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THE IMPACT OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) ON IRANIAN FEMALE INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE INVESTIGATED THE IMPACT OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) ON WRITING PERFORMANCE OF THE IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS. THERE WERE TWO GROUPS OF FORTY STUDENTS OF THE INTERMEDIATE FEMALE LEARNERS STUDYING ENGLISH IN JAHAD-E-DANESHGHAHI LANGUAGE INSTITUTE, RANGING IN AGE FROM THIRTEEN TO NINETEEN. THEY PARTICIPATED IN THEIR REGULAR CLASSES IN THE INSTITUTE AND WERE ASSIGNED TO TWO GROUPS INCLUDING AN EXPERIMENTAL GROUP OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) AND A CONTROL GROUP. FOR THE PURPOSE OF HOMOGENEITY, ALL STUDENTS IN TWO GROUPS TOOK AN ACHIEVEMENT TEST BEFORE THE TREATMENT. AS A PRE-TEST; STUDENTS WERE ASSIGNED TO WRITE A TASK AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COURSE. ONE OF THE CLASSES WAS CONDUCTED THROUGH TAKING A TBLT APPROACH ON THEIR WRITING, WHILE THE OTHER CLASS FOLLOWED REGULAR PATTERNS OF TEACHING, NAMELY TRADITIONAL APPROACH FOR TBLT GROUP THERE WERE SOME TASKS CHOSEN FROM LEARNERS' TEXT BOOK. THE TASK SELECTION WAS IN ACCORDANCE WITH LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ESL AND TOFEL WRITING SECTIONS. AT THE END OF THE TREATMENT, A POST -TEST WAS ADMINISTERED TO BOTH EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND THE CONTROL GROUP. SCORING WAS DONE ON THE BASIS OF SCORING SCALE OF "EXPOSITORY WRITING QUALITY SCALE". THE RESEARCHER USED PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST TO ANALYZE THE EFFECT OF TBLT TEACHING APPROACH ON THE WRITING PERFORMANCE OF THE LEARNERS. THE DATA ANALYSIS REVEALED THAT THE SUBJECTS IN TBLT GROUP PERFORMED BETTER ON THE WRITING PERFORMANCE POST-TEST THAN THE SUBJECTS IN CONTROL GROUP. THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY ALSO DEMONSTRATED THAT TBLT WOULD ENHANCE WRITING PERFORMANCE IN THE GROUP OF LEARNERS. MOREOVER, IT WAS INDICATED THAT TBLT HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE IN TEACHING WRITING PERFORMANCE TO IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS.

KEY WORDS: TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING, TASK, LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH, WRITING PROFICIENCY, EFL LEARNERS.

1. Introduction

Tasks have a central role in modern SLA research and especially in language pedagogy. It is in the natural setting where the word "task" entered language teaching through work with adults who needed

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to use the second language outside the classes (Allwrights, 1979; Breen, 1984; Nunan, 1989; 1993 as cited in Rosa , 2004).

The advent of “task” can be traced back from 1980s, responding to dissatisfaction with dominate principles of traditional methods which had resulted in disappointing outcomes and unsuccessful learners. At that time, tasks were considered as mechanisms for production phase of teaching a language (Norris).

Scholars have defined tasks in several different ways. Long (1985) has defined task as a piece of work undertaken freely or for the some rewards: painting a fence, filling out a form.... For Crooks (1986) task is a piece of work or activity with some specified objectives, as a part of educational course, or at work. While according to Bygate (2001), task is an activity which requires learners to use language with emphasis on meaning to attain an objective.

Considering the importance and implementation of task, Task-based language teaching approach has been proposed the notion of “task” in modern pedagogy followed communicative approaches of language teaching as the main pedagogical tool.

TBLT can be defined as a process-oriented approach to language teaching that focuses on communication (Little wood, 2004; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2005 as cited in Lai & Li, 2011). The basic point in Task-based language teaching is communicative tasks that serve as major units of curriculum while the primacy is on meaning (Lai & Li, 2011). Recently, Task-based language teaching has gained great popularity among researchers, teachers and syllabus designers in a variety of educational settings due to its signs of crystallizing in to a robust domain of inquiry, with an international conference series (www.tblt.org) , a book series (Task-based language teaching: issues, research and practice), and a healthy literature (Norris, 2009).

Rod Ellis (2003) was the pioneer researcher who proposed and elaborated “Task-based” instructional approach, which encompasses tasks of various kinds to develop learners’ communicative language ability. Harmer (2002 as cited in Rosa, 2004, p.208) summarized very clearly the stages of the TBL framework:

In the pre-task, the teacher discusses the topic with the class and may highlight useful words and phrases, helping the students to understand the task instructions. The students may hear a recording of people doing the same task. During the task cycle, the students perform the task in pairs or small groups while the teacher monitors from a distance. The students then plan what they will tell the rest of the class, what they did and how it went, and they then report on the task either orally or in writing. In the language focus stage the students examine and discuss specific features of any listening or reading text which they have looked up for the task and the teacher may conduct some form of practice of specific language features which the task has provoked.

Wray (2011) believes the main feature of Task-based Language Teaching is that it emphasizes on the complexity of tasks and primacy of communication. Basically, according to Ellis (2003), TBLT involves taking task as the basic for the whole language curriculum, which is a unit of syllabus in language pedagogy by applying a procedural syllabus consisting graded set of tasks to be accomplished by students. He states that “tasks are seen not a means by which learners acquire new knowledge of restructuring their inter-language, but simply as a means by which learners can activate their existing knowledge of the L₂ by developing fluency” (Ellis, 2003, p. 30).

Prabhu (1987) was the first researcher to consider task as the central notion of learning and teaching a language. Later, Foley (1991) described the psychological framework of TBLT. Moreover, in an attempt to operationalize Task-based theory, Brenda Dyer (1996) investigated L₁ and L₂ writing theories according to

Hillock's environmental mode and Task-based language teaching. Hillock (1986) concluded that a Task-based, process / product combination was the most effective mode of teaching composition.

Consecutively, Swain and Lapkin (2000) examined the use of first language in Task-based language learning. They concluded that there was more use of L₁ than was expected, so judicious use of L₁ can support L₂ learning. Focusing more on the details, Carless (2003) conducted a case study, implemented Task-based language teaching in Hong Kong to observe determining factors in the implementation of Task-based teaching in primary schools. Besides distinguishing the factors, he found out that examination would have some impact on what is going on in class, as well as the point that lack of teacher's proficiency will inhibit implementation of communicative approach.

More recently, Sánchez (2004) examined the role of Task-based approach in language teaching. Sánchez tried to bring positive results of using Task-based approach such as: more refined and complete foreign language syllabus, motivating students and focusing the attention of teachers and students on meaning and communicative language use. Meanwhile, Rosa (2004) investigated the effect of TBLT on young learners. He believed translation is a compulsory step, especially in reporting phase. One year later, in an attempt to reconsider Task-based language learning, Slimani-Rolls (2005) claimed that one-way and decision-making tasks are preferred regarding language development.

During a case study for Korean Secondary School classroom practice, focusing on EFL teachers' perceptions of Task-based language teaching, Jeon and Jung - Won Hahn (2005) stated that majority of teachers have a higher level of understanding about TBLT, although there are some negative views on using TBLT in class practices. Moreover, Kuteeva (2006) focused on students' collaboration on Task-based communication in on-line forums. Additionally, Carless (2007) examined the suitability of TBLT for secondary schools in Hong Kong, resulting in more flexible version of TBLT; namely, Task-supported Language Teaching. As a comprehensive attempt, Adams (2009) collected and speculated all books and articles on the topic of TBLT, while Norris (2009) considered key principles of TBLT. Later, Zhao (2011) questioned the role of Task-based theories in combination with communicative and form-focused approaches. He approved superiority of Task-based language teaching over traditional methods. At the same time in Asia, Butler (2011) investigated implementation of communicative and Task-based language teaching in Asia-Pacific region. The researcher found TBLT being adopted and used in many countries, while facing some challenges like: conceptual constraints, classroom-level constraints and societal-institutional level constraints.

Concerning local studies, TBLT implementation was examined by Rahimpour (2006) proposing three kinds of TB syllabi, concluding that TBLT will lead to greater fluency and complexity among language learners.

Sadeghi and Fazelijou (2011) from Urmia University conducted a research focusing on the role of Task-supported language teaching and Task-based language teaching in EFL learner's writing performance and grammar gains. They concluded students using revised PPP approach (TSL) learning did significantly better in grammar recognition section of the post-test, but students in Task-based language teaching did better on writings.

Considering tasks in TBLT, Maftoon and Haratmeh (2012) focused on the effectiveness of in-put _ out-put_ oriented tasks for vocabulary knowledge.

Moreover, Shabani and Ghasemi (2014), examined the effect of TBLT and CBLT (Context-based Language Teaching) on Iranian ESP learners' Reading Comprehension, preferring TBLT as more effective approach as the result.

Najjari (2014) conducted a research on the implementation of TBLT in Iran, concerning the barriers of TBLT. He resulted in a more flexible and more innovative version of TBLT to be implemented in Iran's context.

As its clear; many studies have conducted on TBLT and its efficiency and importance so far, but to the researcher's best knowledge, few studies have focused on determining beneficial approach in teaching language, especially in the Iranian context and among intermediate EFL learners. Therefore, a research question has been formulated dealing with exploring the efficiency of Task-based Language Teaching on the development of writing proficiency. The study has addressed the following question:

RQ: Does teaching writing through Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing proficiency?

2. Research methodology

Participants

As the research question entails, the required participants need to be of the same intermediate level of second language proficiency. Since the purpose of this study is to examine potential and practical ideas for how Task-based Language Teaching can be applied to Iranian language learners, this study employed a quasi-experimental design including an experimental group and a control group of intermediate level of second language proficiency participants.

Forty intermediate female learners studying English in Jihad-e-Daneshgahi Language Institute were selected to take part in this research, ranging in age from thirteen to nineteen. They were researcher's students that participated in their regular classes in the institute who were assigned to three classes. Three students of each class were omitted due to age limitation or unmatched proficiency level after the homogeneity test. Random selection of participants in a class was impossible because they had already been assigned to their existing classes by the institute.

Instruments

To accomplish the purpose of the research, three instruments were determined as required for the study:

Homogeneity Test

In order to provide homogeneity, all students in both groups have taken an achievement test before conducting the treatment. The "General English Proficiency Test", Nelson (400B) was administered before the treatment. It consisted of four sections, i.e. vocabulary, structure, reading comprehension items. This was conducted to evaluate and ensure the proficiency level of students which was supposed to be the intermediate level. Among learners, based on their scores on Nelson proficiency test, those placed in intermediate level (within one standard deviation below and above the mean), were considered as main participants.

Pre/Post-Test

It is worth noticing that since the pre-test and post-test utilized in this study were researcher-made ones, they were piloted prior to use. Reliability indices for the pre- and post-test (0.70) revealed that the researcher-made tests were accepted for the purpose of the study. Besides, the test content was validated with regard to test instructions, the relevance of questions to content, its suitability to the research goals and objectives, and the suitability of the time allocated to the tests. The remarks of the validating team, their notes and suggestions were taken in to account, and the researcher made the necessary modifications before applying the test.

Scale for Assessing Writing

The scale for Evaluating Expository Writing developed by Quellmalz (1982) was used as the framework in rating students' writing. This is a holistic analytic instrument that has six- point scales for assessing four dimensions of writing competence, focus/organization, support and mechanics. Inter-reliability test (using Cronbach alpha) indicates that the total reliability is 0.918 from the raters' perspectives and the reliability of each of them is obtained as 0.848.

Material

The specifically regular text books of the institute are Top Notch Books series written by Saslow and Ascher (2005), which were chosen to be the base of the treatments of this study as they were the text book of the institute.

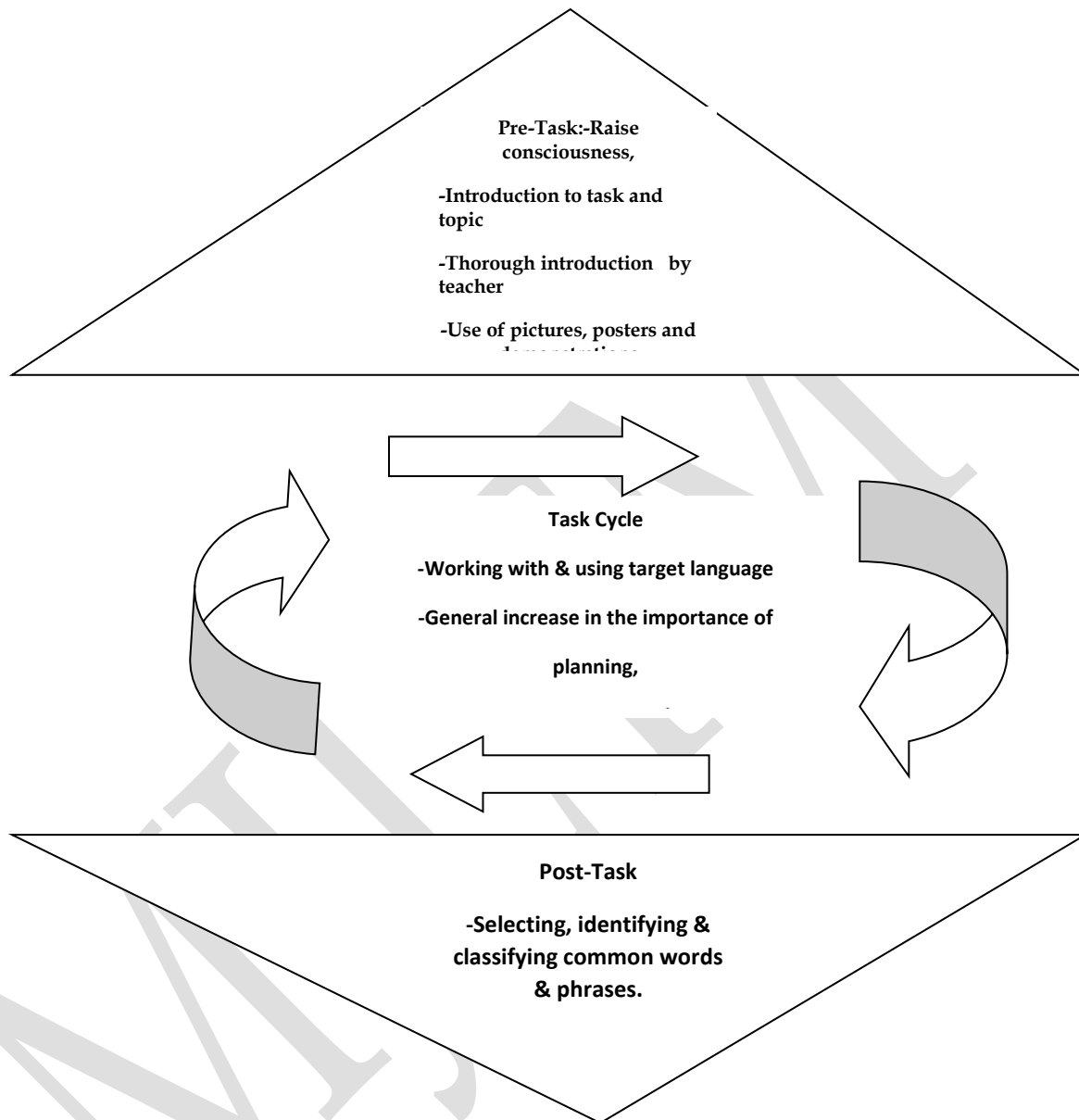
Procedure

This study has a quasi-experimental design including an experimental group and a control group. The participants needed to be of intermediate level of second language proficiency. In order to provide homogeneity, students in both groups took an achievement test before conducting the treatment.

Additionally, as a pre-test, students were assigned to write a task at the beginning. The treatments were about 20-30 minutes during each session. One of the classes received TBLT approach on their writing as the experimental group. For the experimental class, the teacher taught according to pre-task, task and post-task phases. The focus was on communication and meaning, but for the main focus was on tasks. Following the process of teaching tasks, students were asked to write about the topic in groups of two or three.

The task selection was in accordance with learning standards for ESL and TOFEL writing sections. Consequently, their writings were collected and scored by the teacher. For the end of the treatment, a post -test was administered to both experimental group and the control group. The writings were examined in terms of subject clearness, main idea clearness, beginning and end relevance, logical planning and the number of digressions. Scoring was done on the basis of scoring scale of "Expository Writing Quality Scale"

Figure 1. The structural frame work for TBLT



3. Results

Null hypothesis: Teaching writing through Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) does not have significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing proficiency.

In order to determine the kind of test running, the researcher uses Kolmogorov -Smirnov test to analyze the normal status of the related data.

Table 2. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for Tasked Based Language Teaching

task-based

N		40
Normal Parameters a,b	Mean	3.5438
	Std. Deviation	1.40955
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.188
	Positive	.188
	Negative	-.152
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.191
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.117

One can conclude from the obtained results, where the level of significance for Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is reported as 0.117 (P value > 0.05), that obtained results of this method confirm the normal status of the relevant data. Based on the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the researcher uses Paired-samples t-test to study this hypothesis. Prior to statistical analyses of the hypotheses, it is necessary to change the hypotheses to statistical hypotheses.

$$\begin{cases} H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 \\ H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2 \end{cases}$$

Table 3. Paired-samples t-test regarding the effect of Tasked-based Language Teaching

	Paired Differences				T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Mean	Error95% Interval Difference				Confidence of the
				Lower				Upper
Post-test – pre-test	.83750	.78755	.17610	.46892	1.20608	4.756	19	.000

Since significance level (p value) is less than 0.05 (0.000), null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted i.e. teaching writing through task-based language teaching has significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing proficiency. In addition, 95% confidence interval (1.20608, 46892) is a positive value and this indicates that teaching writing through task based language teaching has a positive effect on writing proficiency.

As seen in the above table, the level of significance pertinent to variables is less than 0.05. It reveals that Task-based variable mean is significantly greater than that of control group. This implies that Task-based Language Teaching is more effective when compared to common traditional Language Teaching. Moreover, Task-based condition mean is significantly greater than that of control condition that proves the efficiency of TBLT on the learners' writing proficiency.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher drew the conclusion that Task -based Language Teaching had significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing proficiency in isolation. Also, it is clear from the study findings that this approach had significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing proficiency when compared simultaneously with traditional common approach of language teaching (control group).

Being in line with most current studies and researches on the issue of teaching methods; Task-based language teaching revealed to have great benefits in learning a language. Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011) cited Ellis's (2009) list of the benefits such as:

- TBLT provides opportunity for 'natural' learning in class.
- It emphasizes on meaning, while stressing over learning form.
- It brings a fertile input of target language.
- It is motivating intrinsically.
- It is consistent with learner-focused educational psychology, but considers teacher input and guidance important.
- It encompasses improvement of communicative fluency but not ignoring accuracy.
- It can be deployed together with traditional approaches"(Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011, p. 49).

It can be concluded that TBLT provides opportunities to set clear goals for the instructional courses; additionally, it ensures student-centered and authentic approaches to learning as well as providing multiple opportunities for input, production and feedback

The findings of this study can be employed in classroom teaching and instruction. By considering the limitations of TBLT and adapting this method in Iranian context. The results of the study can be useful and helpful for instructors, researchers, syllabus designers and teachers in presenting efficient and effective writing tasks. Also text-book developers for junior and senior high schools may benefit from the findings of this study in designing new materials and possibly in changing the current grammar-based textbooks used in Iran. The experiences and concerns described in the paper may be shared by teachers to move from a teacher-centered approach which is the traditional approach of teaching in Iran, to one in which the learners play a more active, independent role to teach more and better namely Task-based Language Teaching.

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AN INVESTIGATION OF EFL TEACHERS' VIEWS TOWARDS 'PROSPECT 1'

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ABSTRACT

TEXTBOOKS ARE ALWAYS IMPORTANT FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES. AS SUCH, TEXTBOOK EVALUATION CAN PAVE THE WAY FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES. THIS STUDY EXAMINED THE SEVENTH-GRADE ENGLISH TEXTBOOK 'PROSPECT 1' WHICH IS CURRENTLY USED IN IRANIAN HIGH SCHOOLS TO DETERMINE THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT FULFILLS THE EXPECTATIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS. TWENTY EFL TEACHERS WERE SELECTED BASED ON AVAILABILITY SAMPLING TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY. THE DATA WERE GATHERED THROUGH A QUESTIONNAIRE WITH LIKERT-SCALE ITEMS. THE FINDINGS REVEALED THAT ONLY 63.36% OF THE PARTICIPANTS WERE SATISFIED WITH THE TEXTBOOK. THE RESULTS IMPLY THAT THIS TEXTBOOK IS NOT QUITE AN APPROPRIATE ONE FOR THE SEVENTH-GRADE EFL LEARNERS AND MORE CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN BY THOSE WHO ARE INVOLVED IN THE PREPARATION OF TEXTBOOKS.

KEY WORDS: EVALUATION, SURVEY, TEACHERS, TEXTBOOK, PROSPECT 1

1. Introduction

According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, textbooks are the most familiar educational materials which are the books that teach a particular subject and are used especially in schools and colleges. Because of the importance of English language as an international language and its implementation at school levels, the English school textbooks are one of the issues worthy of further investigation. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) stated, textbooks always play a very important role in the process of language teaching and learning, no matter how the methodologies of language teaching and learning change.

Evaluation requires due attention to the details and enumerating the strong and weak points. In evaluating a textbook, we should explore how suitable it is for the specific goals we are willing to achieve, and the students' needs in their particular situation.

According to Sheldon (1988), textbooks are to be evaluated for two reasons. First, the evaluation will assist the teachers or program developers to make decisions on choosing the proper textbook. Furthermore, evaluation of a textbook will make the teachers familiar with its probable weaknesses and strengths. This will enable teachers to make appropriate adaptations to enhance the quality of the materials in their future instruction.

Although the significance of the textbook as a universal component of English language teaching is undeniable (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994), it is difficult to define the role of textbook in the language classroom thoroughly. Textbook is a common framework for both teachers and students. However, they should not be used from cover to cover, for meeting students' needs. Instructors need to strike a balance

between being a slave to the texts and providing organized, objective-based instruction (Garinger, 2002). To do so, instructors need updated criteria for evaluation system to use as evaluation, as an underlying element in the introduction of innovations and modifications within an educational context. This is a dynamic process which examines the suitability and appropriateness of an existing practice (Rea-Dickens & Germaine 1992) and can be used as a useful device for both teachers and material writers. However, despite its undeniable role in improving different aspects of instructional programs, evaluation is not still well-accepted part of a project (Hargreaves, 1989).

One of the recent changes in the educational system in Iran is the new division in the grades. Accordingly, after the sixth grade in the primary school level, the students start junior high school, which is initiated with the 7th grade. The English textbook for the 7th grade students is "Prospect 1", which is not quite known to some teachers and students in high schools. That is why this textbook is chosen for a brief evaluation from both external and internal aspects. Questionnaire has become one of the most popular research instruments applied in the social sciences (Dörnyei, 2003). This study tries to investigate the degree of appropriateness of the book 'Prospect 1' for the students of the 7th grade in high schools in Rasht.

2. Literature Review

Classroom teachers spend much time using textbooks in class, so choosing an appropriate one is important. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) claim that "no teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook" (p. 315). Sharing the same opinion, Riazi (2003) believes that textbooks are the second most important factor, surpassed only by the teacher in language education and maintains that the teacher must know how to use their materials and how useful they can be.

Several studies have been done in the area of textbook evaluation. In what follows, some of the most important ones will be reviewed.

Ansary and Babaii (2002) believed that "teachers, students, and administrators are all consumers of textbooks. All these groups, of course, may have conflicting views about what a good/standard textbook is. However, the question is where they can turn to for reliable advice on how to make an informed decision and select a suitable textbook" (Checklist Approach to Textbook Evaluation section, para. 3). Accordingly, the fundamental problem with the checklists used in their study was their dependence on the swings of the theoretical pendulum (Sheldon, 1988, cited in Ansary & Babaii, 2002). They argued that no clear formula can present a conclusive way to judge a textbook. They, therefore, compiled a list of what they deem to be a set of theory-neutral and universal features of EFL/ESL textbooks.

Jahangard (2007) evaluated four EFL textbooks which were prescribed for use in the Iranian high schools by the Ministry of Education. In his paper, the merits and demerits of the textbooks were explained in detail with reference to 13 common critical features extracted from different materials evaluation checklists. His study gave some suggestions as to how to evaluate some of the shortcomings encountered in the textbooks.

According to Riazi and Mosalanejad (2010), the textbook evaluation studies in Iran have focused on developing textbook evaluation criteria. They used most of those criteria to examine the shortcomings of the English textbook (English 1).

Ghorbani (2011) examined the first-grade English textbook used in Iran's senior high schools based on the research findings in syllabus design, English language teaching, and the specific language teaching situation in Iran to determine the extent to which it conforms to the common universal characteristics of EFL/ESL textbooks. Detailed analysis focused specifically on the use of a checklist extracted from different EFL textbook evaluation checklists in line with the local needs. The findings showed that only 63 percent of the textbook conforms to the universal characteristics of textbooks.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A sample of 20 English teachers of 7th grade in some schools in Rasht was selected based on availability sampling for the study. Their experience of teaching English ranged from 8 to 34 years. Some of these teachers had a B.A. and some of the others had an M.A. and their age ranged from 31 to 52.

3.2. Instrument

A questionnaire was used in this study which includes some selected items based on McDonough and Shaw (2003). This Likert-scale questionnaire consists of thirty items and is enclosed in the Appendix.

3.3. Procedures

Each participant was given the questionnaire to report her teaching experience, age and their ideas about 'Prospect 1'. Then the questionnaires were considered to find the degree of their agreement with this textbook based on the of items including practical consideration, skills, activities and practices, and of course pedagogical purposes and methods.

Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were reported for each item. To this end, the SPSS software was used to analyze the data.

4. Results

The first five items of the questionnaire (from one to five) are related to the practical consideration of the book 'Prospect 1' which is being taught in 7th grade at schools. The following table displays the results of SPSS analysis (Table 1). The scores are counted out of 25.

Table 1. Practical Consideration (Items 1-5)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 13	1	5	5	5
15	1	5	5	10
16	5	25	25	35
17	2	10	10	45
18	3	15	15	60
19	2	10	10	70
20	1	5	5	75
21	4	20	20	95
24	1	5	5	100
Total	20	100	100	

The second table in this study is related to the items six to nine in the questionnaire (See Table 2). This table reports the effectiveness of the usage of skills in the book 'Prospect 1' at schools. The scores are out of 20.

Table 2. Skills (Items 6-9)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 8.00	3	15.0	15.0	15.0
9.00	1	5.0	5.0	20.0
10.00	2	10.0	10.0	30.0
11.00	1	5.0	5.0	35.0
12.00	4	20.0	20.0	55.0
13.00	4	20.0	20.0	75.0
14.00	2	10.0	10.0	85.0
15.00	1	5.0	5.0	90.0
16.00	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
17.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Following the first two tables about practical consideration and skills, the third table in the following shows the amount of agreement about the influence of activities and practices used in the book 'Prospect 1' for the 7th grade students (See Table 3). The third table talks about the items ten to twenty-three and describes the percentages of the amount of teachers' agreement by paying attention to the activities and practices used in the book. The scores mentioned in the third table are out of 70.

This table is the most important table in this study that shows the number of items in the questionnaire which are related to the activities and practices is higher than the other ones. It portrays the importance of activities and practices in the mentioned book and the English classes at schools.

Table 3. Activities and Practices (Items 10-23)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 26.00	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
33.00	1	5.0	5.0	10.0
34.00	1	5.0	5.0	15.0

35.00	1	5.0	5.0	20.0
38.00	3	15.0	15.0	35.0
39.00	1	5.0	5.0	40.0
43.00	1	5.0	5.0	45.0
44.00	2	10.0	10.0	55.0
45.00	3	15.0	15.0	70.0
47.00	3	15.0	15.0	85.0
48.00	1	5.0	5.0	90.0
53.00	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
62.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

The following table is the fourth one and explains the pedagogical purposes and the use of methods according to the ideas mentioned by the experienced teachers who answered the questionnaire. The scores in this table are out of 35.

Table 4. Pedagogical Purposes and Methods (Items 24-30)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 16.00	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
17.00	1	5.0	5.0	10.0
18.00	1	5.0	5.0	15.0
19.00	1	5.0	5.0	20.0
20.00	2	10.0	10.0	30.0
21.00	4	20.0	20.0	50.0
22.00	1	5.0	5.0	55.0
23.00	4	20.0	20.0	75.0
25.00	1	5.0	5.0	80.0
26.00	1	5.0	5.0	85.0
28.00	2	10.0	10.0	95.0

31.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the information presented in the tables in the previous section (Tables 1-4), the book 'Prospect 1' is not found to be a satisfactory textbook for the students of 7th grade in high schools. The teachers who answered the questionnaire items were not so much satisfied with this book and showed their disagreement in this way.

The following table (Table 5) shows the conclusion in percentages. As mentioned in the table, just 72.4% agreement is gained about the practical consideration of the book which is the highest amount of satisfaction, and the others are all less than this percentage.

Next, pedagogical purposes and exercises used in this way got 63.7% of satisfaction and different activities used in the book reached only 60.92% of agreement. The last one, which is the lowest, is related to skills and reveals about just 60% of satisfaction.

Total satisfaction of the teachers about the book 'Prospect 1' in 7th grade of high schools is just 63.36% which does not seem to be high enough.

Table 5. Total Evaluation of the Book 'Prospect 1'

Section	Score	Perfect	Percentage
Practical consideration	362	500	72.4%
Skills	240	400	60%
Activities and practices	853	1400	60.92%
Pedagogical purposes and methods	446	700	63.7%
Total	1901	3000	63.36%

Thus, it is necessary for teachers to be well-qualified to evaluate materials and be sure that students are using the suitable ones for their language learning experience and textbooks should effectively match the identified needs of the learners. It should be also possible for curriculum developers, administrators and teachers to try to focus more on how to maximize intake rather than concentrating on language item coverage (Ghorbani, 2011).

Implications suggest that all material developers need to use the appropriate checklists with more acceptable characteristics which are adapted to meet the the needs of the EFL learners. Some of the textbooks lack many of the criteria of a really valuable book. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully check all aspects of the materials, especially textbooks. To sum up, modifications need to be made in the existing textbooks to make sure that the educational goals are achieved as expected. To this end, textbook evaluation in various contexts recruiting different EFL instructors can shed light on the potential weaknesses and drawbacks.

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APPENDIX

همکار ارجمند:

این پرسشنامه برآن است تا کتاب زبان انگلیسی هفتم را از منظر کمی و کیفی مورد بررسی قرار دهد. لطفاً با پاسخ دادن به موارد، ما را در این امر یاری فرمایید. لطفاً با قراردادن یک نشان در مربع مورد نظر خود میزان موافقت یا عدم موافقت خود را اعلام فرمایید.

با تشکر

سن:..... تحصیلات:..... میزان تجربه تدریس:

موارد مورد نظر برای بررسی	کاملاً مخالف	کاملاً موافق	نظری ندارم	مخالفم	موافقم	کاملاً موافقم
1. این کتاب به همراه لوح فشرده-کتاب تمرین و کتاب معلم در دسترس میباشد.						
2. طراحی جلدکتاب با دقت کافی انجام شده است.						
3. متن و تصویر در این کتاب از هماهنگی خوبی برخوردار است.						
فضای فرهنگی کشور هماهنگ است. 4. کتاب با						
5. عناوین درس بکاررفته در این کتاب روی یادگیری تاثیر گذارند.						

				6. در این کتاب تمرینات کافی برای مهارت گوش دادن ارایه می شود.
				7. در این کتاب تمرینات کافی برای مهارت صحبت کردن ارایه می شود.
				8. در این کتاب تمرینات کافی برای مهارت خواندن ارایه می شود.
				9. در این کتاب تمرینات کافی برای مهارت نوشتن ارایه شده
				10. در این کتاب روش مناسبی برای آموزش الفبا ارایه شده است.
				11. تمرینات کتاب از آسان به سخت درجه بندی شده اند.
				12. تمرینات این کتاب برای یادگیری فرهنگ ها سودمند است.
				13. فعالیت‌های ارایه شده با موقعیت‌های واقعی قابل تطبیق است.
				14. کیفیت تمرینات دستوری ارایه شده در کتاب به صورت تدریجی افزایش می یابد.
				15. لغات بصورت چرخشی در تمرینات متفاوتی ارایه می شوند.
				16. تعداد لغات جدید هر درس و قابلیت درک آنها دارای هماهنگی است.
				17. تمرینات و فعالیت‌ها در یادآوری نکات دستوری قبلی تاثیرگذارند.
				18. در مورد تمرینات و فعالیت‌ها توضیحات کافی وجود دارد.
				19. فعالیت‌ها باعث آسان شدن به کارگیری نکات دستوری می شوند.
				20. دانش آموزان در استفاده از تمرینات و فعالیت‌های موجود انگیزه کافی دارند.
				21. تمرینات و فعالیت‌های این کتاب برای این گروه سنی کلاس هفتم مناسب است.
				22. تمرینات با اهداف دروس هماهنگی دارند.
				23. کلمات درس ها به میزان کافی در تمرینات تکرار می شوند.
				24. این کتاب با اهداف برنامه آموزشی هماهنگی دارد.
				25. این کتاب در مقایسه با کتاب قبلی زمان کمتری برای تدریس نیاز دارد.
				26. کتاب راهنمای معلم به درک بهتر اهداف کتاب و روش تدریس آن کمک می کند.
				27. در کتاب راهنمای معلم مثال های زیادی در اختیار معلمین قرار میگیرد.
				28. کتاب راهنما روش های دقیق و واضحی را برای تدریس هر درس ارایه می کند.
				29. این کتاب پایه خوبی برای یادگیری زبان است.
				30. روش آموزش این کتاب برگرفته از جدیدترین روش های آموزش زبان است.

THE EFFECT OF SUMMARIZING VS. TRADITIONAL FOLLOW-UP COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES ON THE LANGUAGE LEARNERS' RETENTION OF DIFFERENT GENRES

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ABSTRACT

A VARIETY OF FOLLOW-UP EXERCISES HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED TO ENHANCE THE COMPREHENSION AND RETENTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTS. THE USE OF QUESTIONS HAS BEEN REGARDED AS AN INTEGRAL TYPE OF SUCH EXERCISES THOUGH OF COURSE NOT NECESSARILY THE MOST EFFECTIVE ONE. THE PRESENT STUDY WAS AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLORE THE EFFECT OF ENGLISH AND PERSIAN SUMMARIZING OF TEXTS IN DIFFERENT GENRES (LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC) VERSUS THE USE OF MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS AS THE FOLLOW-UP COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES ON THE LANGUAGE LEARNERS' LONG-TERM RETENTION. TO DO SO, SIXTY NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE GRADUATE STUDENTS WERE ASSIGNED INTO 3 GROUPS OF 20. ALL SUBJECTS WERE EXPOSED TO TWO SCIENTIFIC AND TWO LITERARY TEXTS. THE TEXTS WERE THE SAME FOR THE MENTIONED GROUPS WHILE THE FOLLOW-UP COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES INCLUDED MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS, PERSIAN SUMMARIZING AND ENGLISH SUMMARIZING FOR THE THREE GROUPS RESPECTIVELY. AFTER TWO WEEKS OF TREATMENT, THE SUBJECTS, GIVEN THE FIRST LINE OF THE ALREADY MENTIONED TEXTS, WERE ASKED TO WRITE FREE-RECALL PROTOCOLS IN FARSI OR ENGLISH. TWO PROFESSIONAL RATERS THEN SCORED THE PROTOCOLS, AND THE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DATA THUS GATHERED INDICATED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BOTH ENGLISH AND PERSIAN SUMMARIZING IN ENHANCING THE LANGUAGE LEARNERS' LONG-TERM RETENTION OF THE TEXTS DISREGARDING THE TYPE OF GENRE.

KEY WORDS: SUMMARIZING, MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS, FOLLOW-UP EXERCISES, RETENTION, GENRE

Introduction

The importance of genre analysis in the realm of ESP (Swale, 1990) has led recent research studies to regard rhetorical 'move' structures and linguistic features of all types of texts. Swale goes on to describe genre as follows:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constraints choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience.

O'Sullivan, Hartley, and Saunders (1994) argued that 'genres are agents of ideological closure- they limit the meaning-potential of a given text' (p. 128). Chandler (1997) claimed that genre provides a comprehensive framework within which readers interpret texts and make inferences. The specific genre of a text guides readers towards a *preferred reading* and does not hinder readers to prevent from 'reading against the grain' which restricts the interpretation of texts (Feuer, 1992; Fiske, 2002). Knight (1994) referred to texts including a specific genre as an active process contributing the students to infer the meaning. Moreover, according to Seidenberg (1989) one of the genres helping readers to identify important information and make logical connections between ideas is the literary genre. Therefore, the cognitive process involved in the story comprehension as a literary genre helps learners to remember and recall the text more effectively. Measuring retention of different genres based on text processing led to a movement from multiple-choice question (MC) toward summarization (Alidib, 2004). Bernhardt (1993) reported that MC questions neglect interaction occurring between the readers and text. Hence, the use of summarization as one way of measuring reading comprehension has been manifested "more carefully at the authenticity of the assessment tasks and their alignment with current research, theory, and instructional practices" (Valencia, 1990: 60). Such a practice enables us to gain insight into students' comprehension abilities, whether they are able to get the main focus and viewpoint of texts (Johnston, 1981; Kintsch & Van Dijk, 1978). Moreover, summarization promotes students' quality of their overall comprehension and long-term retention of information affecting their learning (Pearson & Duke, 2002). Although there have been a number of studies examining the summarizing skill of learners (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981; Day, 1980; Susar & Akkaya, 2009; Winograd, 1984; Zafarani & Kabgani, 2014a); the effect of text genres on summarizing (Li, 2014) and the effect of genre-based instruction on reading comprehension (Hyon, 2001a), few if any studies have investigated Persian and English summarization in comparison to multiple choice questions as follow-up comprehension activities to come to the most effective means of enhancing learners' long-term recall of literary and scientific genres. The result of this study can be regarded as a practical contribution to both teaching and learning effective reading comprehension by providing guidelines resulting in the language learners' enhanced retention of the texts they read.

Literature review

In the realm of foreign language teaching in general and reading comprehension skill in specific, the area of genre remains to be controversial. According to Paltridge (2001), the difference among genres has been established concerning discourse structuring. He says that belonging of texts to particular genre types is based on pragmatic and perceptual criteria:

“... What typifies a genre at the discourse level is not dependent on the presence of any one particular aspect of discourse structure in isolation, but on the interaction and co-occurrence of a number of aspects of discourse structure: that is, those of macrostructure, discourse elements and discourse relations, components of discourse elements and semantic relations”.

A genre theorist (Chandler, 1997) supported that conventional definitions of genres based on the notion that they constitute particular conventions of content such as themes or settings and forms or include structures and styles shared by the texts. In addition, the students' cognitive process is improved through identifying and linking the themes in one specific genre to comprehend the written texts better.

Keller-Cohen (1986) investigated the effect of various aspects that may influence the comprehension of two specific genre types – bank accounts and periodical bills. The results indicated that prior knowledge, familiarity with content and language, and reading purpose affected the comprehension of these genres. Accordingly, prior knowledge contributed learners to determine the textual structure leading them to predict the information included in the texts. Similarly, Bernhardt (1991) conducted a study to examine textual and conceptual factors affecting the reading comprehension of a business letter as a genre in

English adult learners of German as a foreign language. The findings demonstrated the influence of all factors, particularly, formal prior knowledge and cross-cultural differences.

Most of the works on foreign language comprehension of different genres consist of recall protocols analysis. This allows readers to recall ideas at both micro and macrostructure levels.

Hyon (2001b) examined the effects of an EAP genre-based reading comprising four different genres (hard news story, feature article, textbook, and research article) course on eight adult non-native speakers. In other words, this study attempted to find whether the corresponding of class genres to students' interest and reading requirements; their retention of about what taught in the course; and the effect of genre-based instruction on how their L2 reading. The four genres were based on the following features: (1) content; (2) structure; (3) language style; and (4) purpose.

It was found that the class genres were linked with to some of the students' academic and non-academic reading materials. In terms of non-academic reading, they argued that newspapers or magazines as texts they read outside their courses, some of which were similar to ones covered in the reading class. Regarding their academic work, they mentioned reading textbooks and journal articles. Furthermore, students' impression of the class and texts helped them to remember class genre features and employed the material to their L2 reading and writing. This findings included the definition of genre as a category of texts in which share "some set of communicative purposes" as well as "various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience" Swale (1990, p. 58).

Later on, Alidib (2004) examined the effects of text genre on French language reading comprehension at two levels of college French instruction. All the 48 students were exposed the same two passages from twentieth century French literature. Having read excerpts from novel and play, they were asked to compose an L1 free-recall protocol. The recall protocols were analyzed using prepositional analysis system proposed by Johnson (1970) and the scores were analyzed with the Analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure. The results demonstrated significant effect for text genre and level of class performance but no significant effect for the level of instruction.

In the realm of EFL teaching in Iran, Marzban and Seifi (2013) determined the effect of text structure instruction on reading comprehension of narrative and expository texts. The participants consisted of 80 students assigned to four groups. The first experimental group received instruction of narrative structures and the first control group received samples of narrative text without instruction. They were exposed to posttest after five sessions. The second experimental and control group were given an expository pretest. The first experimental group received the instruction of expository structure in five sessions but control group did not receive any instruction. Then expository posttests were given. The results illustrated the positive effect of narrative instruction on reading comprehension ability of learners. Nevertheless, the effect of expository text structure on reading comprehension ability of the students was not significant.

Measuring retention of different genres is feasible through summarization requiring readers to think critically both during and after reading. They must analyze the text information for important concepts, and also for information that can be deleted in order to summarize. Students must take time to process and reflect on what has been read. Summarization as an effective way to identify the main ideas in the text and then rephrase in one's own words (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). Dole et al. (1991) argued that summarizing forces to sift through large units of text, differentiate important from unimportant ideas, and then synthesize those ideas and create a new coherent text that stands for, by substantive criteria, the original.

Cumming, Rebuffot, and Ledwell (1989) investigated the difference between first and second language summarizing. In this study, the 23 participants were asked to write summaries in English and 14 students were asked to write summaries both in English and French. They found out that first language (L1) was a

main factor affecting their summarization. Less proficient L1 students applied both languages in their summaries whereas the experts focused on one language and wrote the gist of the texts. Therefore, the difference between them was attributed to the difference in their knowledge and literacy.

Chin (2010) conducted a study on the effect of summary writing in Taiwan. Forty-six students participated in his study. They were given two English texts and were then asked to summarize the two texts based on what they comprehended. Having analyzed each text in terms of their quality and framework proposed by (Friend, 2001; Rivard, 2001; Yu, 2007), the results demonstrated that intermediate students relied on minor ideas in their summarization, while advanced level students concentrated on the main points. The lower group suffered from lexical and grammatical deficiencies and copied more of the content from the original texts.

Likewise, Zafarani and Kabgani (2014b) examined the effectiveness of summarizing strategy, main idea strategy, and the explicitness of the training on improving comprehension of English textual materials of Iranian ESP learners. 70 students were assigned to two homogeneous groups of experimental and control. They were exposed to a pretest and a posttest. The results illustrated a significant difference between the pre- and posttests in which experimental group outperformed the control group in the post reading comprehension test. It showed the effectiveness of summarization training which led to the greater achievement in reading comprehension of ESP learners.

Despite the mentioned studies conducted to examine the separate effects of text genre on reading comprehension, based on what Henry and Roseberry (1998, p. 148) explained, “the arguments for and against the genre approach in ESP/EAP have been limited to the theoretical, and few if any attempts have been made to evaluate the approach empirically in an ESP/EAP context”. Furthermore, the literature related to reading comprehension follow-up activities is not inclusive and many studies are needed to indicate the relative effectiveness of such exercises.

Method

Participant

The population from which the subjects were drawn consisted of 60 non-English languages graduate students assigned into 3 groups of 20. Their majors comprised agriculture engineering, science, and law. These three groups enrolled in English classes to be prepared for the TOEFL exam. They were selected through convenience sampling.

Procedure

As the first step, the subjects in the three groups of the study were given 4 passages, 2 literary and 2 scientific. The passages the 3 groups were exposed to were the same but the follow-up activities were different. During the treatment period, the first group was exposed to the traditional multiple choice questions, the second group provided a Persian summary while the third group was asked to provide an English summary of the materials covered. Based on the time available and allowed 2 passages were covered in every session. 2 weeks after the treatment, the subjects in the three groups attended a test in which given the first line of each of the already covered passages, they were asked to write down all they remembered from the respective passage in Persian or English in the form of a free-recall protocol. The jobs were then collected and scored by two experienced experts.

Data analysis

The data thus gathered was analyzed through a two-way ANOVA using SPSS version 21. This was done to determine which of the 3 follow-up activities i.e. traditional (MC questions), Persian summary and English summary would lead to the better long-term retention of the passages covered in class.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptive and inferential statistics related to only follow up exercises with significant differences. As the mean differences in table 1 show, the group exposed to multiple choice questions as the follow-up reading comprehension activity received the lower mean though this is not enough for making a decision. Table 2 indicates the results of a multiple comparison among the 3 groups done through an ANOVA. As shown in the table, both the group exposed to the Persian summary and the one exposed to English summary as their follow up exercises outperformed the multiple choice group at 0.005. While the performances of the English vs. Persian summary groups as well the performances of the three groups across genres were not significantly different and resultantly aren't mentioned in the table.

Table 1. Descriptive data related to the significant group differences

Performance	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
English summary(ES)	15.1250	2.53375	20
Multiple Choice (MC)	13.4500	2.33095	20
Persian Summary(PS)	14.4500	2.46982	20

Table 2. Significant results of the Multiple Comparisons

(I) Exercise	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
ES	MC	1.6750*	.52178	.005	.4359	2.9141
PS	MC	1.0000	.52178	.005	-.2391	2.2391

Discussion

This section discusses the results highlighting the main effects of the independent variables: Text genres and exercise methods.

As mentioned in the result section, the findings of the study revealed a non-significant role for the genre type as a factor affecting long-term retention in a reading class. Unlike the minor role of genre type in long-term retention, the exercises used as the post-reading activities proved highly significant. The results

showed the use of Persian and English summarizing as the post-reading exercises could lead to a significantly higher retention of language learners in comparison with multiple choice questions. The results also indicated no significant difference between Persian summarizing and English summarizing as post-reading class activities in enhancing the language learners' long term retention.

Conclusion

The present study examined the extent to which non- English language graduate students were able to recall excerpts of literary and scientific texts followed by different types post-reading exercises after a two-week interval. The Subjects in the present study were 60 graduate students enrolled in the reading TOEFL classes. They were assigned into three groups of 20. During the treatment period, the first group summarized the literary and scientific texts in Persian. The second group summarized the same texts in English and the last group followed the traditional approach of answering multiple choice questions as their reading follow-up activities. Later, their retention was measured through free-recall protocols. The results demonstrated the non-significant role of the text genre in subject's recall. However, the findings showed that summarizing in English or Persian could be significantly more effective as a post reading activity in comparison with multiple choice questions while long-term retention is sought.

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEW ENGLISH TEXTBOOK NAMED *PROSPECT 1* USED IN IRANIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

MATERIALS EVALUATION IS AN EDUCATIONAL NECESSITY BECAUSE IT SHOWS HOW A TEXTBOOK CAN BE IMPROVED OR JUSTIFIED. TEACHING MATERIALS HAVE A DIRECT INFLUENCE ON THE PROCESS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING. THIS RESEARCH TENDS TO EVALUATE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEW ENGLISH TEXTBOOK USED IN IRANIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS NAMED *PROSPECT 1* WHICH WAS INTRODUCED BY THE IRANIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN 2014. TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, A RESEARCHER-MADE QUESTIONNAIRE WAS USED AND ACCORDINGLY AN INTERVIEW WAS RUN AMONG TEACHERS WHO TEACH THIS BOOK IN CITIES OF ISFAHAN, NAJAFABAD, AND FOOLADSHAHR, IRAN. THE SAMPLE OF THIS STUDY CONSISTED OF 150 TEACHERS FOR COLLECTING THE QUANTITATIVE DATA AND THE QUALITATIVE DATA WERE OBTAINED THROUGH INTERVIEW WITH FIVE TEACHERS. THE TEXTBOOK WAS EVALUATED IN TERMS OF EIGHT MAIN FACTORS INCLUDING LAYOUT AND PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, CONTENT, OBJECTIVES, LANGUAGE TYPE, SKILLS, ACTIVITIES AND TASKS, CULTURE VALUES, AND TEACHER'S NEEDS. QUANTITATIVE DATA WERE COLLECTED THROUGH A FIVE-POINT LIKERT SCALE QUESTIONNAIRE CONSISTING OF 57 ITEMS FOR TEACHERS. THE FINDINGS REVEALED THAT TEACHERS WERE IN FAVOR OF THE NEW ENGLISH TEXTBOOK IN TERMS OF LAYOUT AND PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, CONTENT, OBJECTIVES, LANGUAGE TYPE, SKILLS, AND ACTIVITIES AND TASKS. THE RESULTS ALSO SHOWED THAT TEACHERS HAD ACCEPTED THE NEW TEXTBOOK SUITABLE AND PRACTICAL FOR TEACHING ENGLISH.

KEY WORDS: CRITICAL ANALYSIS, TEXTBOOK EVALUATION, *PROSPECT 1*

1. Introduction

Textbooks are considered an essential component of any EFL course so that the use of EFL published materials is more widespread than ever. They serve teachers with guidelines concerning syllabi, teaching methodologies, and the materials to be taught. Here care should be done in choosing the best suitable text for a particular context. More recent authors have criticized textbooks for their inherent social and cultural biases. Researchers such as Porreca (1984), Florent and Walter (1989), Clarke and Clarke (1990), Carroll and Kowitz (1994), and Renner (1997) have demonstrated that many EFL/ESL textbooks still contain rampant examples of gender bias, sexism, and stereotyping. They describe such gender-related inequities as: the relative invisibility of female characters, the unrealistic and sexist portrayals of both men and women, stereotypes involving social roles, occupations, relationships and actions as well as

linguistic biases such as 'gendered' English and sexist language. Such findings have led researchers to believe that the continuing prevalence of sexism and gender stereotypes in many EFL/ESL textbooks may reflect the unequal power relationships that still exist between the sexes in many cultures, the prolonged marginalization of females, and the misrepresentations of writers with social attitudes that are incongruent with the present-day realities of the target language culture (Renner, 1997; Sunderland, 1994).

Iranian government-run schools use materials produced according to the syllabuses and curricula designed and developed by the Iranian Ministry of Education and under the supervision of this organization. In Iran, learning English happens as a part of the normal school program. Usually, English is learned either to pass exams part of one's education or for university entering evaluations. In this fashion, therefore, textbooks essentially determine and control the methods, processes, and procedures of language teaching and learning. Moreover, the pedagogic principles that are often displayed in many textbooks may also be conflicting, contradictory, or even outdated depending on the capitalizing interests and exploitations of the sponsoring agent. The textbook proposed for evaluation is "Prospect 1" which is recently developed for the native Persian speakers learning English as a foreign language at the first grade of junior high school. The book is published by the Iranian Ministry of Education. Since this is the introduction to English for students, it is important to analyze teachers' perceptions and beliefs on this new context. Palmer (1921) stated that "If we take care of the elementary stage, the advanced stages will take care of themselves" (p. 13). Hence, this study aims at evaluating the textbooks from teachers' point of view and tries to show that textbook evaluation is a necessary and worthwhile process for teachers in this context. This study also attempts to examine the advantages and disadvantages of this textbook. The study specifically highlights the need for assessing the existing checklists regarding EFL teachers' perception and beliefs. In this respect, the present study proposes a screening procedure that would enable EFL practitioners including inspectors and teachers of English to assess current TEFL materials evaluation checklists and select and adapt the one that specifically conforms to the needs and requirements of their particular language programs.

2. Literature Review

Textbook evaluation, according to Cunningsworth (1995), would involve the careful selection of materials examining whether they reflect the needs of the students, aims, methods, and values of a specific teaching program. Textbook evaluation helps the teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it further facilitates them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook materials (A Cunningsworth, 1995; Ellis, 1997). Through the evaluation of a textbook, teachers know the content of the book, its strengths and weaknesses which will facilitate them to adapt it to suit the course aims, students' needs, and teachers' beliefs. As Littlejohn (1998) observes, textbook evaluation serves the purpose of examining whether the methodology and content of the materials are appropriate for a particular language teaching context. The evaluation would test out the claims materials make for themselves: whether they truly develop autonomy, whether they truly involve problem solving, and if they indeed are communicative as its writers claim.

There have been long debates about the values of using or not using textbooks. Whereas teacher-generated materials can be time, cost, and quality defective, textbooks can reduce potential occupational overload and allow teachers to spend their time undertaking more worthwhile pursuits (O'Neill, 1997; Sheldon, 1988). Haycraft (1978) stated that one of the main advantages of using textbooks is that they are psychologically necessary for students since their achievement and success may be evaluated concretely when they are used. Although some theorists have alluded to the inherent danger of the inexperienced teacher who may use a textbook as a pedagogic crutch, such an over reliance may actually have the opposite effect. Some of different theorists have talked for and against using them. Textbooks which yield a respectable return on investment are relatively inexpensive and involve low lesson preparation saving students from a teacher's deficiencies (Kitao & Kitao, 1997; O'Neill, 1997; Williams, 1983). Hutchinson

and Torres (1994) have pointed out that textbooks may play a pivotal role in innovation. They suggest that textbooks can support teachers through potentially disturbing and threatening change processes, demonstrate new and/or untried methodologies, introduce change gradually, and create scaffolding upon which teachers can build a more creative methodology of their own.

English language teaching/learning has many important components but the essential one for many EFL classrooms is the textbook. It is difficult for teachers to teach systematically without a textbook. They think they need written materials during the process of teaching. The role of textbooks is crucial in providing base of materials not only for the teachers but also for the students. Sheldon (1988) suggests that textbooks not only represent the visible heart of any EFL program but also offer considerable advantages for both students and the teachers when they are being used in the ESL /EFL classrooms. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) stated that the textbook is an almost universal element of teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in different countries...No teaching-

O'Neill (1997) demonstrated that textbooks are often sensitive to students' needs, even if they are not organized particularly for them, they are adequate in terms of money and time and they can and should allow for adaptation and improvisation. Cunningsworth (1995) pointed out the potential which textbooks have for serving several additional roles in the ELT curriculum. He argues that they are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presentation material, a source of ideas and activities, and a reference source for students, a syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) identified four ways in which textbooks can help in times of educational change: first, as a vehicle for teacher and student training; second, because they provide support and relief from the burden of looking for materials; third, by providing as complete picture as possible of what the change will look like; and the last, through the psychological support they give to teachers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study sought to evaluate the first year English textbook through the survey. Based on the research objective, the null hypothesis was formulated as "The teachers have not accepted the new book suitable and practical way of teaching English". The descriptive survey in which the phenomenon is described is the appropriate approach by which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Through teachers' questionnaire, the quantitative data were gathered. In addition, interviews from teachers were used to collect qualitative data. Using questionnaire and interviews to gather needed information is one of the advantages of applying this methodology. Questionnaires are the most useful and less expensive method for collecting data from selected sample in a short period. In addition, interviews help gather detail information regarding the concepts of the questionnaires. To complete the objectives of this study, the required data were collected based on the teachers' answers to the needs analysis questionnaires and the interview questions by some of them.

3.2. Participants

This study was administered in high schools of Isfahan, Najafabad, and Fooladshahr, Iran. One hundred and fifty male and female teachers took part in this study for gathering the quantitative data. They were chosen randomly. They were asked to fill in the questionnaires prepared by the researcher and express their opinions about the textbook. To collect the qualitative data, five English teachers who were teaching prospect 1 in some high schools of Isfahan, Najafabad, and Fooladshahr were invited to the interview. They warmly accepted to do the interview and discussed about the topics. It was assumed that the teachers were aware of the English learning needs of high school books because they were completely

familiar with the present status of their field of study and had some knowledge about their lacks and wants towards Iranian high school English textbook.

3.3. Instruments

The main instrument for collecting data in this study was questionnaire. This questionnaire was adapted from some questionnaires which were related to the topic under study and, then, they were modified according to the needs and their usability by the researcher. Most of the items in the questionnaire were adapted and modified from the checklists and criteria used to evaluate English Language Teaching (ELT) materials by A Cunningsworth (1995), Peny (1996), Tomlinson (2003), Richards (2001), Tekir and Arikan (2007), and Abraha (2008). The researcher selected common features of these checklists. This questionnaire was prepared in English language. The main purpose of designing this questionnaire was to be acquainted with the teachers' perception on the evaluation of the new published English book for the first year of junior high school (Prospect 1). This questionnaire was issued to 150 teachers of Iranian high schools and focused on the main themes designed in the teachers' questionnaire. The teachers' questionnaire was in target language. It contained two main parts. The first part of the questionnaire named "demographic part" was designed to gather some information about teachers' personal characteristics and the second part named "textbook evaluation" made an attempt to extract the view of the teachers toward the first grade textbook (Prospect 1) general characteristics, teaching, and learning content. This part included eight main categories: layout and physical appearance, content, objectives, language type, skills, activities and tasks, culture values, and teacher's needs. It should be added that, totally, these eight parts consisted of 56 items. All the items in these parts were designed on a five-point Likert scale of frequency, where 1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= undecided, 4= disagree, and 5= strongly disagree.

The second tool for gathering information of the research was interview. The purpose of the researcher for doing interview was to gain an insight to the research questions. Moreover, the researcher could make sure that the information he gathered through the questionnaire was correct. The interviews were conducted to obtain rich information and greater insight into the teachers' perception of Prospect 1. The data gathered through the interviews helped to get a more correct conclusion regarding the research objective. The researcher could interpret the meaning of the survey data better by the results of the interviews. The data, which were gathered through the teachers' interviews, helped the researcher in making a correct conclusion. By questionnaire, the researcher understood the general attitudes and perceptions of the teachers toward the new textbook (Prospect 1). But to gain more comprehensive information regarding their attitudes toward the prospect 1 textbook, its content, objectives, skills, as well as the teachers' main attitude about this course of study, the interviews were done. The purpose of doing teachers' interview was to investigate the opinions and attitudes of the teachers of the junior high school textbook (prospect 1), how it was taught, and the needs of the students. Teachers' interview consisted of seven questions including seven main parts or themes which were needs analysis, layout, skills, authenticity, content and objectives, teaching methodology, and teachers' general attitude towards the Prospect 1 textbook.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

3.4.1. Teachers' questionnaire.

The first draft of the questionnaire was constructed according to the research aims. The questionnaire with the content validation form and face validation form were sent to three experts with the intention of reviewing the questionnaire by them. The purpose of content validation form was to determine content validity and face validity of the questionnaire. According to the viewpoints of these experts, some changes were made on the first draft of teachers' questionnaire. The second draft was designed as the result. The Teachers' questionnaire was originally designed in English. As the respondents were English teachers, no translation was done on it.

To calculate the questionnaire reliability, 10 English teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Moreover, before starting the research, the questionnaire was piloted. For each theme, the amount of Chronbach' Alpha was calculated. Subsequently, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied on the results of the pilot study to determine the internal reliability of the items of the questionnaire. Reliability of 0.7 pointed to the matter that the internal reliability of the questionnaire items was acceptable. Based on the results, the questionnaire was finalized for the large-scale data collection. As it was mentioned before, this questionnaire had two main themes, namely demographic information and teachers' textbook evaluation. Separately, for each theme, the amount of Chronbach' Alpha was measured and, then, it was done for the entire questionnaire.

After calculating the reliability, 200 questionnaires were distributed among the English teachers teaching in cities of Isfahan, Najafabad, and Fooladshahr, Iran. The researcher took part in the meetings which were held for reviewing the new textbook. Out of those 200 questionnaires, 150 questionnaires were usable for data entry.

3.4.2. Teachers' interview protocol.

Teachers' interviews were held in English language as the participants were English teachers. The interview was mostly adapted from Litz (2005) and researcher made some changes and chose the appropriate ones which completed this research. For examining its content validity, one form of content validation was prepared and sent to the three experts to rate the validity of the questions based on two criteria of the appropriateness of the questions in representing the topic and the clarity of the meaning of the questions. The result of the content validation form showed that the interview questions did not have any ambiguous part and were clearly understood. Therefore, the final draft of the teachers' interview was prepared. Teachers who participated in this study had taught Prospect 1 during the previous year. The researcher asked 10 English teachers to take part in the interview and they voluntarily accepted to participate. All the interviews were conducted in January 2015 and every participant was given a consent form to be signed. Agreement was obtained from all of the participants. All of the teachers' interviews were direct interview. Initially, the subject and the purpose of the study and the interviews were explained to the participants individually in five to 10 minutes. Then, each question was put to the interviewees in turn and they were asked to reply freely. They were asked to fill a consent form.

3.5. Data Analysis Method

The initial required data were collected through questionnaires and interviews to find out the attitudes of teachers toward the new textbook. To this end, descriptive statistics determining the frequencies and percentages of the teachers' answers indicating their needs and lacks were used. In order to analyze the results of this study, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. The researcher grouped the attitudinal agreement and disagreement points of the view of the teachers and, then, determined the frequencies and percentages of their attitudes.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Teachers' Perceptions of the New English Book

In order to answer the first objective of the present study, i.e. teachers' perceptions of the new English text book, one sample t-test was applied. Three was set as the test value. The eight parts of teachers' questionnaire (layout and physical appearance, content, objectives, language type, skills, activities and tasks, teachers' needs, and cultural values) were investigated separately. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Teachers' Perceptions of the New English Textbook. (Prospect1)

Variable	Test Value = 3		
	t-value	Significance	Mean Difference
Layout and physical appearance	-7.609	0.000	-0.41
Content	-8.276	0.000	-0.45
Objectives	-5.025	0.000	-0.32
Language type	-5.964	0.000	-0.44
Skills	-4.338	0.000	-0.29
Activities and tasks	-2.936	0.004	-0.23
Cultural values	-1.885	0.061	-0.22

As shown in Table 1, teachers were in favor of the new English textbook in terms of layout and physical appearance ($P < 0.001$), content ($P < 0.001$), objectives ($P < 0.001$), language type ($P < 0.001$), skills ($P < 0.001$), and activities and tasks ($P < 0.005$). However, the results found no significant results for teachers' perceptions of the cultural values.

4.2. Results of the Teachers' Needs Analysis

The frequencies and percentages of teachers' responses to nine questions of the teachers' questionnaire related to needs analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 2
The Descriptive Statistics of the Results Related to the Teachers' Needs Analysis

Statements	Agree		Not decided		Disagree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
48. The use of the material is easily manageable by the teacher.	79	53	20	13	51	34
49. The teacher's manual suggests an appropriate concise method for teaching each lesson.	77	51	40	27	40	27
50. The design of the materials allows the teachers to use them differently according to the needs of different students.	64	43	32	21	54	36

51. The teacher's manual helps the teachers understand the objectives of the textbook.	71	47	47	31	32	21
52. The manual gives instructions on how to incorporate audiovisual materials produced for the textbook.	82	55	42	28	26	17
53. The manual provides additional exercises for reinforcing various language skills in the textbook	56	37	41	27	52	35
54. Teachers are given techniques for activating students' background knowledge before reading the texts.	69	46	44	29	37	25
55. The tests and assessment devices are helpful to the teacher.	68	45	42	28	40	27
56. The manual provides teachers with alternative and authentic assessment techniques	56	37	43	29	51	34

Based on the results of the Table 2, the highest frequency for teachers' responses belongs to item 52 (The manual gives instructions on how to incorporate audiovisual materials produced for the textbook) and the lowest frequencies belong to the same item and item 51 (The teacher's manual helps the teachers understand the objectives of the textbook). The teachers' perceptions of the new English textbook needs are sorted in Table 3.

Table 3

Sorting of Teachers' Perceptions of the Needs

Items	Mean
52. The manual gives instructions on how to incorporate audiovisual materials produced for the textbook.	2.56
51. The teacher's manual helps the teachers understand the objectives of the textbook.	2.59
48. The use of the material is easily manageable by the teacher.	2.7
49. The teacher's manual suggests an appropriate, concise method for teaching each lesson.	2.75
54. Teachers are given techniques for activating students' background knowledge before reading the texts.	2.8
55. The tests and assessment devices are helpful to the teacher.	2.83
50. The design of the materials allows the teachers to use them differently according to the needs of different students.	2.85

53. The manual provides additional exercises for reinforcing various language skills in the textbook	2.87
56. The manual provides teachers with alternative and authentic assessment techniques	3.09

As shown in the above table, items 52 and 51 had the lowest mean values, but the items 56 and 53 had the highest values among teachers' perceptions of the new English textbook teacher needs.

4.3. Analysis of the Teachers' Interview

The teacher's interview protocol consisted of eight main sections. The first question of interview was about the book layout and its appearance which was subdivided into questions related to quality of papers, color, and so on.

They responded to the first question that the layout and appearance of the book are ok. Alex said:

The size of the book is good. I prefer the large size, but they have changed it to the small size for the prospect 2.

About the cover he added that:

I should say it is somehow philosophical; its perception is difficult for the students.

Another part of this question was about headings which Alex described them good, but Harry, another teacher, did not like the way they are presented.

Another question was about teaching aids, which Tom said:

Its CD is good and complete, although the speakers of the CD are not logical.

Regarding the second interview question about the content of the book, whether they are well formed and attract the students, Harry said:

I actually don't understand what I should do and what the book expects me to teach the students.

Alex stated that:

The content of the book is a mix of politics, religion, and language. It tries to preach morality and so on. I should say this book tries to use communicative language teaching approach. As you know, in this method you can use native language in the classroom.

The third interview question was about the objectives of the book. In this regard, Ann stated that:

The objectives are clear. In each lesson, an objective is presented.

Betty briefly averted that:

There is no clear objective.

Alex stated that:

A very weak point of the book is that the words have not been repeated in the later lessons. For example, you see a word in lesson one and never see it again.

The fourth question of the interview was related to the language type of the textbook. The teachers were asked if they think the kind of used language is real and can be usable in the student's life.

Ann believed it is not authentic at all. Alex criticized it and said it is not English but Fenglish. In this regard Harry said:

There are strange nouns which you cannot find in English.

Similarly Betty believed that:

The type of language is usable for students, and the exercises designed to be used in real situations.

Skills were the fifth subject of the interview about which the researcher asked some questions. Most of the teachers had similar opinions related to this issue. Most of them believed that the most attention is paid to listening and speaking. Betty believed:

There is no text actually in this book and we cannot call it a textbook.

Alex affirmed that:

Audio materials are practical and useable.

Harry said:

This book just focuses on listening and speaking .No attention is paid to reading and writing.

Ann said, "The CD is so fast and most the students cannot follow it".

The sixth question was about the activities .The teachers were asked, whether the activities are suitable, sufficient, and clear. Most of them declared that they are clear because instructions are in Farsi and students understand what to do. However, Alex believed that the exercises do not suit the lessons.

When answering the seventh question which was about cultural values, most of them answered that they don't see any cultural contrast.

Alex believed that:

The book tries to convey religious and national culture through itself and no attention is paid to the culture of source language.

The last question was related to the teachers' needs. In this regard, Alex believed that teacher's book is useful, but Harry did not believe so. He said:

The teacher book and CD don't help so much .I myself had to design a power point for teaching

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The general purpose of this study was to evaluate teachers' perception of the new English textbook used in Iranian junior high schools named Prospect 1 written by Alavimoghadam et al. (2014). The book is prescribed by the Ministry of Education of Iran to be taught at the first grade in all governmental high schools in the country. The researcher chose to evaluate this book for two reasons: first, it is the foundation stone in the English language program and second, it is a new book and evaluating it is an educational necessity. The evaluation deals with categories including general appearance, design and illustration, accompanying materials, objectives, topic contents, language contents, social and cultural contexts, language skills, teachability, teaching methods, and practice and testing.

The findings revealed that teachers were in favor of the new English text book in terms of layout and physical appearance, content, objectives, language type, skills, and activities and tasks. The findings of the study also rejected the second null hypothesis as the teachers had not accepted the new textbook

suitable and practical for teaching English. The following outcomes are achieved and discussed in comparison with the findings of other studies.

- How do Iranian high school English teachers perceive new English textbook used in Iranian high schools (prospect 1)?

To answer this question which is related to the first objective of the research, different aspects of the mentioned textbook were investigated. They included layout and physical appearance, content, objectives, language type, skills, activities and tasks, and cultural values. The first thing in a book or textbook that catches the attention of reader or student is its appearance. The teachers answered to this aspect of the textbook positively and their answers confirmed the ideas of Alan Cunningsworth and Tomlinson (1984) who emphasized a good balance between visual material and written text, Nunan (1991) who believed students' view of language is a combination of the way materials are organized and types of content and activities, and Sheldon (1988) who stressed the significance of mix of text and graphical material.

The teachers' answers about the second part of the questionnaire, content, were conducive. Most of them agreed on the familiarity of topics to the students and appropriateness of the book's table of contents. Most of the participants claimed that "the content promotes students' autonomy"; this fact is in line with the idea of A Cunningsworth (1995) who believed the textbooks must stimulate students to become more independent in their learning and in their use of English. Our findings about topical, functional, and logical organization of the textbook is in line with Sheldon's statement (1988) who believed that the textbook should be organized in such a way that the units and exercises connect in terms of theme, situation, topic, pattern of skills development, or progression in grammar and lexis.

In the third part of the questionnaire, the participants stated that the objectives of the current textbook are realistic, clear, and precise and they correspond to the needs of the students. The fourth part of the questionnaire was about language type that the most noticeable thing in teachers' answers was the emphasis of textbook on language use. In general, 60% of the participants voted on the authenticity of the materials of the present book that is in line with Swan's idea (1985).

The fifth part of the questionnaire was about the variety of skills applied in this book. Although most of the participants believed that the textbook contains listening materials accompanied by activities which help comprehension and less attention to writing activities such as controlled, guided, and free paragraphs. They also believed that the material for spoken English is sufficient. These results are not in line with the idea of scholars such as McDonough and Shaw (2012) who argued that materials should enable the students in four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Altogether, they are satisfied with at least three skills applied in this textbook.

The sixth part of the questionnaire was about textbook's activities and tasks. Richards (2001) elaborated that textbook's tasks should be flexible and suit students with different learning styles. The participants' answers were not in line with this idea and about half of them (48%) believed that there are a variety of activities in the textbook. Therefore, they did mainly agree that there are sufficient instructions to explain how the exercise should be done.

The last part of the questionnaire was about textbook's cultural values. As the result showed, the teachers were not in favor of the new English textbook in terms of cultural values. They mainly disagreed on the opinion that claimed "the content serves as a window into learning about the target language culture." This finding is not in line with the ideas of scholars like Brown and Rodgers (2002) who believed a language is a part of a culture and these two cannot be separated, Gao (2006) who discussed the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning, and A Cunningsworth (1995) and Nation Ming-Tzu (1999) who believed foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching.

- Have the teachers accepted the new developed textbook as a suitable and practical way of teaching English?

With respect to the second question, teachers' answers to nine items of the teacher's needs part of the questionnaire were mostly agree about: easily manageable use of the material, presenting appropriate, concise method for teaching each lesson in teacher's manual, different design of the materials that allows the teachers to use them differently according to the needs of students, the teacher's manual helps the teachers understand the objectives of the textbook, the manual gives instructions on how to incorporate audiovisual materials produced for the textbook, techniques for teachers to activate students' background knowledge before reading the texts, helpful tests and assessment devices for the teacher. Only in two items, the number of agree and disagree answers were close to each other: alternative and authentic assessment techniques and additional exercises for reinforcing various language skills have been provided in the teachers' manual. Altogether, it can be concluded that the teachers accepted the new textbook as a suitable and practical way of teaching English.

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COMPARATIVE CRITICAL READING AND ITS EFFECT ON ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

THIS STUDY TRIED TO FIND OUT THE EFFECT OF COMPARATIVE CRITICAL READING ON ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS. IN ORDER TO RUN THE STUDY 60 PARTICIPANTS AT INTERMEDIATE LEVEL WERE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO TWO EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS. THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP EXPERIENCED TREATMENT WHICH WAS CRITICAL READING BY COMPARING TEXTS. WHERE AS THE MEMBERS OF THE CONTROL GROUP RECEIVED PLACEBO WHICH WAS READING TEXTS IN THE TRADITIONAL WAY. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY REVEALED THAT PRACTICING COMPARATIVE CRITICAL READING HAD A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY WRITING OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP.

KEY WORDS: WRITING ABILITY, ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS, CRITICAL READING

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, the ability to engage in careful, reflective thought has been viewed in various ways: as a fundamental characteristic of a foreign language learner, as a requirement for responsible citizenship in a democratic society, and more recently, as an employability skill for an increasingly wide range of jobs. Luke and Elkins (2002) believe that teaching EFL / learners to become effective Thinkers is increasingly recognized as an immediate goal of teaching.

If learners are going to function successfully in a highly technical society, They must equip with lifelong thinking skills necessary to acquire and process information in an ever – changing world of the many concepts related to acquisition and improvement of critical thinking, self-awareness is one of the most important factors.

Schallert and Reed (2004) subscribe to the view that reading skill as an evaluative tool can serve a pivotal role in bringing the spirit of self-awareness and criticality to language classes. Therefore EFL learners should learn how to engage in the process of critical reading.

Hirvela (2004) subscribes to the view that reading to write is based on the notion that reading supports and shapes L2 learners. Reading is not merely useful for enhancing L2 learner's writing ability in a general sense. Also, through reading, learners are given opportunities in writing classrooms to acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, or rhetorical features of the texts. Pedagogically, there

are numerous teaching practices suggested for reading to write, including rhetorical reading, modeling approach, extensive reading, and critical reading as a recently far – reaching strategy in academic writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Writing

Writing goals, like those in the other three language skills, vary with the teacher. Some teachers focus almost entirely on the language itself, some on communication, and others on both the forms and the message. On the linguistic level the goal is to learn to make the letters and to acquire the facility to manipulate the grammatical forms accurately. On the communication level, the goal is to adapt the goals of the writer to the needs of the reader (Spack, 1984). Writers should consider the reader; the effect they want to achieve (informing, instructing, persuading); the relationship they want to establish with the reader; the “creation of meaning”; and the use of language and the correctness of grammar.

Obviously, writing to communicate can be possible only when students have sufficient control of the writing system and the grammar to make themselves understood. The unresolved question is what degree of linguistic accuracy the teacher should expect of the students. Is the goal to learn to write on a level at which they can communicate their thoughts to a native speaker? If so, the teacher accepts the premise that language is a communicative system, not a perfectible one, and that native speakers in most cases have such a high degree of fluency in their own language that they can comprehend students’ imperfect writing. If the goal is to learn to communicate in writing while at the same time focusing on linguistic accuracy, the teacher believes that grammatical correctness is an inseparable and necessary component of communication, especially in the educational context.

Given this difference of opinion, perhaps the best position to take is a flexible one. The teacher can reasonably expect a more accurate performance from a gifted language student than from one who is on the other end of the spectrum. He may choose different standards of performance for students studying the language as a requirement and those who are specializing in the language. He may justifiably make distinctions between those students who want to be corrected and those who do not. In other words, the teacher may vary his approach as long as what he does is consistent with the students’ needs and goals. Insisting on grammatical perfectibility in the case of struggling students or those with low self-esteem may lead only to a reluctance to participate in those very activities needed to give them the confidence they must have to continue. At the same time, refusing to correct gifted, conscientious students who want to do everything as perfectly as possible may lead to their failing to put forth their best efforts in a course that fails, in their view, to maintain high academic standards.

The long – term practical goal must be the ability to use the learned materials to communicate a message that a native speaker can understand. This applies to any course, with the accuracy requirements rising as the students advance in their study of and practice with the language and in relation to the students’ abilities. Short term goals are identical except that they apply to specific segments of material. As soon as students complete the first chapter of their introductory course, the teacher should assign a writing task that requires them to communicate their ideas in the second language. Of course, these first attempts at writing are rather short and simple, but with time and weekly practice they will become longer and more complex. The important point is that the students practice writing about the content of each chapter in their texts before moving on to the next.

2.2. Reading

As is true for the other three language skills, reading is a process involving the activation of relevant knowledge and related language skills to accomplish an exchange of information from one person to another. Reading requires that the reader focus attention on the reading materials and integrate previously acquired knowledge and skills to comprehend what someone else has written. Sometimes

erroneously called a passive skill because the reader does not produce messages in the same sense as a speaker or writer, reading nevertheless requires active mental processing for communication to occur. Thus, referring to reading as a passive skill perpetuates a misconception that can only mislead students and harm their perception of what their role in the reading process is.

Reading is a receptive skill in that the reader is receiving a message from a writer. In the past various writers have also referred to reading as a decoding skill. This terminology derives from the idea of language as a code, one which must be deciphered to arrive at the meaning of the message. Although this term points out the active role the reader must play in reading, it does not tell the whole story. Recent researchers in reading describe the reading process in a way that implies an active reader intent upon using background knowledge and skills to recreate the writer's intended meaning. Perfetti (1984), for example, defines reading as "thinking guided by print."

Reading is a basic and complementary skill in language learning. Second language students need to learn to read for communication and to read greater and greater quantities of authentic materials. Students can probably learn to read more easily than they can acquire any other skill, and they can use reading materials as a primary source of comprehensible input as they learn the language.

2.3. Critical Reading

Wallace (2002) believes that critical reading pays attention to social and ideological factors which mediate readers' access to text. Critical reading is concerned less with the individual author's communicative intent than with ideological effect: the claim is that readers need not accept the words on the page as given, but that a range of interpretations are legitimate. Second language (L2) readers may bring different kinds of cultural and ideological assumptions to bear on L2 texts. There by offering fruitful challenges to mainstream or conventional readings sometime we read just for pleasure or entertainment: sometimes we read to obtain information, taking it, for granted that the information is reliable. However, critical reading means analyzing, evaluating, and making judgments on the basis of what we read.

According to Wallace (2003), critical reading has important payoffs in term of foreign language learning in two particular ways. The first approach is downward-looking criticality which refers to the extended discussion of texts which allows learners to draw more fully on their existing linguistic resources and to stretch them at the same time. In this approach, improved grammatical accuracy is a likely outcome as learners search for clarity and precision. Through the second approach called upward-looking criticality, language learners are encouraged to question the institutional frameworks of their classroom and their lives.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that teachers are often less comfortable with the second approach. Since the class follows a socially constructed atmosphere, students may challenge the class and feel free to subvert The teacher's pre-determined practices.

Reading texts comparatively in a dialogical perspective (reader-author interaction) is considered as a key strategy for practicing critical reading in an EFL context. Discussing main ideas, distinguishing facts and opinions, and analyzing different endings by two different writers about the same topic provide more reliable links to other language skills. Furthermore, exploring likenesses and differences between texts can help readers understand them better. Comparative critical reading strategy, more than other strategies, offers opportunities to challenges writers' issues directly.

Comparative critical reading instruction is explicitly of dual purpose. It serves both to improve learners' ability to understand text that they read and to develop their own writing as a social act (Kurland, 2000) When language learners see how they draw meaning from others, they can see how to instill meaning in their own work. In other words, Flynn (1999) introduces comparative critical reading

instruction as an explicitly dual-purpose strategy which serves both to improve learners' ability to understand texts and to develop their writing ability .

At the start of 21st century ,learner –centered courses have continued to dominate writing classes where writing is view as a social activity with communicative ends. Learning the processes of writing ,particularly for learners in foreign language setting seems to be a very complex task. They have to make a great effort in dealing with structural issues such as selecting appropriate lexical items and grammatical structures and generating and developing ideas about different topics. Moreover ,they to overcome their problems with functional ,teachers should help the learners to express themselves freely ,involve in classroom interaction and develop their skills to become autonomous writers .The suggestion here is that by identifying constructive strategies. Teacher can facilitate meaning fall and productive writing. Comparative reading strategy is one of those which is believed to foster writing in EFL learners.

Hence this study set out to examine the effect of comparative critical reading strategy on intermediate Iranian EFL learners' writing achievement .In order to investigate the effect of such strategies on the writing ability of the learners the following research questions were proposed.

1-Is there any difference between the writing achievement of the students who read texts through comparative critical reading activities and those who practice reading through the traditional method?

2-Is there any difference between the reading ability of the students who read texts critically and those who read in the traditional method?

2.4. Objective of the Study

This study hopes to have an effective outcome to improve and facilitate the Iranian EFL learners' writing ability. This study tries to investigate to what extent the presence or absence of comparative critical reading in writing classes effects Iranian EFL learners' argumentative essay writing performance.

So, this study aspired to find answer to the following research question:

RQ: Is there any significant difference between argumentative essay writing performance of students who undergo comparative critical reading and that of students who are involved in normal reading activities?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 60 adult Iranian EFL learners who were studying at a language center in Rasht. They were 25 male and 35 female students whose ages ranged from 19 to 27 and were at intermediate level of language proficiency. The participants were divided randomly into two groups, that is, the experimental and control groups. The experimental group including 30 participants received a 20-session treatment in which they encountered teaching techniques of comparative critical reading through writing. The control group including 30 participants received a 20-session placebo.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

To answer the research question and to test the hypothesis of the study, the following instruments and materials were used:

1- Quick Placement Test (QPT): QPT sheds light on the learners' language level. In order to make up a homogeneous group in terms of the participants' general proficiency, QPT (Version 2) was administered.

The test consisted of 40 items. A total number of 85 learners took QPT and among them 60 learners who got the scores within the range of 24-30 were recognized as being at lower intermediate-level and were selected as the participants of this study. The questions of the test were taken from 'Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate'.

2- Pretest: The goal of this test that was given before the treatment was to discover the possible initial differences between the writing ability of the experimental and control groups. A reading test was used to specifically verify the reading ability of the participants. This test was developed by the researchers and was mainly based on the previous materials the learners had studied. Additionally, the participants were asked to write a four - paragraph composition on: "Fiction or non - fiction: which kind of books do you prefer to read? Support your reasons". The writings, then, were rated by two raters based on the writing profile proposed by IELTS (1981), and those who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean were randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups. However, prior to administering the reading test, the test was piloted and proved to be reliable and valid measures of the traits they intended to measure.

3- Posttest: This test which was administered after the treatment sessions was equal in all respects to pre-test.

3.3. Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

This research was conducted in April, 2015. At the outset, a homogeneity test in terms of the participants' general proficiency was administered. In regard to making a homogeneous group, the researcher used QPT (Version2) for the overall number of 85 learners who were studying English as a foreign language in an institute in Raht, Iran. The allowed time for this test was 30 minutes. Among the total number of learners who sat for this test, 60 learners got the scores within the range of 24-30 and were considered for being in the lower intermediate-level and were selected as the participants of this study. Therefore, these 60 participants remained and the scores of other students were excluded from the data analysis in the remaining phases of this study. A pretest piloted before was then administered. It required the participants to write a composition on a selected topic. The writings were rated by two raters based on the writing profile proposed by IELTS (1981). Then, experimental group received a 20-session treatment through which the participants encountered teaching techniques of comparative critical reading through writing. The treatment took 7 weeks, 3 sessions per week, each session 90 minutes. The classes were divided into two main sections: approximately fifty minutes was allotted to academic reading as the main part of the class and 40 minutes to academic free discussion on the topic of the lessons. During each session, two articles by two different authors on the same topic were presented to the experimental group. The members of the group were asked to compare the introductory part of the two articles, identify their main ideas, and discuss their methods of support. Besides, they were asked to compare the conclusions down by each author and to identify their different perspectives. At the final stage, the learners were supposed to recognize the tone of the language of the passages and find out whether the author ease biased. They were allowed to use a dictionary. In order to assess their understanding of passages, all learners in the experimental group were asked to fill in the Yes/No post-reading report related to each reading passage.

Alternatively, the participants in the control group received a 20-session placebo in their classes. They read two different academic reading texts with different topics. The routine activities of the class were reading, reviewing, reciting, and answering written questions. Similar to the experimental Group, all the students in this group were asked to submit a Yes/No post-reading report. After 20 sessions, all of the students were asked to write a composition on the same topic they had written about at the pretest. The reason was to scrutinize their improvement on writing ability.

4.Results

To select homogeneous participants for the present study, the Quick Placement Test was administered to (n =85) EFL learners. Sixty students whose score fell within the domain 24-30 were chosen as the main sample for the present study. Based on Oxford Placement Test Direction, scores in the area of 0-15 are considered Beginners, 16-23 (Elementary), 24-30 (Lower- intermediate), 31-40 (Upper- intermediate) The results of the QPT for (n =85) students are available in the following table:

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for the QPT scores

Statistics		
QPT		
N	Valid	85
	Missing	0
Mean		27.58
Median		27.00
Mode		25
Std. Deviation		4.476
Variance		20.033
Skewness		.814
Std. Error of Skewness		.261
Kurtosis		.529
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.517
Range		20
Minimum		20
Maximum		40
Sum		2344

Table 1 presented the findings of group statistics and numerical information for the QPT scores which was carried out for selecting homogeneous sample out of (n =85) EFL students. Measures of central tendency such as the mean, the median, the mode and measures of dispersion particularly the variance, and the standard deviation together with measures of distribution such as Skewness and Kurtosis were calculated for the QPT. For the present study, the main sample included (n = 60) lower-intermediate participants who were selected based on QPT direction in order to select a group of lower- intermediate EFL learners.

The next assumption is called the homogeneity of regression slopes. That is, the relationship between the dependent variable and the covariate is the same for each group. It is checked to show that there is no interaction between the covariate and the treatment.

Table2.
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Homogeneity of Regression Slopes

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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Corrected Model	323.769 ^a	3	107.923	108.768	.000
Intercept	47.638	1	47.638	48.011	.000
Groups	5.220	1	5.220	5.260	.030
covariate	141.425	1	141.425	142.533	.000
Groups * Covariate	.012	1	.012	.012	.904
Error	55.565	56	.992		
Total	11046.000	60			
Corrected Total	379.333	59			

a. R Squared = .818 (Adjusted R Squared = .835)

In the Table2, the only value that needs to be checked is the significance level of the interaction term (shown above as **Groups * covariate**). The Sig. value is *greater* than .05 indicating that the assumption of the Homogeneity of Regression Slopes has not been violated. Therefore, the Analysis of Variance can be properly conducted to explore the differences between our treatment groups.

The results of the groups' descriptive statistics are summarized and tabulated in tables 3, 4 and 5. Table 3 presents the result of the descriptive statistics of the control group on both pretest and posttest measures.

Table3.
Descriptive Statistics of the control group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
pretest	30	5	14	11.15	1.17
posttest	30	6	16	12.14	1.05
Valid N	30				

According to the above table, it is revealed that the pretest mean value of the control group for argumentative Essay writing was 11.15 with the standard deviation of 1.17. With regard to its performance on the posttest, the control group showed some degree of improvement on argumentative Essay writing measure [Mean= 12.14, SD= 1.05].

Table 4.
Descriptive Statistics of the experimental group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
pretest	30	8	15	12	2.03
posttest	30	12	18	14.21	1.18
Valid N	30				

Table 4 indicates the result of the descriptive statistics of the experimental group on the argumentative Essay writing measures before and after the treatment. Prior to the instruction, the experimental group had a mean value of 12 with the standard deviation of 2.03. However, it is revealed that its performance on the argumentative Essay writing measure improved after the treatment. It can be inferred that the instruction through Audiovisual listening tasks was effective in enhancing learners' listening comprehension [Mean= 14.21, SD= 1.18].

Table 5.
Descriptive Statistics of both groups on the posttest

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	14.21	1.18	30
Control	12.14	1.05	30

Table 5 illustrates the descriptive analysis of the experimental and control groups for the posttest scores of argumentative Essay writing measures. Findings revealed that the mean value of the experimental group on the posttest measures of the argumentative Essay writing is 14 with a standard deviation of 1.18. However, the mean value of the control group of the study in the posttest is lower than that of the experimental group (Mean= 12.14., SD= 1.05). Thus, it can be claimed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the posttest of listening comprehension despite the initial difference in their pre-test mean values. Yet, in order to investigate whether the difference between groups is significant, the results of ANOVA should be presented and discussed. What follows in the next section is a discussion of the inferential statistics of the research.

Table 6.
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

	df1	df2	Sig.
.136	1	58	.421

Table 6 summarizes information about the result of the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances. In this case, the assumption has not been violated because the Sig. value is .42, which is much larger than the cut-off of .05. The main ANCOVA results are presented in the Table 4.6, labeled Test of Between-Subjects Effects.

Table 7.
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	323.757 ^a	2	161.878	166.024	.000	.853
Intercept	48.247	1	48.247	49.483	.000	.465
covariate	143.490	1	143.490	147.164	.000	.721
Groups	144.852	1	144.852	116.431	.000	.711
Error	55.577	57	.975			
Total	11046.000	60				
Corrected Total	379.333	59				

a. R Squared = .853 (Adjusted R Squared = .848)

The findings of the Table 7 indicates that after adjusting for pre-intervention scores, there was a significant difference between the two intervention groups on post-intervention scores on argumentative Essay writing performance, $F(1, 57) = 116.431$, $Sig = .000$, partial eta squared= .71. Hence, the ANCOVA has revealed statistically significant difference between the two groups on the argumentative Essay

writing performance when the potential differences at pre-test were taken into account. To conclude, it can be concluded that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in the posttest which is indicative of the great effectiveness of the teaching listening comprehension through Audiovisual listening comprehension tasks for the enhancement of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

5. Discussion

The main point of this study was to examine the effect of Comparative Critical reading on the argumentative essay writing performance of Iranian EFL learners. First, one research question was proposed asking whether there is any significant difference between argumentative essay writing performance of students who undergo comparative critical reading and that of students who are involved in normal reading activities.

Consequently, this hypothesis was proposed that there is not any significant difference between argumentative essay writing performance of students who undergo comparative critical reading and that of students who are involved in normal reading. Based on the results of this study, this null hypothesis was rejected, which shows that explicit instruction of Comparative Critical reading effects on the argumentative essay writing performance of Iranian EFL learners.

Since writing calls for mental involvement and self-awareness of the language learners, the positive answer to the research question reveals that these strategies provide the required opportunity for the learners. Moreover, these strategies can increase the students' consciousness toward the lexical and grammatical structures of the texts and offer an invaluable practice to cater for awareness toward the rules and structures needed in writing.

Furthermore, by using these strategies in reading classes, teachers can budget their class time and simultaneously work on both reading and writing ability of their students. Teachers and practitioners should consider that this strategy not only buttresses the spirit of self-awareness and critical inquisitiveness among language learners, but also bridges the gap between reading and writing skills, especially by comparing texts which follow similar topics.

This is in line with studies of Schallert and Reed (2004) who have come to the point that reading skill as an evaluative tool can serve a pivotal role in bringing the spirit of self-awareness and criticality to language classes. Therefore EFL learners should learn how to engage in the process of critical reading.

This study produced results which corroborate the findings of the previous work in this field, and it agrees with Hirvela's (2004) view which subscribed reading to write is based on the notion that reading supports and shapes L2 learners. Also, through reading, learners are given opportunities in writing classrooms to acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, or rhetorical features of the texts.

The findings of this study suggest that with a critical focus on reading skill participants are given the opportunity to acquire how to participate in interactive reading, engage in academic writing, and question the underlying social and educational assumptions of the texts. However, achieving these major aims requires an extra effort on the part of material developers and Language teachers to introduce the principle of criticality to the textbooks and classroom practices.

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