



Evaluation of “*First Certificate Gold Course Book*”: Evidence from Students of a Private English Institute in Iran

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate the *first certificate Gold course book* (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) taught at Mehr English Institute in Lahijan (Guilan Province, Iran). The objectives of this book focused on developing a communicative competence, providing plenty of practice, including listening and reading texts to bring the course up to date, including writing tasks, etc. The sample consisted of 35 EFL learners who were selected through random sampling. Also, 6 teachers evaluated the textbook. The researcher used a quantitative research survey design which includes a researcher-made evaluation checklist on the basis of eight checklist references. The course book was evaluated according to five key aspects: design and organization, topics, skills and strategies, practical considerations and illustrations, and activities. Quantitative data was obtained through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 23 items. Descriptive statistics including percentage were calculated for each item of the questionnaire. Findings indicated that majority of participants and teachers had positive views toward the textbook. It was concluded that despite having a few shortcomings, the course book was fairly successful according to its intended objectives. In the light of these findings, some pedagogical implications are discussed.

Keywords: First Certificate Gold Course Book, Evaluation, Checklist, English Language Teaching (ELT), Iranian EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are considered as the basis for the language content and skills (Richards, 2001). They are identified as sources in presenting the materials, and sources for learners to practice and do the activities. Textbooks provide the learners with a reference source on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Further, they are served as self-study sources for learners and syllabi (Cunningsworth, 1995). Actually, textbooks act as key components in most language programs. They provide the learners with the necessary input (Richards, 2001). They foster effective and quick learning of the language (Sheldon, 1988). Additionally, they are served as a support for the beginner teachers who have not yet gained confidence (Cunningsworth, 1995). As a

matter of fact, course books are widely perceived as the main map of ELT programs (Sheldon, 1988).

Regarding the advantages of textbooks, Hutchinson and Torress (1994) believed that textbooks help teachers be pedagogically innovative by mentioning brilliant ideas. Further, Sheldon (1988) stated that they represent the visible heart of any ELT program. According to him, their merits are embedded in their credibility that makes them more reliable than teacher-generated or in-house materials.

Textbook evaluation is an applied linguistic activity through which teachers, administrators, materials developers, and supervisors can "make judgments about the effect of the materials" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 15). Additionally, Mertens (2005, p.47) defines the process of evaluation as "determining the worth, merit, or value of something".

Sheldon (1988) suggested several reasons for textbook evaluation. He pointed out that the selection of an ELT textbook often indicates an important educational decision in which there is considerable financial, professional, or even political investment. A thorough evaluation would make the teaching staff and management of institutions see the differences among textbooks on the markets. Moreover, it would familiarize them with a textbook's content. Textbook evaluation would help educators identify the special weaknesses and strengths. Also, it would include obtaining information for use in judging the worth of programs, products, procedures, or objectives (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

A lot of textbook evaluation researchers such as Harmer (2001), McDonough and Shaw (2003), Byrd (2001), and Tomlinson (2003, 2008) used the checklists to help the language teachers evaluate ELT textbooks (Litz, 2005). One advantage of using this approach is that it can provide a systematic way to ensure that all appropriate items are taken into consideration (McGrath, 2002). According to Nation and Macalister (2010), the checklists need to be reliable, valid, and practical. A checklist is likely to be reliable if the people using it are trained to use it, if the items on it can be understood clearly by each person using it, and if it contains several items. Also, a checklist is likely to be valid if it is based on a well-thought-out, well-researched system of knowledge that is relevant to what is being evaluated. Further, a checklist is likely to be practical if it is easy to use, if it is not too long, and if it is easy to interpret its results.

Actually, various approaches of checklists (e.g. evaluation of cognitive skills) for ELT textbook evaluation provide EFL/ESL teachers with different criteria such as practicality and authenticity. According to Dudley-Evan and St. John (1998), language teachers should select, evaluate, and adapt textbooks to match the learners' needs and the materials objectives.

In Iranian context, the EFL materials have not met the expectations of most learners and teachers. They buy some supplementary textbooks to make up for the shortcomings of textbooks (cited in Shafiee Nahrkhalaji, 2012). Therefore, the objective of this study is

to evaluate the first certificate Gold course book (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) as one of the available textbooks on the markets. It seems that it is very rare to find studies that addressed the present textbook in Iranian context. So, the finding of this study can be beneficial for teachers and learners. It may help them compare the merits and shortcomings of this textbook with other available textbooks. This study is also important for the material developers. The results will provide them a good reason behind the need to adjust the textbook to the students' needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Iran where English is used as a foreign language, several textbooks (e.g. Interchange, Top Notch, English Result, Person to Person, etc.) are used very widely in language institutes. It seems that extensive use of textbooks like Top Notch, Headway, and Interchange (Salslow & Ascher, 2006) gets the researchers to evaluate the merits and shortcomings of present textbooks. Despite all merits of these textbooks, a lot of Iranian teachers are not always sure of their currently used textbooks. Thus, to meet the students' need, adapting and evaluating other available textbooks may be necessary.

The field of ELT textbook evaluation has a limited supply of literature (Litz, 2005). A few empirical studies have evaluated ELT textbooks (e.g. Top Notch, Interchange, etc.). For instance; Al-Madany (2009) investigated students' attitudes toward the Headway Series. Results revealed that Saudi students were satisfied with the textbook. Also, Ranalli (2002) evaluated the New Headway Upper-Intermediate used at Yonsei University. Findings showed that the textbook was well-written in terms of fluency and accuracy. Regarding nationwide research (Iran), Shafiee Nahrkhalaji (2012) evaluated Top Notch Series according to their attractiveness, the suitability of exercises, the practicality of the textbook, the clarity of instructions, etc. Results indicated that the researcher found the textbook appropriate in EFL context. In addition, Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi (2009) carried out an evaluation on Interchange Series using Littlejohn's framework (1998). It was concluded that the textbooks were in line with their objectives to some extent. For instance; findings showed that they encouraged students to use the language.

Although a few studies have been conducted in the area of textbook evaluation, no research has already investigated the strengths and weaknesses of first certificate Gold course book (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) in Iranian EFL context.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to carry out an evaluation through a researcher-made checklist on the *first certificate Gold course book* (Aclam & Burgess, 2006). To achieve this purpose, the present study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1). To which extent is *first certificate Gold course book* appropriate in terms of the design and organization?
- 2). To which extent is *first certificate Gold course book* appropriate in terms of the topics?

- 3). To which extent is *first certificate Gold course book* appropriate in terms of the skills and strategies?
- 4). To which extent is *first certificate Gold course book* appropriate in terms of the practical considerations and illustrations?
- 5). To which extent is *first certificate Gold course book* appropriate in terms of the activities?

METHOD

Research Design

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, a quantitative research survey design using a random sampling method was used.

Participants

The sample of this study included 35, out of 60, upper-intermediate students of Mehr Institute in Lahijan (Guilan Province, Iran). They were selected randomly. Actually, only 35 participants, who had an interest in the course book evaluation, were willing to participate in this study. They were both male and female students with the age range of 19 to 24.

Materials

Material used for the purpose of the present study included: Acklam and Burgess's (2006) book on *first certificate Gold course book*.

Instruments

To investigate the merits and drawbacks of the current textbook, common features of eight checklists were browsed. The focus of checklists was on the specific domains (e.g. design and organization, skills and strategies, etc.). Due to short of time, very broad approaches checklists were not taken into account. For instance; the model provided by Breen and Candline's (1987) seems very complex.

The scale used in the present study was constructed from the common elements from the checklists of Cunnigsworth (1995), Ur (1996), Eskey and Grabe (1988), Littlejohn (1998), Litz (2005), Sheldon (1988), Sung Kyun Kwan University (2000), and Garinger (2000). That is, the *first certificate Gold course book* (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) was scrutinized against design and organization, skills and strategies, practical consideration and illustrations, topics, and exercises. Actually, the five mentioned domains were taken into consideration in order to meet learning objectives. Further, the same domains were focused on the similar studies conducted on the textbooks like Interchange Series. Another objective was to develop a checklist of factors that was easy to understand by the upper-intermediate participants.

The newly developed checklist was checked for its content validity by three university professors (Ph.D. in TEFL). To make sure about reliability, the internal consistency was an alpha of 0.76 and 0.74 for intra-rater reliabilities, and 0.72 for inter-rater reliability.

Then, the researcher-made questionnaire was distributed among the participants. The questionnaire incorporated 23 items based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Excellent to Very weak. It is worth noting that in order to capture the necessary information needed for this study and to keep the questionnaire short; investigating more than 23 items was avoided. Then, it was translated into Persian by the researcher. The translated version was piloted with 17 students from a similar population. The Cronbach alpha reliability was 0.8.

Procedure

Before conducting the study, the participants were informed about it. Although, informing the participants may hazard the results of the study, it was an inevitable decision. It was a danger that the questionnaire may be incorrectly completed. Thus, the respondents were given extra time to think about their answers.

A week after informing the participants, the questionnaire was distributed. To ensure that there was no misunderstanding about the questions asked (e.g. writing styles, fluency), they were explained in detail. Then, to make clear any unknown concept or something, the respondents were given opportunity to ask their questions. Next, they were asked to complete the questionnaire in no more than 45 minutes.

Shortly after collecting data, six English teachers expressed their willingness to participate in this study. All the teachers had opportunity to teach Interchange Series, English Result, and first certificate Gold course book. Due to short of time and some restrictions of Mehr Institute, they only agreed to answer the expository questions. It took them less than 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, descriptive statistics procedures (percentage) were used to investigate the research questions.

RESULTS

The following four statements investigated listening skill:

1. To what extent are the listening texts interesting?
2. To what extent is the listening material as authentic as possible?
3. To what extent is the listening material accompanied by background information?
4. To what extent is the listening material accompanied by activities and questions?

Item one was concerned with the students' interest in listening materials. More than half of the respondents (60%) chose Average. That is, the listening texts were within their interest to some extent. Only 3% of the respondents supported the statement that "the listening texts are interesting to high extent". That is, they chose Excellent. Also, 37% of the respondents chose Good. That is, they had positive views. Nobody chose Weak or Very weak alternatives. In other words, none of the respondents had negative views.

With regard to the second item, 37% of the respondents chose Good and 63% of them chose Average. That is, most of the respondents were in favour of the claim that "the listening material is as authentic as possible".

Item three evaluated the background information. While 3% of the respondents chose Weak, more than half of the respondents thought that the listening material was accompanied by background information to some extent. That is, they chose Average (54%). In addition, less than half of the respondents had positive views. In other words, 43% of them chose Good.

Regarding item four, all of the respondents had positive attitudes. No one chose Weak or Very weak alternatives. More than half of the respondents thought that the listening materials were accompanied by activities and questions to some extent. That is, 60% of them chose Average. Further, more than one third of the respondents (37%) chose Good and 3% of them chose Excellent, respectively.

The following three statements investigated speaking skill:

5. To what extent is material for spoken English well-designed to equip learners for real-life interactions?

6. To what extent are the speaking skills adequately covered?

7. To what extent does the textbook practice natural pronunciation such as stress and intonation?

Item five aimed at finding out whether the material for spoken English was well-designed to equip learners for real-life interactions. Only 3% of the respondents chose Weak. They might believe that the material for spoken English was not adequately well-designed to equip learners for real-life interactions. On the contrary, less than one third of the respondents (26%) chose Good and 71% of them chose Average, respectively. That is, they had positive views.

Regarding item six, more than half of the respondents (66%) chose Good, 8% chose Excellent, and 26% chose Average, respectively. Actually, no one had negative attitudes towards the claim "the speaking skills are adequately covered".

In reply to item seven, one third of the respondents believed that the textbook did not appropriately practice natural pronunciation such as stress and intonation. That is, they chose Weak (23%) and Very weak (11%), respectively. More than half of the respondents (63%) chose Average. That is, they believed that the textbook practice natural pronunciation such as stress and intonation to some extent. Only 3% of the respondents supported the claim that "natural pronunciation such as stress and intonation are appropriately practiced in the textbook". That is, they chose Good.

The following four statements investigated reading skill:

8. To what extent does the textbook teach the reading strategies such as visualizing, finding signal words, etc.?

9. To what extents are top-down and bottom-up reading strategies used?

10. To what extent are the reading selections authentic pieces of language?

11. To what extent is there sufficient reading material?

With regard to reading strategies such as visualizing, finding signal words, etc., less than one third of the respondents were dissatisfied with adequate coverage of aforementioned skills in the textbook. That is, 14% of the respondents chose Weak and 3% of them chose Very weak. On the contrary, more than two third of the respondents felt that such reading strategies were taught by the textbook to some extent. That is, 74% of them chose Average. Further, 9% of the respondents chose Good. In other words, they were satisfied with adequate coverage of reading strategies.

Item nine attempted to evaluate both top-down and bottom-up reading strategies. In reply to this item, more than one third of the respondents had negative view. That is, 31% chose Weak and 6% chose Very weak alternatives. On the contrary, a few respondents had positive views. That is, they chose Good (6%). Also, more than half of the respondents believed that top-down and bottom-up reading strategies are used to some extent. That is, they chose Average (57%).

Item ten was concerned with authenticity of reading passages. On the one hand, some of the respondents thought that reading passages were authentic. That is, they chose Good (17%). On the other hand, less than one third of the respondents might believe that reading selections didn't contain real-life issues. That is, they chose weak (23%) and very weak (3%). Further, more than half of the respondents felt that reading selections were authentic pieces of language to some extent. That is, they chose Average (57%).

With regard to item eleven, 23% of the respondents chose Excellent, 68% chose Good, and 9% chose Average, respectively. That is, majority of the respondents had positive attitudes towards the claim "there is sufficient reading material".

The following three statements investigated writing skill:

12. To what extent are writing activities suitable in terms of amount of guidance/control?

13. To what extent are writing activities suitable in terms of use of appropriate style?

14. To what extent do activities in the textbook help learners improve their writing skills such as punctuation, spelling, etc.?

Item twelve referred to suitability of writing activities in terms of amount of guidance/control. 17% of the respondents chose Weak and 11% of them chose Very weak. No one chose Excellent or Good alternatives. It is understood that less than one third of the respondents were in favour of the idea that writing activities were not suitable enough in terms of guidance/control. Also, 72% of the respondents chose Average. That is, more than two third of the respondents thought that writing activities were suitable in terms of amount of guidance/control to some extent.

In response to item thirteen, almost less than one third of the respondents thought that writing activities were not suitable enough according to the use of appropriate styles.

That is, 26% of the respondents chose Weak and 3% of them chose Very weak, respectively. More than two third of the respondents believed that writing activities were suitable according to the use of appropriate styles to some extent. That is, they chose Average (71%).

In item fourteen, respondents' ratings were quite negative. None of the respondents had positive attitudes. More than two third of the respondents were in favour of the idea that activities in the textbook help learners improve their writing skills to some extent. That is, they chose Average (74%). Further, 23% of the respondents chose Weak and 3% of them chose Very weak alternatives.

The following item investigated design and organization:

15. To what extent does the presence of structures and vocabularies move gradually from simple to more complex?

Less than one third of the respondents might favour the statement "structures and vocabularies move gradually from simple to more complex to some extent". In other words, 20% of the respondents chose Average. In addition, 9% of the respondents chose Excellent and no one chose Weak or Very weak alternatives. More than two third of the respondents thought that the textbook provided them with appropriate presence of structures and vocabularies. That is, they chose Good (71%).

The following two items investigated topics:

16. To what extent does the subject matter motivate and interest you?

17. To what extent are there enough variety and range of topics?

Regarding item sixteen, more than one third of the respondents (37%) who chose Good and 9% of them who chose Excellent thought that the subject matter appropriately motivates them. Further, more than half of the respondents might believe that the subject matter was interesting to some extent. That is, they chose Average (54%).

Item seventeen was concerned with variety and range of topics. No one chose negative alternatives (Weak or Very weak). More than half of the respondents thought that there was sufficient variety in the topics. That is, they chose Good (60%). Less than one third of the respondents believed that there was range of topics to some extent. That is, 26% of them chose Average. Also, a few respondents were in favour of the claim that the textbook provided them with appropriate range of topics. That is, they chose Excellent (14%).

The following three items investigated activities:

18. To what extent are activities in the textbook balanced among various skills?

19. To what extent are adequate numbers of skill-building activities provided in every unit?

20. To what extent is fluency practiced in all four skills?

With regard to item eighteen, less than one third of the respondents chose Average (22%) and no one chose Weak and Very weak alternatives. It is understood that less than one third of the respondents supported the claim that the activities were not well-balanced among various skills. On the contrary, nearly half of the respondents (49%) who chose Good and less than one third of them (29%) who chose Excellent believed that activities in the textbook were appropriately balanced among various skills.

Item nineteen attempted to evaluate the number of skill-building activities provided in each unit. More than two third of the respondents thought that the number of skill-building activities provided in units was appropriately good. That is, they chose Good (71%) alternative. Also, 20% of the respondents chose Excellent and 9% of them chose Average, respectively. In other words, majority of the respondents had positive attitudes.

Regarding item twenty, almost half of the respondents chose Average. That is, 49% of them thought that fluency was practiced in all four skills to some extent. Further, more than one third of the respondents believed that fluency was well-practiced in all four skills. That is, they chose Good (39%). Likewise, 9% of the respondents chose Excellent. Only 3% of them chose Weak. It is understood that a few respondents had negative views.

The following three items investigated practical considerations and illustrations:

21. To what extent is the book attractive in appearance?
22. To what extent do the illustrations motivate learners to talk about the subject?
23. To what extent are appropriate visual materials available?

Item twenty one referred to the appearance of textbook. 23% of the respondents chose Good and 6% of them chose Excellent, respectively. Whereas, 20% of the respondents chose Weak and 6% of them chose Very weak. It is understood that less than one third of the respondents had positive attitudes and less than one third of the respondents had negative attitudes. Also, less than half of the respondents thought that the textbook was attractive in appearance to some extent. That is, 45% of them chose Average.

Item twenty two was concerned with the illustrations. None of the respondents chose Very weak. Only 3% of them chose Weak. That is, a few respondents found the illustrations inappropriate. On the contrary, majority of the respondents had positive views towards the claim that “the illustrations motivate learners to talk about the subject”. That is, 46% of the respondents chose Average, 42% of them chose Good, and 9% chose Excellent, respectively.

With regard to item twenty three, nearly half of the respondents thought that visual materials were appropriate to some extent. That is, 46% of them chose Average. Also, slightly more than one third of the respondents believed that the textbook provided them with appropriate visual materials. In other words, 34% of the respondents chose Good. On the contrary, 20% of them chose Weak. They might think that visual materials were not available as much as possible.

Table1: Student textbook evaluation

<i>Item No</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Very Weak</i>
1	3%	37%	60%	-	-
2	-	37%	63%	-	-
3	-	43%	54%	3%	-
4	3%	37%	60%	-	-
5	-	26%	71%	3%	-
6	8%	66%	26%	-	-
7	-	3%	63%	23%	11%
8	-	9%	74%	14%	3%
9	-	6%	57%	31%	6%
10	-	17%	57%	23%	3%
11	23%	68%	9%	-	-
12	-	-	72%	17%	11%
13	-	-	71%	26%	3%
14	-	-	74%	23%	3%
15	9%	71%	20%	-	-
16	9%	37%	54%	-	-
17	14%	60%	26%	-	-
18	29%	49%	22%	-	-
19	20%	71%	9%	-	-
20	9%	39%	49%	3%	-
21	6%	23%	45%	20%	6%
22	9%	42%	46%	3%	-
23	-	34%	46%	20%	-

This study was also concerned with the perception of six language teachers at the Private English Institute (Mehr) toward the merits and drawbacks of *first certificate Gold course book* (Aclam & Burgess, 2006). All the teachers' responses to the expository questions were analysed using descriptive analysis of percentages. Also, the data were analysed for the frequency of positive and negative attitudes.

At first, they were asked if they believed that the current textbook taught students all the skills and strategies. The results demonstrated that nearly all of the teachers (83.33) believed that there was a balance among the four skills. It seems that teachers found the textbook appropriate according to the four skills coverage. Majority of teachers agreed that speaking paragraphs and related photos required students to discuss the topics and questions. Regarding listening skill, some teachers thought that listening tasks were accompanied by relevant pictures which helped students relate the pictures to the sounds. The results also implied that several teachers were satisfied with the presenting of writing tasks. One teacher said "these activities mainly involve models and styles which are similar to that of authentic letters". On the contrary, 16.66% had a fairly negative attitude toward the skills and strategies. With respect to reading skill, one teacher said "reading passages do not motivate students. They are not controversial". Another teacher mentioned "these passages are not relevant to the students' daily life".

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of teachers' responses on the skills and strategies

Question	Frequency		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you believe that <i>first certificate Gold</i> course book teach students all the skills and strategies?	5	1	83.33	16.66

The second question investigated teachers' attitudes toward the topics and illustrations. That is, they were asked about the range of topics, availability of illustrations, etc. Teachers' answers supported the results of close-ended questions. More than half of the teachers (66.66%) thought that the textbook was open to different topics (e.g. the planet Earth, How to make a fortune, the price of fame, etc.). They believed that interesting topics encouraged students to have an active participation in classroom discussions. On the contrary, two teachers (33.33%) thought that the range of topics presented by the textbook was not successful to draw students' attention to high extent. With regard to visual images, they believed that colorful photos and different charts made the textbook appear attractive. One teacher said "effective use of appropriate illustrations helped students activate background knowledge".

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of teachers' responses on the topics and illustrations

Question	Frequency		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you think that <i>first certificate Gold course book</i> cover the various topics, illustrations, and visual images?	4	2	66.66	33.33

Finally, they were asked that how they found the textbook according to its design and activities. Some teachers (50%) indicated that the textbook provided the students with activities focused on fluency. Further, they stated that the grammatical rules and the related tasks were appropriate for the students' level. One teacher said "the grammatical items were followed by exercises which required students to activate their prior knowledge taught at the previous unit". On the other hand, some teachers (50%) thought that several students had a great difficulty with the grammatical rules. They believed that the textbook did not provide the students with appropriate instructions.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of teachers' responses on the activities and design

Question	Frequency		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you find <i>first certificate Gold course book</i> suitable in terms of its activities and design?	3	3	50	50

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed at evaluating the *first certificate Gold course book* (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) to show its strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- Findings showed that students found the present textbook appropriate according to the coverage of four skills and related activities. These findings support the results of other studies (e.g. Shafiee Nahrkhalaji, 2012). Mc Donough and Shaw (1993) stated that material developers should provide the students with sufficient opportunity to develop skills through adequate practices. Further, Mc Donough and Shaw (2003) claimed that materials should enable the learners to see how the four skills can be used effectively in appropriate contexts. In addition, integration of skills is essential in a sense that it can enable students to gain a deeper understanding of how communication works in the foreign languages.

- Results revealed that the textbook covered a range of different topics in order to enhance learning process. The fact is that including range of topics appealed to maintain the students' attention. Cunningsworth (1995) suggested that the textbooks should include subject-matter and topics of the area of interest. In addition, Wilson and Yang (2007) stated that the materials should be interesting. Actually, they should call students' interest and motivate them. Reflecting on the findings of this study, the results are in line with that of Shafiee Nahrkhalaji's (2012). According to him, Top Notch included variety of topics. He also believed that developing awareness across the different cultures was taken into consideration (e.g. American customs). Furthermore, results showed that interesting and challenging topics motivated the learners. This finding supports the results of Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi's (2009). They concluded that motivating activities helped students express themselves.

- Findings showed that the textbook satisfied majority of the students with regard to the presence of structures and vocabularies. As a matter of fact, appropriateness of content in terms of complexity is an important criterion in the process of textbook evaluation. Sheldon (1988) stated that the presence of vocabularies and structures which move from simple to complex should be taken into account.

- Nunan (2007) believed that comprehension depends on the students' activation of background knowledge. Results revealed that only a few learners had a great difficulty in comprehending the listening texts. Most of the learners had no difficulty. This may be due to the fact that the content of listening was related to the students' prior knowledge information. This finding is in harmony with that of Shafiee Nahrkhalaji's (2012). He stated that the learners had to complete the tasks. Then, the new words part was followed by authentic listening comprehension activities (e.g. a radio program). Additionally, this finding is in harmony with that of Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi's (2009). It was revealed that Interchange Series helped the learners activate the prior knowledge. Actually, teaching points in new unit were dependent on the information taught in prior units.

- Furthermore, many learners believed that the textbook provided opportunities for fluency practices and the material for practices in all four skills. This finding supports the result of Ranalli's (2002). His evaluation showed that the New Headway was well-written on the basis of fluency. Nation and Macalister (2010) suggested that language course should provide tasks and exercises aimed at enhancing the fluency with which the students can use the language they already acquire, both productively and receptively.

- Results also showed that most of the students' attitudes toward the illustrations seemed to be quite positive. They thought that appropriate illustrations created an interesting atmosphere for discussion. This result is in line with that of Shafiee

Nahrkhalaji's (2012). He concluded that visual images and colourful photos motivated students for practice. Further, this result is in line with that of Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi's (2009). It was revealed that Interchange Series provided the learners with adequate graphical illustrations. Sheldon (1988) argues that the textbooks should have an optimum density, mix of text, and graphical material on each page. Additionally, he stated that the textbooks are physical artifacts, and the author needs to recognize that layout, format, typography, and graphics are essential for a successful textbook. According to Mc Donough and Shaw (2003), clarity of layout and visuals such as tables, charts, and diagrams are as the two important criteria for textbook evaluation.

Weaknesses

- With respect to writing skill, more than two third of the respondents were not completely sure whether writing activities were appropriate according to the use of appropriate styles. Further, results showed that some learners found the writing activities inappropriate based on amount of guidance/control. Thus, it might be inferred that EFL learners were likely to find the related activities difficult to cope with. It seems that this drawback may decrease students' desire to write more.
- Results also indicated that the learners' attitudes toward the use of top-down and bottom-up reading strategies were quite negative. According to Koda (2005), comprehension occurs when the reader extracts and integrates information from the text and combines it with what he/she has already known.
- Results showed that the students' perceptions about the authentic selection of reading passages were negative to some extent. This result contradicted that of Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi's (2009). They concluded that Interchange Series provided the students with authentic passages. Cunningsworth (1995) stated that the authors should check if the reading passages are as authentic as possible.

Additionally, this study was carried out to see if students' perception was in harmony with teachers' attitude. The first expository question and 14 items of the questionnaire were designed to elicit teachers and students' perception of skills and strategies. Findings showed that there was no remarkable contradictory view between the students and the teachers' perceptions. For instance; more than half of the respondents and the majority of teachers believed that the textbook helped students activate their background knowledge and facilitated listening comprehension. Anderson and Lynch (2000) stated that successful comprehension in listening takes place when the listener has schematic knowledge and knowledge of the context. Furthermore, results revealed that the textbook required students to express their opinions. That is, speaking activities helped learners improve their ability. Additionally, exposing students to appropriate writing styles was another advantage of first certificate Gold course book (Aclam & Burgess, 2006). It seems that the textbook provided the students with the variety of authentic passages that helped them understand the style of different written texts. Also, less than one third of the students and teachers thought that the reading passages were not very motivating. In other words, a few teachers may believe that reading texts discourage students from being engaged in group discussion. Actually, they found reading passages uncontroversial.

Furthermore, the majority of teachers and students had a positive attitude toward topics and visual images. It seems that appealing pictures attracted teachers and student's attention. Nearly half of the students believed that visual materials motivated them to talk about the

topics. Results also revealed that appropriate illustrations (e.g. charts, photos) helped students activate background knowledge. Additionally, several teachers thought that various topics and colourful photos made the classroom discussions more motivating.

The third expository question "Do you find first certificate Gold course book suitable in terms of its activities and design?" was received a parallel rating by teachers. On the one hand, half of the teachers thought that the textbook was well-sequenced on the basis of grammatical rules, activities, and level of difficulty. Results revealed that many respondents had the same perception as the half of teachers. That is, they thought that the textbook provided them with appropriate presence of grammatical rules and structures. On the other hand, half of the teachers believed that grammatical items were not appropriately matched to the students' level. They claimed that most of the students were faced with grammatical difficulties. Findings showed that the teachers' attitude was in contrast with the students' perception. In other words, teachers found that several students did not perform the grammatical tasks well; however, many students claimed that they had no difficulty in grammatical rules. One of the possible reasons is that they were unwilling to perform the tasks. It seems that they found the tasks fatiguing. Another hypothesis is that they were forced to do the tasks by their teacher. It is worth noting that Cunningsworth (1995) put a great emphasis on engaging students' interests. Thus, keeping students' attention can help them acquire the grammatical structures. More importantly, the main objective of first certificate Gold course book (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) has been enhancing a communicative competence. Therefore, developing tasks that require students to focus on form-meaning structures may be more motivating.

Despite a few discrepancies found between the students' perceptions and teachers' attitudes, the general consensus was that the current textbook was fairly successful in terms of its intended objectives (e.g. motivate students to use the language).

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Finding of this study has important implications for material developers. Actually, a few points need to be taken into account. For instance; providing reading passages related to the students' daily life and including strategy-oriented writing tasks (e.g. guided writing). Furthermore, these findings hold pedagogical implications for English teachers. In fact, this evaluation helped them understand the EFL learners' attitudes toward their textbook. Also, the present study provided them with a better understanding of shortcomings. It should be noted that use of supplementary materials may improve the weaknesses.

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Turkish Abstract

“First Certificate Gold Course Book” un Değerlendirilmesi: İran'daki Bir Özel İngilizce Enstitüsünden Bulgular

Bu çalışmanın amacı Lahijan'da Mehr İngilizce Dil Enstitüsü'nde kullanılan *First certificate Gold course book* (Aclam & Burgess, 2006)'u değerlendirmektir. Bu kitabın amaçları iletişim yetkinliği geliştirmek, güncelliği sağlamak için dinleme ve okuma metinleri, yazma çalışmaları içeren çok sayıda alıştırmayı vermektir. Çalışmanın örnekleme rassal örnekleme metoduyla seçilen 35 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Ayrıca 6 öğretmen kitabı değerlendirmiştir. Araştırmacı 8 kontrol listesi referansını temel alarak araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanmış bir kontrol listesini içeren nicel anket desenini kullanmıştır. Ders kitabı 5 temel noktaya göre değerlendirilmiştir: dizayn ve organizasyon, konu başlıkları, beceriler ve stratejiler, pratik noktalar ve resimlendirme ve

aktiviteler. Nicel veriler 23 maddeli 5'li Likert ölçeğiyle elde edilmiştir. Yüzdelikleri de içerden betimsel istatistik anketin her bir maddesi için elde edilmiştir. Bulgular katılımcıların ve öğretmenlerin büyük çoğunluğunun kitaba karşı olumlu düşüncelerinin olduğunu göstermiştir. Birkaç eksikliğe rağmen kitabın beklenen amaçları doğrultusunda oldukça başarılı olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu bulgular ışığında bazı pedagojik çıkarımlar tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: First certificate gold course book, değerlendirme, kontrol listesi, İngilizce öğretimi, İranlı dil öğrencileri

French Abstract

L'Évaluation de la «First Certificate or Coursebook": Preuve de Étudiants d'un Institut Privé Anglais en Iran

Le but de cette étude était d'évaluer le *first certificate Gold course book* (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) enseigné à l'Institut anglais Mehr dans Lahijan (Guilan la Province, l'Iran). Les objectifs de ce livre concentré sur le développement une compétence communicative, la fourniture beaucoup de pratique, y compris l'écoute et la lecture de textes pour actualiser le cours, y compris l'écriture de tâches, etc. L'échantillon a consisté en 35 apprenants EFL qui ont été choisis par l'échantillonnage aléatoire. Aussi, 6 professeurs ont évalué le manuel. Le chercheur a utilisé un design d'enquête de recherche quantitatif qui inclut une liste de contrôle d'évaluation faite de chercheur sur la base de huit références de liste de contrôle. Le livre de cours a été évalué selon cinq aspects clés : design et organisation, sujets, compétences et stratégies, considérations pratiques et illustrations et activités. Des données quantitatives ont été obtenues par un questionnaire d'échelle de Likert à cinq points consistant de 23 articles. La statistique descriptive incluant le pourcentage a été calculée pour chaque article du questionnaire. Les découvertes ont indiqué que la majorité de participants et des professeurs avait des vues positives vers le manuel. On a conclu que malgré l'ayant de quelques défauts, le livre de cours était assez réussi selon ses objectifs destinés. À la lumière de ces découvertes, quelques implications pédagogiques sont discutées.

Mots-clés: First Certificate Gold Course Book, évaluation, liste de contrôle, enseignement de l'anglais (ELT), Iranien EFL apprenants

Arabic Abstract

تقييم "First Certificate Gold Course Book": أدلة من طلاب معهد اللغة الإنجليزية خاصة في إيران
وكان الغرض من هذه الدراسة لتقييم الشهادة الأولى بالطبع الذهب كتاب (Aclam & Burgess, 2006) التي تدرس في معهد اللغة الإنجليزية في مهر Lahijan (محافظة غيلان، إيران). ركزت أهداف هذا الكتاب على تطوير الكفاءة التواصلية، وتوفير الكثير من الممارسات، بما في ذلك الاستماع وقراءة نصوص لجلب بالطبع حتى الآن، بما في ذلك كتابة المهام وغير ذلك، تكونت عينة الدراسة من 35 المتعلمين EFL الذين تم اختيارهم من خلال أخذ العينات العشوائية. أيضا، 6 معلمين تقييم الكتب المدرسية. واستخدم الباحث تصميم المسح البحث الكمي الذي يتضمن قائمة مراجعة التقييم الذي الباحث على أساس من ثمانية إشارات المرجعية. تم تقييم الكتاب بالطبع وفقا لخمسة جوانب رئيسية: تصميم وتنظيم، والموضوعات والمهارات والاستراتيجيات، والاعتبارات العملية والرسوم التوضيحية، والأنشطة. تم الحصول على البيانات الكمية من خلال خمس نقاط الاستبيان مقياس ليكرت يتألف من 23 مادة. حسب الإحصاء الوصفي بما في ذلك النسبة المئوية لكل بند من بنود الاستبيان. وأشارت النتائج إلى أن الغالبية العظمى من المشاركين والمعلمين وجهات نظر إيجابية تجاه الكتب المدرسية. وخلص إلى أنه على الرغم من وجود بعض أوجه القصور، وكان الكتاب بالطبع ناجحة إلى حد ما وفقا لأهدافها المرجوة في ضوء هذه النتائج، وتناقش بعض الآثار التربوية.

الكلمات المهمة: أول شهادة المقرر الذهب كتاب، التقييم، المرجعية، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT)، والمتعلمين EFL الإيراني