

**Karo KARAPETYAN**  
**Hossein ASLANABADI**  
*Yerevan State University*

## **EVALUATING IRANIAN HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS**

*One of the major problems of language learning in Iran is that most of our language learners do not have any clear knowledge about the culture of the people whose language they learn which leads to some sort of misunderstanding. This reveals the fact that as time passes the intercultural communication between this generation of students and the English language communities will become weaker and weaker in future. Their capacity to express themselves in the foreign language fluently after studying English at high school even for six years is not sufficient to communicate in English. It seems that it is partly due to the textbooks used, and partly to the kinds of instruction, procedures, methods and techniques used for teaching English as a foreign language at high schools.*

*This paper has taken an analytic look at the course objectives and textbooks by careful analyses of the content of high school English textbooks prepared and published by the ministry of education in Iran with special reference to the foreign language culture and comparison of the two cultures.*

**Key words:** *intercultural communication, high school textbooks, methods and techniques, content and principles of teaching*

A careful look at the English language textbooks in Iran demonstrates that a foreign language culture or any comparison of cultures is totally ignored in them /Birjandy et al, 2012, High school English textbooks; book 1, 2, and 3/. Although the content of High School English textbooks is expected to teach the language and the culture which are different from the learners' mother tongue and the culture of their own country, no foreign language culture or tradition is explicitly discussed in the texts of the textbooks or implicitly reviewed in the pictures, which any language learner is naturally eager to know.

As our research hypothesis is that the present high school English textbooks, procedures, methods and techniques used for teaching English cannot help learners to overcome their communication problems in English, the research should answer whether it is possible to make proper changes in the content and structure of Iranian high school English textbooks to help to improve the learners' ability to deepen their knowledge of the language and their intercultural communication skills of EFL in Iran.

The problem here seems to be bidirectional. First, the textbooks themselves should be written in a way that may encourage and motivate the learners to be engaged in the learning activities, and, second, teachers should base the teaching on

new methods, techniques and strategies to prepare their students to take an active part in learning activities in order to achieve the goal: i.e. communication.

In any pages of the a.m. textbooks one can only find proofs of irrelevant, contradicting and even culturally meaningless images which only represent Iranian culture. The pictures presented in these books are irrelevant with regard to the presentation of culture which is crucial in any language learning environment. So, for a new language learner who is eager to learn about the people and their culture along with learning their language, these books appear to be boring and tiresome. No reference to English Speaking countries was found, nor was a picture exclusively dealing with cross-cultural comparison. High school textbooks developed in Iran seem to fail to meet the standards normally used in the preparation of materials of this type. Incorporating the cultural and social aspects of language in these books is an important issue which seems to have been neglected /Aliakbari, 2004, Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012, Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011/. Since textbooks have very great role in any teaching and learning settings and students usually willingly and uncritically absorb knowledge represented by their textbooks, this study is going to investigate a discourse analysis of cultural factors which are implicitly or explicitly mentioned in the texts and through the pictures presented in Iranian High School textbooks.

The texts selected for high school textbooks should be authentic or authentic like, not too difficult for the learners, suitable for the teaching goals and usable in the series of activities, lending themselves as a resource of information and ideas. They should also have currency of topics, situations and contexts. Some of the reading texts, included in high school textbooks, lack currency.

The reading parts of the high school English textbooks have not been organized according to the level of difficulty or background knowledge of the learners. The first lesson of grade one is more difficult than the next two lessons and it has so many new vocabulary items and expressions (see: high school textbooks; Book 1, 2, and 3). The type of activities and exercises included in the comprehension part are not enough to really develop reading skills in the students as for developing this skill all the techniques related to it such as predicting the content of a text, scanning, skimming, intensive reading, extensive reading and guessing the meaning of unknown words can be dealt with. It seems that the focus is on grammatical points because a high proportion of work is on this point. "Speak out" includes some drill exercises which seem to be more grammar exercises than developing speaking skills. Although these exercises are oral drills and should be practiced orally in the classroom, they are mostly assigned as homework assignments to be done at home and are changed to writing exercises so the real aim of this part is ignored.

In "Write it down" most of the exercises are completion of sentences, responding to questions, or writing out some items related to grammatical points. Most of the exercises have a model to follow, which will detract from motivation of new answers and decrease creativity in responses. There is little room to expand on these exercises. Some of the questions require students to select a verb tense but do not invite them to go further and create their own sentences. There is little recycling

of the grammatical points learned and practiced throughout the lessons so a grammatical point which is so emphasized in a lesson is forgotten during the course. Some exercises lack clarity of directions so they are not clear to both students and the teacher. Let's consider Book 1 for grade one, lesson 8, Speaking 3, the instruction requires the students to answer the questions. Some of the questions are in passive voice and others are in active voice and the grammatical point taught during the lesson is passive so the students become confused if to answer all questions in passive or not. Apart from these drawbacks, the type of activities and exercises do not require the students to have active participation and do not encourage group work. The dialogue sections provided in the "Language Function" present few genuine or real-life situations. The conversations are superficially organized and pronunciation is taught by using exercises based on contrastive pairs.

The analysis of high school textbooks shows that in most English classes, the teachers cannot use English as a means for communication since this will take longer time to present the lessons which may cause anxiety for the teachers. They explain types of activities, grammar points and cultural information in Farsi. They translate the reading passages and new words into Farsi and do not allow the students to work out the meaning of the new words from the passage and comprehend the text for themselves. This prevents the students from achieving the desired goals and most of them cannot understand the unseen passages. However, the teacher can ask the students to translate some words or phrases just to show him/her that they have understood it. In presenting vocabulary, the teachers can use different techniques for example, showing a real object, showing a picture, using actions and facial expressions, giving examples, using synonyms and antonyms, etc. But most of our teachers just resort to giving Farsi equivalents of the words and ask the students to memorize the words in the list along with their Farsi translation. But we know that we tend to recall words through their meaningful association with other words which appear in collocation in the texts (e.g.: Doctor is likely to appear in texts in which medicine, patient, pain or hospital appear). It is for this reason that learning vocabulary in context is much more useful than learning isolated words. It is better when introducing a new word, the teacher draws the attention of the students to other related words. As most of the words introduced in a lesson do not recycle through other lessons, and if the students do not encounter or use acquired words for a long time, they forget them rapidly, the teacher can introduce games and exercises regularly to give the students an opportunity to help them recall words they have learned before. In that way, the students refresh their mind and the availability of the words is increased.

The materials selected for a textbook should satisfy the students' needs and interests and motivate them to get involved in classroom activities and in the learning process. The researchers' findings showed that most of the reading texts included in English textbooks are not suitable for the age and do not motivate the students. To find out how the students feel about their course book materials, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed among learners in three high school levels both for girls and

boys in two high schools in Iran. The analysis shows, that the content of the textbooks does not motivate the learners to get involved in classroom activities. The results of the research proved the researchers' viewpoints.

The result of the study proves these exercises and activities do not satisfy most of the students' needs with different motivations for learning English. For example, only 21% of girls and 28% of boys believe that their English textbooks are excellent in helping them learn English. Only 12% of the girls and 9% of the boys believe that texts for reading have been organized according to the difficulty level.

As it was mentioned before, most of the problems which Iranian students have regarding English learning are due to the content and structure of the textbooks and teaching techniques. In order to test the hypothesis, a questionnaire including 30 questions was distributed between 58 boys and 75 girls in two high schools in Tabriz, Iran. The answers rated "very much or excellent", "fair", "poor" and "very poor". Among those questions only 15 items directly related to the topic of this paper i.e. evaluating high school textbooks and techniques used in the class were chosen.

The researchers believe that high school textbooks do not help students achieve their desired objectives. The findings of the study show that only 22% of girls and 32% of boys believe that their textbooks have an excellent role in helping them achieve their objectives, while 36% of girls and 16% of boys say the books have a poor role in helping them achieve the goals. The charts show that only 28% of boys and 21% of girls believe that in comparison with other English books they are familiar with, their textbooks are excellent in helping them learn English. 30% of boys and 21% of girls think the textbooks have a poor role in helping them learn English.

It is a known fact in methodology of compiling textbooks that the selection of appropriate and native-like reading materials is a crucial component in the establishment of a productive reading programme. Reading texts is the very important part of each lesson and a good syllabus designer can provide various activities and tasks based on the reading passage in order to improve students' reading skills. 24% of girls and 34% of boys believe that the reading materials are very useful to encourage them to learn English. 38% of girls and 23% of boys believe that they are more or less useful. The organization of reading texts according to the difficulty level is an important factor in encouraging students to work on reading materials. Only 12% of the girls and 9% of the boys believe that the reading texts have been organized according to the difficulty level. 36% of girls and 28% of the boys think that the organization of the materials is fair while 31% of girls and 24% of boys think the materials have poor organization and 16% of girls and 32% of boys feel that the materials have a very poor organization. Page layout of the textbooks is another factor which affects learning. Some texts overwhelm the students with too much textual information so that students lose their interest and enthusiasm for learning. Nobody can deny the effect of graphic elements like illustrations, photographs, maps, charts, etc. 25% of girls and 21% of boys hold that the layout of their textbooks is very good and encourage them to

learn the language. 51% of girls and 29% of boys think the books are fairly appropriate in this regard.

The type of exercises included in the textbooks can play an important role in helping students achieve the educational goals. Tasks which are designed to increase students' involvement, those which are interesting and require active participation of learners enhance the rate of learning. 25% of girls and 38% of boys believe that the exercises of the book help them achieve the learning goals. 49% of girls and 45% of boys think they are fair. 20% of girls and 16% of boys feel that they hardly help them and 3% of girls and 2% of boys state that they are very poor in helping them to overcome their learning problems.

Communicative language teaching emphasizes pair and group work in the classroom so that the activities and tasks of the textbooks are completed through pair work in the classroom. When completing the tasks in the classroom, the teacher can monitor the students' tasks and make sure they have understood the instructions. When assigning the tasks to be done as homework, the teacher cannot ensure that they have done the tasks themselves. In our study, 57% of girls and 26% of boys believe that doing the tasks in the classroom is very effective in learning. 23% of girls and 20% of boys think it is fairly effective. 16% of girls and 25% of boys feel that it has little effect and 3% of girls and 28% of boys think it has a very low effect in learning the language.

To overcome the existing problems connected with the efficiency of textbooks in learning English at Iranian high schools, it is necessary, first of all, to give a well defined objective of the English course. In our opinion, the language material should be presented in a rich variety of oral and reading text-types, including newspaper extracts, conversations, notes, etc. To make the textbooks more interesting and stimulate the students' motivation and enthusiasm to learn the language, cartoon stories, poems, and colored pictures can be used. The tasks and activities involved should be of a kind to emphasize the four skills and require on the part of the students the ability to do different activities with the language such as to describe people, make suggestions, give advice, etc.

To sum up, it is necessary to bear in mind that the materials of the textbooks should be based on scientifically proved principles of selection as well as to stress the idea that language is used in a social context. Students should work regularly in pairs, and sometimes in groups, simulating social interaction. Most of the tasks should be done in the classroom with emphasis on pair or group work while the teacher monitors their performance. Some of the workbook materials should be designed so that they can be used for independent study, although they can equally well be used in the classroom with the teacher's supervision. Once students are familiar with the style, they will realize that they can approach the texts and deal with exercises on their own. To increase the rate of learning, more extensive use of language teaching aids attached to the textbooks (recordings, wall display materials, video films, computer software programs, etc.) is suggested, since technology provides an exciting means of helping students develop language skills. Combining computers

with video disks provides an exciting advancement in the use of modern technology to teach the language. The number of sessions of English classes should be increased at least to four in a week. In teacher's book the techniques and procedures for teaching different parts of the textbooks should be clearly explained so that there should be more correspondence between the techniques used in the classroom by different teachers to develop students' English competence.

## REFERENCES

1. Aliakbari M. The place of culture in the Iranian ELT textbooks in high school level, 2004 // *9th Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics Conference, Namseoul University, Korea. Retrieved* (Vol. 21, No. 09, p. 2008).
2. Birjandy P., Soheili A., Noroozi M. & Mahmoodi Gh. English Book 1. Tehran: Textbook Publishing Company of Iran, 2012.
3. Birjandy P., Noroozi M. & Mahmoodi Gh. English Book 2. Tehran: Textbook Publishing Company of Iran, 2012.
4. Birjandy P., Noroozi M. & Mahmoodi Gh. English Book 3. Tehran: Textbook Publishing Company of Iran, 2012.
5. Brown H. D. The optimal distance model of second language acquisition // *TESOL Quarterly*, 157-164, 1980.
6. Brown H. D. Breaking the language barrier. Yarmouth, ME.: Intercultural Press, 1991.
7. Brown H. D. Principles of language learning and teaching. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994.
8. Ghorbani M. R. ELT in Iranian high school in Iran, Malaysia, and Japan // *Reflections of how test influences use of prescribed textbooks*. Malaysia: University of Patra, 2007.
9. Khajavi Y. & Abbasian R. English language teaching, national identity and globalization in Iran: The case of public schools // *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(10), 2011.
10. Kramsch C. Language and Culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
11. Kramsch C. Language and Culture. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2001.
12. Kramsch C. The privilege of the intercultural speaker. In Byram & Fleming // *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective. Approaches through drama and Ethnography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
13. Rajabi S. & Ketabi S. Aspects of Cultural Elements in Prominent English Textbooks for EFL Setting // *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(4), 2012.
14. Richards J. C., Platt J. & Platt H. Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. London: Longman, 1992.

**Կ. ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ, Հ. ԱՍԼԱՆԱԲԱԴԻ – Իրանի դպրոցների ավագ դասարաններում օգտագործվող անգլերեն լեզվի դասագրքերի վերլուծություն.** – Հոդվածը նվիրված է դասագրքերի վերլուծությանն ու գնահատմանը ըստ բովանդակության, կառուցվածքի, վարժությունների համակարգի, ուսումնական նյութերի հետ աշխատելու հնարների: Հոդվածում դիտարկվում է նաև այդ դասագրքերի համապատասխանությունը ժամանակակից պահանջներին՝ որպես օտար լեզվի ուսուցման միջոց: Քննադատորեն նշվում է այն փաստը, որ դասագրքերը չեն անդրադառնում միջմշակութային հաղորդակցությանը, չկան երկու մշակույթների համեմատության վրա հիմնված վարժություններ, փաստավավերական տեքստեր: Վարժությունները հստակ տարբերակված չեն կատարման տեսանկյունից, ինչպես նաև չեն ապահովում բավարար թեմատիկ աշխատանք դասերի բառապաշարի հետ:

Հոդվածում ներկայացված են սովորողների շրջանում անցկացված հարցումների վերլուծության արդյունքները՝ ուսումնական նյութի ընտրության և այդ նյութի հիման վրա ուսումնական գործընթացի կազմակերպման արդյունավետության վերաբերյալ, ինչպես նաև խորհուրդ է տրվում ուսումնական գործընթացը կառուցել հաղորդակցական մոտեցման հիման վրա:

**Բանալի բառեր.** դասագրքեր բարձր դասարանների համար, միջմշակութային հաղորդակցություն, մեթոդներ և հնարներ, ուսուցման սկզբունքները և բովանդակությունը

**К. КАРАПЕТЯН, Г. АСЛАНАБАДИ – Анализ учебников по английскому языку для старших классов школ Ирана.** – Статья посвящена анализу и оценке учебников с точки зрения их содержания, структуры, системы упражнений, приемов работы с учебным материалом равно как и их соответствия современным требованиям, предъявляемым к учебникам как к средству овладения английским языком. Критически отмечается тот факт, что в материалах учебников очень слабо отражена такая важная сторона обучения как межкультурная коммуникация, очень мало упражнений основанных на сравнении двух культур, аутентичных текстов. Дифференциация упражнений с точки зрения их выполнения не четкая, а также не достаточно обеспечена тематическая работа со словарем уроков.

В статье представлены результаты анализа опроса учащихся об эффективности отбора учебного материала и построения учебного процесса на основе этого материала. В статье рекомендуется строить учебный процесс на основе коммуникативного подхода к овладению иностранным языком.

**Ключевые слова:** учебники для старших классов, межкультурная коммуникация, методы и приемы, содержание и принципы обучения