96 (t>1.96). Moreover, it was observed that the mean of the participants' scores in the shape items was 21.50 which was greater than "15". Based on the findings, the teachers believed that the shape of the textbook was appropriate for the eleventh grade high school level.

## Testing Research Hypothesis 3

Table 9: One-sample Statistics for the Objectives

	N	Items	M	SD	SEM
Objectives	29	5	20.95	0.785	2.045

Table 10: One-sample Test for the Objectives

	Test Value = 3							
•					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Lower	Upper		
Objectives	10.1005	29	$0.000^{*}$	0.6775	0.7854	3.2044		

<sup>\*</sup>P < 0/05

Table 10 shows the significance level was 0.000 (p = 0.090) and it was less than the error value (p < 0.05). In addition, the t-statistics was 10.1005 which was greater than 1.96 (t > 1.96). Moreover, it was observed that the mean of the participants' scores in the objectives items was 20.95 which was greater than "15". Therefore, the objectives of the textbook did correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school.

Testing Hypothesis 4

Table 11: One-sample Statistics for the Teaching Aids

	N	Items	M	SD	SEM
Teaching Aids	30	5	14.84	0.6854	1.8546

Table 12: One-sample Test for the Teaching Aids

	Test Value = 3						
-			95% Confidence Interval Difference				
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Lower	Upper	
Objectives	0.8442	29	0.085*	0.6468	0.3987	0.8975	

<sup>\*</sup>P < 0/05

Table 12 shows the significance level was 0.085 (p = 0.085) and it was greater than the error value (p < 0.05). In addition, the t-statistics was 0.8442 which was greater than 1.96 (t > 1.96). It was observed that the mean of the participants' scores in the teaching aids items was 14.84 which was less than "15". Based on the findings, the teaching aids of the textbook did not correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The obtained results revealed that the shape and the content of the book were appropriate for the eleventh grade high school students. In addition, the objectives of the course book did correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school. At last, the teaching aids of the textbook did not correspond to the objectives of the English teaching program in the eleventh grade high school.

#### 6. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are in line with Ansary and Babaii (2002) who examined a corpus of 10 EFL/ESL textbook reviews in addition to 10 EFL/ESL textbook evaluation checklists. Obtained results revealed that not all of these characteristics would be present in each and every textbook. Moreover, Yarmohammadi (2002) analyzed the senior high school textbooks based on a modified version of Tucker's model. Having administered the research, Yarmohammadi found that these textbooks suffer a lot of shortcomings. For example, the textbooks are not authentic. Moreover, oral skills in the textbooks are ignored.

The findings of the study are in line with Amalsaleh (2004) who evaluated three types of textbooks, including junior and senior high school textbooks with respect to the presence of social factors. The results revealed that the textbooks demonstrated a deferential representation of social factors. Junior and senior high school textbooks tended to shape normative perspectives towards gender-specific issues and class relations in which a middle-class urban male was considered to be the norm.

The findings of the present study agree with Sajjadi and Hadavi Nia (2011) who tried to evaluate an ESP textbook written for bachelor students of physics entitled English for the Students of Physics which is prepared by SAMT. The results revealed the extent of appropriateness of the textbook used by bachelor students of physics. Likewise, Shafiee Nahrkhalaj (2012) examined the merits and demerits of EFL textbooks and explained two different sorts of textbooks used in Iran: global materials and institutional or in-house materials. The researcher found that the textbooks helped the learners find their aims to a great extent and it could improve the linguistic proficiency of the learners. Based on the teachers' opinions, it was concluded that all the skills were covered in this textbook.

The findings of the present study match Davari, Iranmehr, and Erfani (2013) who conducted a research study on Payam Nour University (PNU) ESP textbooks. Similar to the findings of the present study, Danaye Tous and Haghighi (2014) did a research study in the field of study on ESP textbooks of Payame Noor University. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the ESP textbook "English for the Students of Computer Engineering" taught at

Payame Noor University in Astane (Guilan province, Iran). Findings indicated that despite having pedagogical values, the textbook was not very good according to design and organization, language content and exercises, skills and strategies, practical considerations, and illustrations.

#### 7. IMPLICATIONS

The EFL teachers' attitudes towards eleventh grade high school play a crucial role in the success of their students. By knowing teachers' attitudes towards the textbook, textbook designers and editors have a better understanding of what must be and not be included in the textbook and the next editions of the book will be mostly based on teachers' and learners' needs and requirements.

Conducting needs analysis helps textbook writers to improve their works and also develop and write the textbooks that are according to the learners' needs. Teachers can also be aware of the needs of the learners and pay enough attention to their requirements.

The findings of this study enable the textbook authors to adapt the textbook more relevant to the students' needs. The questionnaires used in this study help the teachers gain a deeper insight in selecting the appropriate textbook.

Some points should be taken into consideration by textbook designers and editors while revising the textbook. They are put forth as follows:

- a) Improving individual learning.
- b) Covering all four skills adequately to meet the needs of eleventh grade high school students.
- c) Giving more priority to written skills especially reading passages and associative activities.
- d) Emphasizing on authentic-based materials in different language skills and sub skills.
- e) Providing materials that facilitate real-life interaction.
- f) Modifying grammar items matched with the students' level.
- g) Focusing much more attention on attractive appearance.
- h) Revising and updating the textbook may be useful. Providing texts and tasks with newer concepts and information is necessary.

#### 8. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- a) The generalizability of the findings may be limited since this research has examined only 30 teachers at two high schools in Masjed Soleiman. Future studies may investigate the evaluation of the textbook, utilizing random sampling method with the larger sample sizes. Maybe if all participants were chosen from different high schools all over the country, the results would be more generalizable.
- b) In order to measure the questionnaire of the present study, 5 points Likert were used. Likert scaling is a bipolar scaling method, measuring either positive or negative response to a statement. Future studies could use other ways to measure the related questionnaire.

- c) This study was primarily conducted to evaluate the English textbook taught at Iranian high schools for the eleventh grade. Interested research could evaluate the English textbook taught at Iranian high schools for the tenth and twelve grades.
- d) Future studies could explore Iranian high school students' perspectives to evaluate the English textbook taught at Iranian high schools for the twelve grade.
- e) Future research need to spend a longer time than the time spent in this study.

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