A Retrospective-Comparative Evaluation of Textbooks Developed by Native and Non-native English Speakers

Javad Gholami[1], Farahnaz Rimani Nikou[2], Arya Soultanpour[3]

[1]*Department of English, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran*
[2]*Department of ELT, Islamic Azad University, Salmas Branch, Salmas, Iran*
[3]*Department of ELT, Islamic Azad University, Urmia Branch, Urmia, Iran*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to evaluate the suitability of the textbooks "World English 1", as a book written by native speakers of English, and "ILI 1", as a book written by non native speakers of English for elementary level students based on two criteria (illustrations, and physical make-up) adopted from Doaud & Celce- Murcia's (1979) checklist in a comparative way. The study was conducted at Atlas Language Institute in Urmia and Iran language Institute (ILI) in Urmia. The participants of the study were 120 and 100 students (50 in each institute) and 20 teachers (10 in each institute). Then, the obtained data were analyzed by calculating the level of meaningfulness, mean score, and T value by using SPSS software. The results of the study revealed that illustrations and physical make-up which students rated them as having almost equal suitability were not rated as the same by teachers; since teachers, resorting their experiences and profession, believe that native written book is better than nonnative written one.

Key words: Textbook evaluation, World English1, ILI1, retrospective evaluation

I. Introduction

English, as a global language, is one of the dominant mediums in great number of areas such as politics, economy, and international education. English is the major tool to communicate with the all people around the world and the main language used for international trade and academic study (Wang, 2010). That is why people want to learn English as a foreign or second language in their countries especially in Iran. Educational materials in general and textbooks in particular have an important role in this process.

In educational programs textbooks are reliable resource for teaching and learning process; but they depend on the pedagogical environment in which they are used. Nowadays textbooks are basic elements in English language teaching. Moreover, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) state that "the tangible element that gives a language course face validity to many teachers and learners is the textbook" (p. 167).

Generally speaking, no textbook can be perfect, therefore, textbook evaluation is very important to clarify the suitability of the sources and find the best one.

In this regard, Tavakoli (1995) had also a textbook evaluation study in Iran about discourse features (speech acts). He conducted a study by using Searle's (1976) model of speech act to analyze dialogues of three English textbooks to identify if different forms of speech acts were correctly used and which function was used frequently. Tavakoli came to the conclusion that three of the five language functions, that is reprehensive (assertion - claim- report), directive (suggestion -request or command) and expressive (apology - complaint -thanks - congratulate) were presented in the text book; whereas, comissive (e.g., promise - threat) and declarations (e.g., wedding ceremony) were completely ignored.

Kanik (2002) did a material evaluation study to show effectiveness of ESP reading materials at both macro and micro level including nine criteria for English for Law courses at Bashkent University in Turkey. Checklist, interview, and observation were used as instruments of the study. The results of the study indicated that both the students and teachers had negative view about content, type of activities, physical appearance and materials were not suitable for the learners' needs.

In their paper, Rahimpour and Hashemi (2011) evaluated the tree English language textbooks used at high schools in Iran from the high school English teachers point of view. They provided 45 –item questionnaire about the five section of the textbooks (vocabulary, reading, grammar, language function, and pronunciation practice) and fifty high school teachers with more than five years of teaching experience were asked to fill the questionnaire prepared by the researchers by checking one of the four options mentioned. The result showed that the textbooks were not satisfactorily acceptable in terms of vocabulary presentation, reading and pronunciation practice. The textbooks were also not satisfactorily acceptable in the terms of practical concerns and physical make-up. According to the author, the textbooks were "to some extent" acceptable in term of grammar presentation and practice. The results of the content study showed that the English language textbook that are taught at high schools in Iran do not meet the teacher's expectations.

Reviewing the literature disclosed some gaps which were as prompts to conduct this study. To the researcher's best knowledge, no research has been done about the textbooks prepared by native and non-native speakers of English designers and specialists. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness and suitability of "World English1" as an ELT textbook written by native speakers of English which is taught in Atlas Language Institute in Urmia in comparison with "ILI1" textbook written by non-native speakers of English which is taught in Iran Language Institute in Urmia. Both of the books are taught in elementary level and that is why they are considered to be equal in content. Based on the aims of the present study the following questions were tackled to be answered in this research:

A. Which one of the books, World English 1 or ILI 1 is suitable for Iranian EFL learners in terms of the illustrations?

B. Which one of the books, World English 1 or ILI 1 is suitable for Iranian EFL learners in terms of the physical make- up?

II. Methodology

A. *Design of the study*

The present study is a descriptive study that focuses on instructors' and students' attitudes and opinions with regard to the textbooks "World English 1" and "ILI elementary 1". The data was collected from the groups of instructors and students from Atlas language institute in Urmia and Iran language institute in Urmia by means of a checklist.

B. *Participants*

This study was conducted at Atlas language institute and Iran Language Institute in Urmia. The total participants who took part in this study were 120. Twenty instructors with the teaching experience more than two years and 100 students. The students were in elementary level and aim of their course was learning English language.

C. *Instrumentation*

In evaluation, the researchers need a tool to use to elicit the required data. Among the tools in this field checklist is the common tool. This kind of instrument (checklist) can vary according to the purposes the researchers want to reach.

Checklist was used to collect required information. The checklist proposed by Daoud and Celce – Murcia (1979) was used in this study. Out of five criteria, two of them (i.e. illustrations and physical-makeup) were applied in this study.

D. *Procedure*

The checklist distributed among the participants of the study in Atlas language institute and Iran language institute in Urmia at the end of the semester. The researcher introduced the checklist to the participants and explained them how to select the options. At the end, all collected data were analyzed descriptively.

III. Results

In order to answer the research questions, a descriptive analysis of the quantitative data is used and the results are discussed in this section.

A. *Students' views for the Illustrations in World English1 and ILI1*

Considering the collected data in this section shows that there is no meaningful difference between the textbook written by native speakers of English, World English 1, and the textbook written by non native speakers of English, ILI1, at the forth criterion (illustration). The meaningfulness level is more than 0.05 and therefore there is no meaningful difference between native and non native written textbooks. In this part the participants were required to answer the following questions

   a) Do illustrations create a favorable atmosphere for practice in reading and spelling by depicting realism and action?
   b) Are the illustrations clear, simple, and free of unnecessary details that may confuse the learner?
   c) Are the illustrations printed close enough to the text and directly related to the content to help the learner understand the printed text?

Table I shows the mean score value for native and non native written textbooks about the illustration part from the students' perspectives.

Table I. The obtained mean score and t value for native and non native written textbooks about illustration (students' view)

	Mean	T value	Freedom level	Level of Meaningfulness
Native (World English1)	2.02	0.421	48	0.68
Non native (ILI1)	2			

The results of table I about the forth criterion (illustrations) on textbooks, indicate that there is no significant difference between the mean score of native and non native written textbook. The results also indicate that the level of meaningfulness is more than 0.05; therefore, the mean score difference is not meaningful. According to this table and results, students believe that no significant difference exists between World English1 and ILI1 in presenting illustrations.

B. Students' views for the Physical make-up in World English1 and ILI1

The data analysis in this section shows that there is no meaningful difference between the textbooks written by native speakers of English and the textbook written by non native speakers of English in the fifth criterion (Physical make-up). The meaningfulness level is more than 0.05 and thus, there is no meaningful difference between native and non native written textbooks. In this part the participants were asked to answer the following questions:

a) Is the cover of the book durable enough to withstand flexes as the book is opened and closed?
b) Is the text attractive (i.e., cover, page appearance, binding)?
c) Does the size of the book seem convenient for the students to handle?
d) Is the type size appropriate for the intended learners?

Table II shows the mean score value for native and non native textbook about the physical make-up part:

Table II. The obtained mean score and t value for native and non native written textbooks about physical make-up (students' view)

	Mean	T value	Freedom level	Level of Meaningfulness
Native (World Enlgish1)	1.9	0.938	48	0.471
Non native (ILI1)	1.62			

As the above table shows the level of meaningfulness is more than 0/05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the two compared books in terms of illustration in students' view.

C. Teachers' views for the Illustrations in World English1 and ILI1

The below table, i.e. table III, presents the data gathered from teachers about the illustration section of the two tackled books in this study.

Table III. The obtained mean score and t value for native and non native written textbooks about illustration (teachers' view)

	Mean	T value	Freedom level	Level of Meaningfulness
Native (World English1)	2.86	2.841	18	0.01
Non native (ILI1)	2.13			

As it is indicated in the above table, the level of meaningfulness is less than 0.05. It could be concluded that there is a meaningful difference between teachers' view about illustrations in native and non-native written textbooks in the analyzed criterion.

D. Teachers' views for the Physical make-up in World English1 and ILI1

Considering the last criterion about the textbook, table IV shows the obtained mean scores taken from teachers about the physical make-up in native and non-native written textbooks.

Table IV.The obtained mean score and t value for native and non native written textbooks about physical make-up (teachers' view)

	Mean	T value	Freedom level	Level of Meaningfulness
Native (World English1)	2.45			
		1.624	18	0.00
Non-native (ILI1)	1.72			

As it is indicated in the above table, the level of meaningfulness is less than 0.05 and therefore there is a meaningful difference between teachers' view about physical make-up in native and non native written textbooks in this study about physical make-up.

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the suitability of the textbooks "World English1", as a book written by native speakers of English, and "ILI 1", as a book written by non native speakers of English, for elementary level students by means of a checklist adopted from Daoud and Celce- Murcia (1979) based on five criteria. After conducting the evaluation, the results of the study were analyzed. The results about the illustration criterion in learners' view revealed no significant difference in the level of meaningfulness between native and non- native written textbooks. However, the data analysis of this criterion did not show the same result for teachers' view. Teachers believed that native written book is more suitable than non native written one in the case of illustration. The difference in views between teachers and learners may stem from the fact that teachers look at the books with their critical view and the experiences they have in teaching different books by which they can analyze with more details. Teachers believe that ILI1 also should have better illustration to attract the students and meet the needs of teachers. This view is supported by Griffiths (1995) who

believes that interesting, attractive and well- illustrated materials are more favorable in learners and instructors' views.

The data analysis of the next criterion, i.e. physical make-up, showed that there is no significant difference in the level of meaningfulness about the native and non native textbooks in physical make-up criterion. But, like the previous criterion, teachers' views are different from those of learners. They believe that native written book is more suitable than non native written one in the mentioned criterion. This difference can be attributed to the matter that students do not care about the physical appearance of their books, while teachers are more sensitive than their students and can see that non native written book dose not have enough quality in absorbing students. This view is in line with Dougill (1987) who argues that the physical appearance of materials should be appealing enough to motivate the learners. This can be meant that the physical make-up of ILI1 should be improved to motivate learners.

The results of this study have some implications which will provide vital information to the syllabus designers, ELT material developers and to everyone who involves in learning and teaching process especially in the field of Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The information gained from this study helps teachers' of ILI1 textbook to see different looks towards the book and try to cover the poor areas of it as far as they can. If the covering process is not workable, they can replace it by a native written book which dose not have those problems discovered in ILI1.

Further studies can be conducted to evaluate the other series of World English and ILI textbooks. Furthermore, other studies are suggested to find out the suitability and effectiveness of the mentioned textbooks using composite evaluation. It is hoped that these kinds of studies will result in better understanding of the nature of textbook and help the literature in general.

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