

ENGLISH LANGUAGE HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS IN IRAN FROM
STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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To:

My Lovely Mother

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching (ELT) textbooks play an important role in language classrooms. The textbooks are worthy to be examined by researchers to determine if they are designed based on learners' language needs. High school ELT textbooks in Iran were written three decades ago based on structural approach. This approach does not take into account learners' language needs and the skills that should be incorporated in ELT textbooks in Iran. The purpose of this study is three fold. The research investigated learners' language needs and the perspectives of learners and teachers on English language textbooks used in Iran. Besides, it examined whether the participants' perspectives on the textbooks meet the learners' needs. The instruments to gather data in this study were questionnaire (to examine the learners' needs), checklist (to investigate the learners' and teachers' perspectives on ELT textbooks) and interview (to clarify unclear points). Based on random sampling, 300 Iranian students from three different high school grades (year 9, 10 and 11, aged between 15-17 years old), and 10 Iranian English language teachers were selected to participate in the study. Teachers and students were required to respond to questionnaires and checklists, and 30 students were selected for an interview session to provide clarification. With regards to learner's language needs, the findings showed that the students considered speaking skill as the most needed skill, followed by other skills such as discussion, listening and writing practices. Besides, it was discovered that the textbooks did not incorporate communicative skills and tasks, and lack meaningful practices. The findings showed that the materials generally did not focus on the skills needed by learners as the books did not provide an appropriate balance of the four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing. Lastly, the results showed that the content of the ELT textbooks do not meet the learners' needs. In conclusion, the discoveries of this study provide evidence that future ELT textbooks in Iran need to be written based on investigation of learners' needs.

ABSTRAK

Buku teks Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris (ELT) memainkan peranan penting dalam pengajaran bahasa dalam bilik darjah. Buku-buku teks tersebut wajar disemak bagi mengetahui sama ada ia direka berdasarkan keperluan bahasa pelajar. Buku teks ELT di Iran ditulis sejak tiga dekad yang lalu berdasarkan pendekatan struktur. Pendekatan ini tidak mengambil kira keperluan bahasa pelajar dan kemahiran yang perlu dimasukkan dalam buku teks ELT di Iran. Kajian ini mempunyai tiga tujuan. Kajian ini mengkaji keperluan bahasa pelajar dan perspektif pelajar serta guru mengenai buku teks bahasa Inggeris yang digunakan di Iran. Selain itu, kajian ini mengkaji sama ada perspektif pelajar dan guru dalam buku teks memenuhi keperluan pelajar. Instrumen untuk mengumpul data dalam kajian ini ialah soal selidik (untuk mengkaji keperluan pelajar), senarai semak (untuk mengkaji perspektif pelajar dan guru tentang buku teks ELT) dan temu bual (untuk menjelaskan perkara yang tidak jelas). Berdasarkan pensampelan rawak, 300 orang pelajar Iran dari tiga buah sekolah tinggi yang berbeza gred (tahun 9, 10 dan 11, berumur antara 15-17 tahun), dan 10 orang guru Bahasa Inggeris Iran dipilih untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Guru dan pelajar dikehendaki menjawab soal selidik dan senarai semak, dan 30 orang pelajar dipilih untuk sesi temu bual untuk memberi penjelasan selanjutnya. Sehubungan dengan keperluan bahasa pelajar, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar menganggap pertuturan adalah kemahiran yang paling diperlukan, diikuti dengan kemahiran lain seperti perbincangan, mendengar dan menulis. Selain itu didapati buku teks yang digunakan tidak menggabungkan kemahiran berkomunikasi dan tugas, dan juga kekurangan latihan yang bermakna. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa bahan-bahan pengajaran tersebut secara amnya tidak memberi tumpuan terhadap kemahiran yang diperlukan oleh pelajar memandangkan ia tidak menyediakan keseimbangan yang bersesuaian tentang empat kemahiran yang diperlukan, membaca, mendengar, bertutur dan menulis. Akhir sekali, dapatan menunjukkan bahawa kandungan buku teks ELT tidak memenuhi keperluan pelajar. Sebagai kesimpulan, penemuan kajian ini memberikan bukti bahawa buku teks ELT di Iran perlu ditulis berdasarkan pertimbangan keperluan pelajar.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
	LIST OF TABLES	xi
	LIST OF FIGURES	xii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xiv
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Background of the Study	3
	1.2.1 Educational System in Iran	4
	1.2.2 English Language Syllabus in Iran	5
	1.2.3 Textbooks Used in Higher Secondary Schools in Iran	6
	1.2.4 High School ELT Textbook Analysis in Iran	7
	1.3 Statement of the Problem	9
	1.4 Purpose of the Study	14
	1.5 Research Objectives	15
	1.6 Research Questions	16
	1.7 Significance of the Study	16
	1.8 Scope of Study	17
	1.9 Theoretical Framework	18
	1.9.1 Textbook Analysis Framework	19

1.9.2	Needs Analysis Framework	21
1.9.3	Constructivism Theory	23
1.10	Conceptual Framework	25
1.11	Operational Definition of Key Terms	28
1.10	Summary	28
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	30
2.1	Introduction	30
2.2	Functions of Textbooks	32
2.3	English Language Textbook Analysis	34
2.4	English Language Learning Needs Analysis	45
2.4.1	Target Situation Analysis	49
2.4.2	Present Situation Analysis (PSA)	50
2.4.3	Deficiency Analysis	50
2.4.4	Strategy Analysis or Learning Needs Analysis	51
2.5	Language Learning Theories	53
2.5.1	Interactionism	53
2.5.1.1	Interaction Hypothesis	54
2.5.1.2	Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (CO)	55
2.5.1.3	Interactionism principles	55
2.5.1.4	Critical Evaluation of Interactionism	56
2.5.1.5	Pedagogical Implications	57
2.5.2	Constructivism	58
2.5.2.1	Principles of Constructivism Kearsley (1999)	58
2.5.2.2	Critical Evaluation of Constructivism	61
2.5.2.3	Pedagogical implications	61
2.6	Syllabus	62
2.6.1	Various Types of Approaches on Syllabus Design	63
2.6.1.1	The Structural Approach	64
2.6.1.2	Process-Oriented Syllabuses	65
2.6.1.3	Procedural/Task-Based Approaches	65
2.7	Curriculum	66

2.8	Materials Design	67
2.9	Teachers' Perspectives on Teaching, Learning, and Textbooks' Analysis	68
2.10	Lerangers' Perspectives on Teaching, Learning, and Textbooks' Analysis	70
2.11	Issues in Textbook Analysis	71
2.12	Summary	75
3	METHODOLOGY	76
3.1	Introduction	76
3.2	Research Design	76
3.3	Research Subjects	77
3.4	Research Instruments	79
3.4.1	Questionnaire	79
3.4.1.1	Validity of the Questionnaire	82
3.4.2	Checklist	83
3.4.3	Interview	84
3.4.4	English Language Textbooks in Iran	86
3.5	Data Collection	87
3.6	Research Procedures	88
3.7	Data Analysis	89
3.8	Summary	90
4	DATA ANALYSIS	92
4.1	Introduction	92
4.2	LeaRners' Needs Analysis	93
4.2.1	Analysis of grade 9 learners' needs	93
4.2.2	Analysis of grade 10 learners' needs	100
4.2.3	Analysis of Grade 11 learners' needs	106
4.2.4	Analysis of the interview with the learners (Needs Analysis)	111
4.2.5	Quantitative Analysis of teachers' Perspectives on Learners' Needs	112
4.3	Quantitative Analysis of Learners' Perspectives on Textbooks	120
4.3.1	Analysis of Grade 9 Learners' Perspectives on English Book 1	120
4.3.2	Analysis of Grade 10 Learners' Perspectives on English Book 2	127

4.3.3	Analysis of Grade 11 Lernasers' Perspectives on English Book 3	132
4.3.4	Analysis of the interview with the learners Regarding the Textbooks	138
4.3.5	Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives on Textbooks	139
4.4	Analysis of Checklist and Questionnaire Items' Matches and Mismatches	146
4.4.1	Learners' checklist and questionnaire matches and mismatches	147
4.4.2	Teachers' checklist and questionnaire matches and mismatches	154
4.5	Discussion	159
4.6	Summary	162
5	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	163
5.1	Introduction	163
5.2	Overview of the Study	163
5.3	Summary of Findings	164
5.4	Limitations	168
5.5	Contribution	166
5.6	Recommendation	168
6.7	Conclusion	170
	REFERENCES	171
	Appendices A-G	183-212

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Standards of textbook analysis 1970s	35
2.2	Standards of textbook analysis 1980s	37
2.3	Standards of textbook analysis 1990s	39
3.1	Profile of Subjects	78
3.2	Questionnaire framework based on Fatihi (2003), Haseli Songhori (2008), Kittidhaworn (2001) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987)	81
3.3	Discarded items from the questionnaires	83
3.4	Checklist framework based on Litz' (2005) study	84
3.5	Textbooks Sections	86
3.6	Data Analysis	90
4.1	Grade 9 learners' perceptions of language skills	94
4.2	Grade 9 learners' interest in learning English	95
4.3	Grade 9 learners' goals in learning English	97
4.4	Grade9 learners' classroom learning preferences	98
4.5	Grade 10 learners' perceptions of language skills	102
4.6	Grade 10 learners' interest in learning English	103
4.7	Grade 10 learners' goals in learning English	104
4.8	Grade 10 learners' classroom learning preferences	105
4.9	Grade 11 learners' perceptions of language skills	107
4.10	Grade 11 learners' interest in learning English	108
4.11	Grade 11 learners' goals in learning English	109
4.12	Grade 11 learners' classroom learning preferences	110
4.13	Teachers' perspectives on learners' language skills	113
4.14	Teachers' perspectives on learners' interest in learning English	114

4.15	Teachers' perspectives on learners' goals in learning English	115
4.16	Teachers' perspectives on learners' classroom learning preferences	116
4.17	Grade 9 Perspectives on Textbook (Part A and B)	121
4.18	Grade 9 Perspectives on Textbook (Part C and D)	122
4.19	Grade 9 Perspectives on Textbook (Part E, F and G)	124
4.20	Grade 10 Perspectives on Textbook (Part A and B)	127
4.21	Grade 10 Perspectives on Textbook (Part C and D)	128
4.22	Grade 10 Perspectives on Textbook (Part E, F, G)	129
4.23	Grade 11 Perspectives on Textbook (Part A and B)	132
4.24	Grade 11 Perspectives on Textbook (Part C and D)	133
4.25	Grade 11 Perspectives on Textbook (Part E, F and G)	135
4.26	Teachers' Perspectives on Textbooks (Part A and B)	140
4.27	Teachers' Perspectives on Textbooks (Part C and D)	142
4.28	Teachers' Perspectives on Textbooks (Part E, F and G)	143
4.29	Learners' Checklist and Questionnaire matches and mismatches (Activities)	148
4.30	Learners' Checklist and Questionnaire matches and mismatches (Skills)	151
4.31	Learners' Checklist and Questionnaire matches and mismatches (Language Type and Overall Consensus)	152
4.32	Teachers' Checklist and Questionnaire matches and mismatches (Activities)	154
4.33	Teachers' Checklist and Questionnaire matches and mismatches (Skills)	156
4.34	Teachers' Checklist and Questionnaire matches and mismatches (Language Type and Overall consensus)	157

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Sample Page of English Book 1 (New Words)	8
1.2	Sample Page of English Book 1 (Reading)	10
1.3	Sample Page of English Book 2 (Speak Out)	11
1.4	Theoretical Framework	24
1.5	Conceptual Framework	27
2.1	Table of Contents of English Book 3	64
3.1	Research Procedure	89
5.1	Schematic Model	167

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Needs Analysis Questionnaire (Students)	183
B	Needs Analysis Questionnaire (Teachers)	190
C	Checklist (Students)	197
D	Checklist (Teachers)	201
E	Interview (Students)	206
F	Sample of the Interview Transcription	207
G	Sample Unit of Textbook	209

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Textbooks serve as one of the crucial elements in the teaching and learning of a language. In general, it provides a direction for the learners in terms of the language input received and the tasks and practices needed by the learners to master a language. They are an efficient tool for standardization, especially when a large number of learners are involved in the program. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994:315):

The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in [various] countries...No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook.

English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks are daily materials that the learners use, especially in ELT classes. Therefore, these materials may become worthy to review critically based on every current trend of language learning. The researcher believes that the ELT materials should follow a valid trend of teaching while considering the learners' needs as the needs of the learners are different from culture to culture and from decade to decade. The relation between textbooks and language teaching is not something which has only recently been commented on.

It has cropped up in writings about language over many centuries (Dahmardeh, 2009). In this argument probably the most important issue is to consider how textbooks should be designed in order to cater to the learner's needs.

Loewenberg Ball and Feiman-Nemser (1988) describe how in teacher pre-service education programs (for all subjects) in the United States, textbooks are consistently reviewed to determine the balance between the textbook content and the classroom needs adequacy. Based on Long's (2005) view, the approach of one-size-fits-all has been discredited. Every language course and textbook may be considered as a course of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) based on learners and classroom needs. In other words, when the learner's needs are investigated, the textbook developers will design the book considering the needs.

In designing the proper and suitable textbook, there are different worthy factors to be considered. One of these factors is the participant's needs. The actual people who are directly in touch with ELT materials (textbooks) are students and teachers. Dahmardeh (2009) believes that needs of the students are totally neglected in Iran, as the writers of the ELT curriculum in Iran devise the books based on their own perceptions of language learning but the needs of the learners were never a matter of concern (further elaboration is in chapter 3).

Generally, English language proficiency can be achieved if there is a well designed material that corresponds to the needs, thoughts and beliefs of the students in different levels from elementary level to the advanced one. The researcher believed that this fact should be a matter of concern as a proper and well-designed material possibly may lead the learners to a greater knowledge.

This study addresses the issue of ELT textbooks used in Iran. As the same books have been used for more than three decades, it is crucial that concerns should be raised in terms of whether the books are still relevant to the present day with so many new approaches developed by recent researchers and practitioners (see Nunan, 2003; Ellis, 1999; Richards, 2001). In order to examine the relevance of the textbooks, the participants' perspectives on the textbooks needs to be conducted.

In addition, as mentioned by Long (2005), textbook writers should also consider learners' needs when designing their materials. These are among the things that are considered missing from the ELT textbooks used in Iran.

1.2 Background of the Study

Having discussed the purpose and the function of the textbooks, the initial motivation of this study is derived from the ELT textbook analysis in other studies by Dahmardeh (2009), Rashidi and Najafi (2010), Ansary and Babai (2003), Aliakbari (2004), Riazi and Mosalanejad (2010) and the study conducted in USA by Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) in 2007. These studies analyze the ELT textbooks based on different perspectives such as teaching method evaluation, English communication failure, and learning objective evaluation based on Bloom's taxonomy.

ELT materials (textbooks) are considered crucial elements in language classrooms, but in recent years textbooks actual roles witness a lot of debate. There are two opposite point of views about using textbooks in ELT classrooms. As mentioned earlier, teachers and students tend to feel secured when their lessons are derived from specific textbooks. This is because textbook writers tend to arrange the contents systematically from simple to difficult concepts and skills, making the teaching and learning process easier to grasp by both the teachers and learners. On the other hand, by assigning specific textbooks to a class, both the teachers and the students may not be able to extend their creativity in their lessons in order to make the lessons interesting, motivating and challenging. Based on this debate, scholars are demanding that there should be a focal point of participants' perspectives on materials used in classrooms in terms of the teaching method and proper textbook design through needs analysis. In Iran, the ELT materials are used in English classes which make the students and teachers feel secure because they guide the participants through the teaching and learning process. However, the participants' perspectives on the materials in hand seem to be missing.

The discussion of the background of the study is divided further in terms of the education system in Iran, English language syllabus in Iran, textbooks used in higher secondary schools and ELT textbooks analysis in Iran. The idea here is to provide a deeper insights into the existing education system in Iran, and in turn, a better understanding of the issues raised pertaining to the use of English language textbooks in Iran.

1.2.1 Educational System In Iran

Generally, schools in Iran are composed of three levels. The first level, (elementary school) includes six years of studying. The students start schooling when they are 6–7 years old. Second, there is a middle school, which comprises three years. After middle school, the students will enter into a high school which involves 3 years of studying. Basically, the students have to study twelve years to be ready for the national university entrance exam in order to get to universities and need to pass the required test. Moreover, the English language is a foreign language in Iran and students are officially taught English from the first year of the middle school. Generally the students have to attend English language classes twice a week for about six years.

The official language of Iran is Persian and all the students normally grow up in a mixed Islamic and Persian communities where they have to study in Persian at all levels. English classes are not considered essential and the teacher's duty is to make the students ready for the University Entrance Exam in a limited time.

In the Iranian context, as Aliakbari (2004) mentioned before the Islamic Revolution in 1979 the English language teaching witnessed great attention because of the presence of native speakers of English and foreign institutes. There were loads of American and British centers in Iran which offered language classes to Persians. Some national universities (eg. Shiraz University) in Iran required students to master English language before entering the university programmes.

Even there were some national universities that were conventionally called American universities.

However, after the revolution, the extreme oppositions against the United States had resulted in English language teaching in schools and institutions being totally discarded from the curriculum because it was deemed unnecessary to study the language of the adversary. In the late 80s, some Iranian academics began to relook into the possibility of offering English language to the learners but with some moderations and changes of concepts and words from the previous textbooks. The newly designed English language textbooks introduced vocabulary, sentence structures and pictures which are more sensitive to Islamic religion.

The view presented here shows that there have been two scenerios of the education system in Iran which were marked by the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The revolution has redefined the role of English language from being an important to less important language. This dramatic change in view about English language has strongly affected the syllabus and textbooks design of English language in Iran.

1.2.2 English Language Syllabus in Iran

The English language syllabus in Iran stipulates that lessons should focus on the four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing. This view is in line with many ELT practitioners and researchers such as (Nunan 1991, etc) These four skills are deemed important in order for students to acquire as well as master English language. The syllabus also included aspects about exposing learners to foreign cultures as well as ensuring these learners to be experts in English language (Dahmardeh, 2009). However, despite the skills included in the syllabus, the skills are not fully translated in the textbooks. The textbook materials seem to provide rudimentary exercises and practices which are basically construction of sentences and filling the blanks (Refer to Appendix G). The four skills mentioned in the syllabus are not approached in integrated manner. There seems to be a gap between the syllabus and the materials used in class.

In addition, aspects about the exposure to foreign cultures mentioned in the syllabus are not fully addressed by the textbooks (Ansary, 2010). Furthermore, rudimentary exercises and practices provided in the textbooks do not really prepare the learners to become experts in the language.

In addition, the students receive a lot of input in the English classrooms. However, there are not enough tasks devised to get the output from the students. Based on the textbook design, the students are never asked to speak English in the classroom or even write a single essay. They normally tend to memorize the words, answer the comprehension questions and do some grammar exercises to pass the final entrance exam (Refer to Appendix G).

Careful analysis of the syllabus suggests that its main concern is about reading comprehension and grammar. It is the case because each skill is defined in the framework of reading. The bulk of the document is devoted to a presentation of reading strategies, and how to teach this skill as well as teaching grammar. In sum, it can be claimed that the English language textbooks used in Iran do not seem to follow the requirements of the syllabus because the focus of the textbooks are not on the four main skills and the learners are not introduced to the foreign culture. Nevertheless, elaboration on the syllabus itself cannot be provided here as it is not accessible to scholars and researchers. To this point, the syllabus is considered a confidential document. Having briefly discussed the educational system in Iran, the next section will focus on English textbook analysis in Iran.

1.2.3. Textbook Used in Higher Secondary Schools in Iran

The ELT textbooks in Iran are produced by the Ministry of Education and all the teachers have to use the same textbooks in both private and public schools. The ELT textbooks were first published in 1980s. The textbook writers devised these books based on structural approach and overtime, the students use the same materials which are heavily focused on reading comprehension and grammar practices. Although there seems to be speaking and writing exercises, they are actually merely

constructing sentences without specific context. Long (2005) believes that textbook writers should not devise the textbooks based on a one-size-fits-all approach.

The materials that are used in the classroom are mainly exam-oriented. The writers of the book believe that these books make the students ready for the University Entrance Exam. The teachers also try to give the students some tips to conquer the test. In other words, they are trying their best to help the students overcome the final test and they ignore the other significant parts of English language learning.

Based on the Dahmardeh's(2009) study, it is clear that the main focus of the ELT textbooks in Iran is on receptive skills of reading accompanied by grammar exercises. In other words, there is no real focus on the productive skills of speaking and writing. Reading and grammar lessons become the epitome of learning and mastering English language, although it is greatly recognized to insufficient in enhancing the learners' communicative ability and proficiency. According to Dahmardeh (2009: 47)

1.2.4 High School ELT Textbook Analysis in Iran

Generally, the learners in high schools have to attend English classes as well as other classes. They attend the classes twice a week during each semester (Two semesters per year). The materials are called "English Book 1, English Book 2 and English Book 3" (Refer to Appendix G) for year 9, 10 and 11 learners. The textbooks were published twenty years ago and the Ministry of Education reprint the books every year. The textbooks contain different sections which are New Words, Reading, Write it down, Speak Out, Language Functions, Pronunciation Practice, Vocabulary Review and Vocabulary List. Figure 1.1 indicates the New Words introduction to learners. As shown the words are introduced to learners in simple sentence levels.

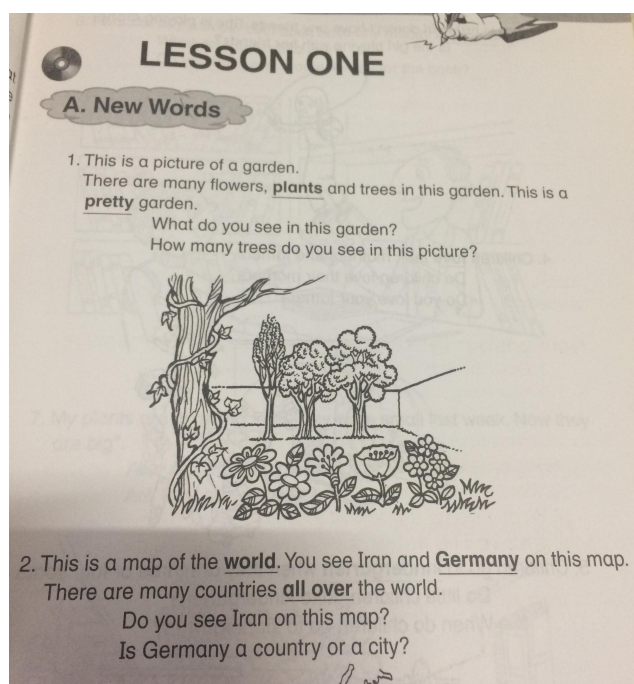


Figure 1.1 Sample page of English Book 1 (New Words)

There are many Iranian researchers who evaluated the ELT textbooks and mentioned the weaknesses of the textbooks recently. For instance, Dahmardeh's(2009) study aimed to investigate how the ELT textbooks in Iran could be more communicative. He discovered that the ELT textbooks in Iran are not communicative and he offered some changes to be done in the textbooks. Karapetyan and Aslanabadi (2015) stated that after studying the ELT textbooks in Iran, the learners do not know any clear information about the English speaking people and they are not able to communicate as well. Khajavi and Abbasi (2011) discovered that the writers of the ELT textbooks in Iran avoided the culture of the foreign countries and the textbooks are neutral regarding the culture. In addition, they found out that the textbooks are not suitable for this modern era and 21st century.

Ahur et al. (2014) evaluated “English Book 2 and English Book 3” (Refer to Appendix G). They discovered the demerits of English Book 3. They concluded that the textbooks’ pictures are dull, the book is not devised based on the learners’ interest, the book is full of grammar exercises, the explanations of the book is not enough, the vocabularies are introduced without any related contexts (figure 1.1) and

the language skills are ignored in the book. In addition, after evaluating the English Book 2, they stated that the teachers were not in favor of this book in general.

Textbook analyses in Iran focus on aspects of whether or not the textbooks provide opportunities and exercises for communication skills. In addition, the analyses and evaluation tend to suggest that the learners were basically exposed to basic level of the language. Therefore, as stated by Aslanabadi (2015) learners were not able to communicate well. The researcher believes that there should be a change in the way the ELT textbooks were designed in Iran as the textbooks were designed more than 30 years ago based on structural approach and teacher-fronted movement.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Having discussed the background of the study, it is deemed important that a study is conducted to examine whether the textbooks are sufficient in teaching the Iranian learners towards becoming proficient in English language. There is however a gap between what is taught in Persian language classroom and what expected level of proficiency the learners should achieve in order to be able to communicate in English language. The gap seems to point to the fact that the ELT textbooks in Iran focuses mainly on basic language skills of reading (Figure 1.2) and vocabularies (Figure 1.1) which hinders the students from becoming proficient users of English language while the goal is that they are expected to be able to communicate with others upon the completion of all the three levels of English language. Figure 1.2 shows a sample of reading passage of English Book 1.

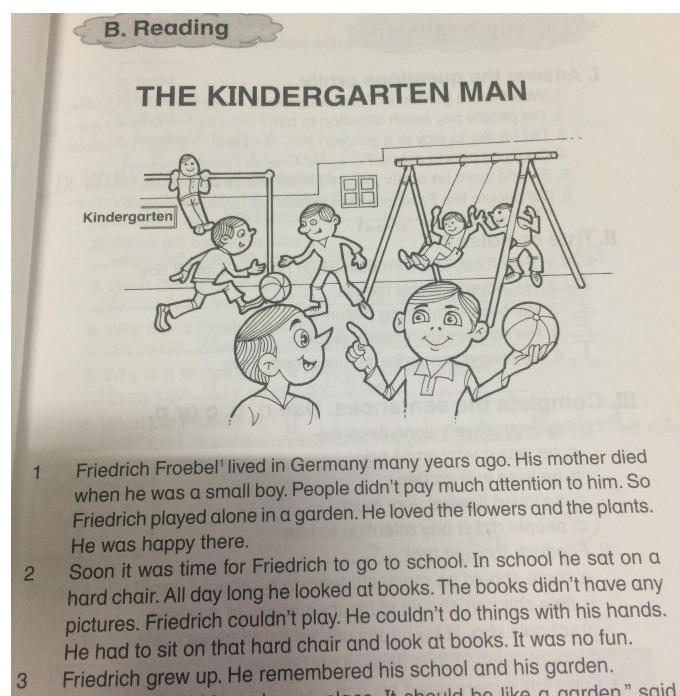


Figure 1.2 Sample page of English Book 1 (Reading)

Dahmardeh (2009) believed that ELT textbooks play an important role in language teaching classrooms. He argues that in recent years language teaching materials became crucial points of debates. His study shows that there are inconsistencies between the students' needs and the ELT materials in Iran. English in Iran is considered a foreign language and English textbooks should be devised in a way to facilitate the learners access to International resources and discoveries in different areas. He states that:

Having considered the students' lack of success in communicating in English with colleagues in different parts of Iran and according to the questionnaire survey, the Iranian curriculum and the textbooks, bearing in mind current literature (i. e. Nunan 1999; McGrath 2002; Gower et al. 2005 etc.), it is concluded that some of the problems that teachers and learners encounter can be traced to the textbooks.

(Dahmardeh, 2009:3)

He believes that the ELT textbooks in Iran are not devised properly and the learners cannot acquire the proficiency that they expect to get. For teaching English as a foreign language, the teachers need to focus on all the skills and sub skills. He also indicates that the textbook writers had a very surface and basic view to the English language teaching. He concluded that there is a problem in ELT textbooks design in Iran. Ansari (2009) also believes that the ELT materials in Iran cannot help the students improve their English knowledge. He assumes that the student's disability to communicate in English might be a result of using inappropriate textbooks.

This researcher believes that despite the emphasis given to regard the four main skills equally, the material writers devised the textbooks based on exam-oriented structure in order to prepare the students for the university entrance exam. Since the ELT textbooks were written in the late 80s when the structural approach was the trend at that time, the emphases observed in the textbooks were heavily on reading and grammar practices with tasks that demand students to drill the required vocabulary and sentence structures repeatedly. Figure 1.3 shows the drilling structures in English Book 2.

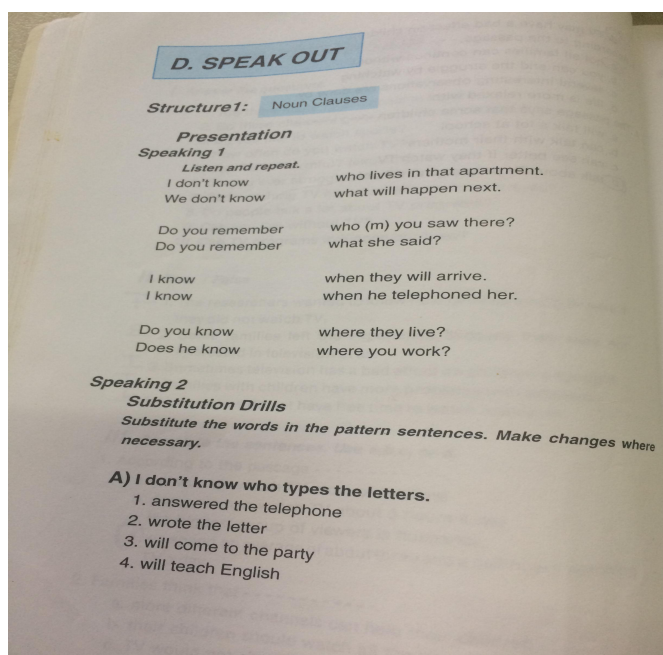


Figure 1.3 Sample page of English Book 2 (Speak Out)

In addition, the content of ELT textbooks in Iran still remains the same for the past thirty years. Having gone through the education system in Iran as a student, the researcher perceives that there are a number of problems that can be highlighted here, which became the basis of this study (out dated content, focus on grammar and reading only, no focus on speaking, no focus on writing assignments, no focus on listening, etc). Furthermore, experience as a learner (1992-1994) alone may be insufficient to really define the scale of the problem. Therefore, it is deemed necessary that examination of past studies about this area be included here and also later in the literature review to further support the researcher's intention of conducting this study.

Dahmardeh (2009) stated that the Iranian students normally are not able to acquire full competence in using English and they also cannot interact with confidence by the education they receive during these seven years. The researcher observes that after all the emphasis done in classes on grammatical points, the students fail to write simple paragraphs and essays. This is because they were mainly exposed to do the exercises in a sentence level and were not taught on producing coherent paragraphs or essays.

The results from Dahmardeh's study reveals that the ELT textbooks in Iran are not communicative at all and these textbooks are designed mainly based on structural approach (Dahmardah's study focus). By communicative it means that learners should be able to use the language in situations which required them to converse with others, negotiate meanings and intentions and share information using English language. However, the researcher indicates that in reality these hardly happen even after 7 years of being in touch with the English language textbooks in classrooms. Furthermore, lack of coherence, a narrow curriculum, form-based exercises and lack of flexibility are considered disadvantages of the course books as well.

Generally, this researcher believes that the ELT textbooks mainly focus on structure, reading and new vocabularies. ELT textbooks contain the same subjects and structures (but different levels), and after 30 years, the same textbooks are

reprinted and there is no consideration of learner's need. By reviewing the objectives and the goal of the textbooks and the results that the researcher witnessed while teaching, she concluded that the students and the teachers are not satisfied by the content, objectives, design and the layout of the ELT textbooks in Iran.

Gunter et al. (2003) stated that the students needs analysis is one of the crucial issues to be considered by curriculum developers and textbook writers. In other words, besides the curriculum and syllabus, the needs of the learners should be one of the elements to examine while designing textbooks, because the main audiences of the textbooks are students, therefore, the textbook writers should cater to the main needs of the audiences.

Student needs analysis could provide background knowledge for teachers prior to planning new learning activities. In addition, teachers may need assistance on how to implement the curriculum so that the content and goals of the lessons are aligned with the standards set by the curriculum.

(Dahmardeh, 2009:4)

After looking into the content, layout and the objectives of the Iranian ELT textbooks the researcher discovers that the studies on textbook analysis (ELT textbook in Iran) which considers the learners' needs is insufficient. In addition, the researcher concludes that the needs of the students and the teachers are neglected throughout the textbooks write up and design. Asari (2009) stated that the current textbooks in Iran cannot help the students improve their English language proficiency. The writer believes that needs analysis is one of the crucial factors that requires deep consideration before textbook design. Based on Long (2005) as there should not be any prescription before diagnosis, there should not be any textbook write up before needs analysis. The researcher stated that the textbook objectives, content, layout and design should be based on students' needs. In addition, the researcher assumes that the needs of the learners are neglected while text book write up in Iran.

To sum up, current textbooks in Iran do not follow the current trends of language teaching approaches and methodology as they were devised 30 years ago based on the structural approach. These textbooks used for more than 30 years are insensitive to the younger generation's needs. In other words, the textbooks are not designed based on the learners' needs. In addition, the books are devised based on structural approach, the main focus of the books is on grammar and reading, there is no focus on speaking or listening, the classes are mainly teacher-fronted and the researcher believes that the needs of the learners are neglected. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the learners should be given chances to express their needs and express their perspectives on the ELT materials because they are the main crowd that uses the textbooks.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to investigate whether the high school students (grade 9, 10 and 11) and the teachers consider the current ELT textbooks (textbooks for grade 9, 10 and 11) in Iran are suitable and whether they believe that the textbooks can cater for students' needs. This would explore the learners' perspectives, and their perceptions of their needs by means of questionnaires, an interview (for students only) and checklists. These aspects were considered because of the importance of learners needs (Littlewood, 1981). The results of this study may assist textbook designers and instructors to design their own programs and course books based on the learner's needs.

Learners' need awareness can motivate the learners to learn. In other words, when the learners can express themselves through their needs, they may actively be involved in their learning process (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993). Therefore, the learner's needs have to be considered as a main issue while teaching is in process.

As Nunan (2003) believed that through secondary school the learners will be able to express their attitude toward language learning and it becomes somehow the matter of concern. Therefore, the high school students in Iran can probably be able to understand and comment on the materials they are using for their own learning.

In support for the data collected from learners, this researcher believes that the information about the learners' needs can also be obtained from teachers who have first hand experience teaching English language to their students. The purpose of including teachers are that:

- 1) They can provide further insights into the needs of the learners to be able to communicate well in English language.
- 2) They can provide ideas about the suitability of the textbooks used, having taught the subjects to the learners

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research include:

1. To investigate the high school learners' needs in learning English in Iran based on learners' and teachers' perspectives
2. To investigate the high school learners' and teachers' perspectives of the ELT textbooks in Iran
3. To investigate to what extent do the ELT textbooks meet the high school learners' needs based on learners' and teachers' perspectives.

1.6 Research Questions

This research attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What are the high school learners' needs in learning English in Iran from the teachers' and learners' perspectives?
2. What are the high school learners' and teachers' perspectives of the ELT textbooks used in Iran?
3. To what extent do the ELT textbooks meet the high school learners' needs based on the learners' and teachers' perspectives?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study aims to investigate the needs of the high school learners in learning English in Iran and to see to what extent the ELT high school textbooks (year 9,10, and 11) in Iran meet the learners' needs based on the learners' and teachers' perspectives. This will be done through various methods which include: needs analysis questionnaires, checklists and an interview.

It is hoped that in using these methods the researcher gains insight into learners' needs in learning English in Iran. In addition, both students and teachers may get insights and knowledge to learners' needs. In other words, the results of this study firstly, can shed lights on learners' needs. Secondly, by enhancing this useful knowledge learners and teachers can be able to discuss and decide on the materials they are using based on the learners' needs. As a result, the learners will be deeply involved in the process of teaching and learning.

In addition, all the students and teachers can benefit from the findings of this research. The researcher believes that the learners have to be able to express their opinions and ideas toward the materials they use. In other words, teachers and

students have the right to express their perspectives toward textbooks to see if the textbooks are devised based on the learners' needs.

The results of this study may help the textbook writers and curriculum developers to notice the value of their works and to believe that learners' need is essential and must be considered before developing a textbook or devising a curriculum. As the saying goes, there is no medical intervention before a thorough diagnosis is done. It means that the writers and developers must consider the needs of the learners before they write or develop a textbook.

This research explore some initial ideas toward textbook selection and investigation of teachers' and learners' perspectives toward the ELT textbooks in Iran. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study can help the curriculum developers notice the importance of needs analysis and consider the learners' needs before developing a new curriculum.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This research attempts to investigate the needs of the high school learners (grade 9, 10 and 11) in learning English in Iran. It also aims to investigate if the current ELT textbooks in Iran meet the learners' needs based on the teachers' and learners' perspectives. The subjects are 300 high school students in three different levels (grade 9, 10 and 11) and 10 English language teachers. There are three textbooks to be examined in this study which are English Book 1 for grade 9 students, English Book 2 for grade 10 and English Book 3 for grade 11 students. Therefore, ELT textbooks used in other countries or context are not part of this study. In addition, only high school learners in Iran participated in this study. Learners from other levels of education are not included.

For this purpose the tools are as follows: 1) needs analysis questionnaire (learners and teachers), 2) checklist (learners and teachers), and 3) interview (learners). These tools were used to investigate more insights into learners' needs

on the ELT materials that they use in Iran. The participants informed the researcher about their needs and expectations that they may have from the textbooks used in schools. The researcher believes that they have the right to talk about the materials they use.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

As it was mentioned earlier, this researcher believes that the current ELT textbooks in Iran do not meet the learners' needs because the textbooks were designed in late 80s and based on the structural approach. The focuses of the textbooks are mainly on grammar and reading. In addition, there is no clear emphases on writing, speaking and listening skills. Furthermore, the needs of the learners seem to be neglected as well. As a result, the researcher investigated the learners' needs in learning English, conducted an examination of the current ELT textbooks in Iran based on the teachers' and learners' perspectives and examined if the current textbooks in Iran meet the learners' needs.

As the concepts of "textbook analysis" and "learners' needs" play a major role in the investigation and will later be measured (in chapter 4), they are essential concepts to define within the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework of this study is guided by three distinct theories: textbook analysis framework as proposed by Cunningsworth (1984), needs analysis framework by Hutchinson and Waters (1984) and Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) and constructivism as explained by Huit (2009). These frameworks deemed relevant to this study because they provide explanations pertaining to the factors included in textbook analysis and the different types of needs analysis to be considered in the design. Furthermore, as learners are responsible for their own learning, they are expected to construct and make sense of the textbook tasks and contents in order to achieve the targeted proficiency level.

1.9.1 Textbook Analysis Framework

According to Hutchinson (1983) the analysis of a textbook contributes to the area of English education in two aspects. That is, one aspect is a simple contribution through the teacher's deed of selecting a textbook and the other is that the teacher can enhance his own understanding of the teaching and learning situation. In other words, the authors' point of view should match the teachers' teaching philosophy.

Cunningsworth (1984) devised the principles of foreign language textbook analysis and summarized them into 4 categories. First, the textbook writers should set up the goal of education first and analyze the textbook in association with this goal. To evaluate a textbook, we should consider also whether the background used in the textbook is closely linked to conditions that are useful to learners. Second, under the recognition of the learners' linguistic view, a textbook that meets the learner's own purpose, should be selected. Third, to learn a language effectively, the learner should learn a limited quantity of new knowledge at a time. The amount of learning that is suitable for one time is stipulated as a unit of learning. The learning unit should be linked to the existing knowledge of learner and the learner builds up knowledge of the English language through adding a new unit of learning. This notion seems to resemble the idea in constructivism theory in which the learners are put in the position where they are responsible for their own learning and have the ability and skills to construct their knowledge bit by bit through time. Fourth, language, curriculum and the elements with the learners are the essential elements in language learning. None of them should be omitted and any of them should not be overemphasized. In other words, Cunningsworth (1984) principles for textbook analysis are 1) setting up the educational goal 2) selecting the textbook based on the learners' purposes 3) selecting the quantity of new knowledge and finally 4) considering language and curriculum.

The period of the 1970s has great significance in that the textbook analysis theory was presented, for the first time in the field of English education. In this period, Stevick (1972), Bruder (1978), Tucker (1978), Cowles (1976), Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) and etc. have presented the theory for English textbook analysis.

The theory of English textbook analysis, presented in this period, lack enough theoretical basis due to its short history. At that time, detailed items to assess the textbook contents, were set up and the assessor was simply asked to make only objective and numerical assessment as for the detailed items, which was the dominant trend at that time.

Upon entering 1980s, the theory of English textbook analysis was systematically established. During this period, Rivers (1981), Cunningsworth (1984), Dougill (1987), Sheldon (1988) and others have presented theories of textbook analysis. The most notable feature with the theory of English textbook analysis in 1980s is that it has established the parent category to which the detailed items of textbook analysis are bound. The fact that the theory of the 1980s began to ask for the evaluator's subjective evaluation.

The most salient feature of the theory of textbook analysis in the 1990s is that the upper category of analysis which started to appear from the 1980s was set up in the higher level. Although not a great quantity of theories of textbook analysis were released in the 1990s, the theory of MacDonough and Shaw (1993) displays a feature that is quite distinct from the theory from the 1980s. That is, it established two upper categories of Macro-Evaluation (External Evaluation) and Micro-Evaluation(Internal Evaluation).

Ansari and Babaii (2002) stated that during these three decades the focus of these evaluators was on textbook rational, purpose and objective. Littlejohn (2011) indicated that there should be a general framework of the textbook analysis. He pointed out that we need to examine two main sections of a material which are the physical aspects of the material (Publication) and the thinking behind the textbook write up (Design).

The researcher of this study tends to consider both design and publication of the textbook while using the checklist from Litz's (2005) study. That is because both design and publication of the materials should be evaluated. A survey conducted by Litz (2005) to analyze a textbook (English Firsthand 2), revealed some

significant results. According to Litz's (2005) findings, English Firsthand 2 which is used by all of the high-beginner English classes in the university's EFL program is a new addition to the ELT materials available on the market. She investigated the merits and demerits of the textbook using the checklist. For instance, she mentions that the entire textbook package contains useful supplementary materials, it manages to integrate the four language skills and the activities and tasks in the book are basically communicative. On the other hand, she indicates that the activities of (English Firsthand 2) are mostly repetitive and do not lead to realistic discourse.

1.9.2 Needs Analysis Framework

The idea of focusing on learners' needs originated in the 1970s resulting from the interest in the design of language courses that could satisfy individual and social needs (Palacios, 1992). Richards (2001) defines the term needs analysis, "as procedures used to collect information about learners' needs" (p. 51). Along the same line, the term needs analysis refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of students (Iwai, Kondo, Limm, Ray, Shimizu & Brown, 2008, cited in Haseli Songhori, 2008, p.2). Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) present needs analysis as the neutral discovery of elements of the target situation. In contrast, Robinson (1991, as cited in Benesch, 1996) believes that needs analysis is "influenced by the ideological preconceptions of the analysts" (p. 724) and that needs "do not have of themselves an objective reality" (Brindley, 1989, as cited in Robinson, 1991, p.7). For Johns (1991), needs analysis is the first step in course design and it provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities (cited in Haseli, 2007). Needs analysis, further, enables the teacher to discover the abilities the learners bring to the class and what they can not do in English.

For Hutchinson and Waters (1987) needs analysis or "target situation needs analysis" is "in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of various participants in the learning process" (p. 59)

Jordan (1997) thinks that the sources of information in the needs analysis are: the students themselves, the academic institution and the prospective employer. To better appreciate the concept of needs, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make a distinction between 'target needs' and 'learning needs'. The former refers to what the learner needs to do in the target situation and the latter, learning needs, to what the learner needs to do in order to learn. Besides, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) look at the target situation in terms of necessities, lacks and wants. Accordingly, necessities refer to the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation; that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively. You also need to know what the learners already know in order that you can decide what necessities the learner lacks. Furthermore, a need does not exist independent of a person. But the learner has a view as to what his or her need is. The Target-Situation Analysis model started with Munby's (1978) model of the Communication Needs Process. This model contains a detailed set of procedures for discovering target situation needs. It is based on analyzing language communication in the target situation in order to provide a communicative needs profile for a specified group of learners. The second major model in needs analysis is the Present-Situation Analysis proposed by Richterich and Chancerel (1980). It discusses the present situation of the learners' knowledge about the English language. In other words, it expresses the learners' language skills in the present situation (further elaboration in chapter 2).

Since awareness of the need is a matter of perception, and perception may vary according to one's standpoint. It is possible that the learners' views might conflict with the perceptions of other interested parties. However, they have a clear view about the necessities of the target situation and of their lacks (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The lacks that the learners face toward the English learning is called deficiency. Deficiency analysis shed lights on the lacks that the learners express about learning the language. Accordingly, Hutchinson and Waters, in an analogy, consider this very tripartite (i.e., lacks, necessities and wants) as a journey.

This study aims to investigate the learners' needs considering the learners' target needs, learning needs, their necessities, wants and lacks.

1.9.3 Constructivism Theory

This is a well-known theory which is commonly cited in explaining the learners' learning process. This research also considers this theory because it situates the learners at the central point of the whole learning process. The teaching embarked by a teacher must have the learners' needs in mind, the acquisition and enhancement of the targeted skills must be observable in the learners. In addition, the learners themselves must be made aware of their learning habits. Learning is not only the responsibility of the teacher, but rather it is also the responsibility of the learners to build and construct the learning. In other words, constructivism theory suggests that learners engaged themselves through the process of learning in mindful processing of information. As noted by Huitt (2009) constructivism theory is based on observation and scientific study about how people learn. Basically it emphasizes that a learner must actively build their knowledge and skills. The theory posits that the learner is the main constructor of their learning through an active and constructive process.

As shown in figure 1.4, this researcher believes that the underpinning frameworks of textbook analysis, the learners' needs analysis and constructivism need to be considered in explaining the rationale for conducting this research. In order to testify whether a textbook is effective in delivering its objectives, analysis needs to be conducted to investigate whether or not the textbook meets the needs of the learners. Through constructivism theory, learners are made aware of their own learning needs and preference because they are responsible in constructing their knowledge and skills.

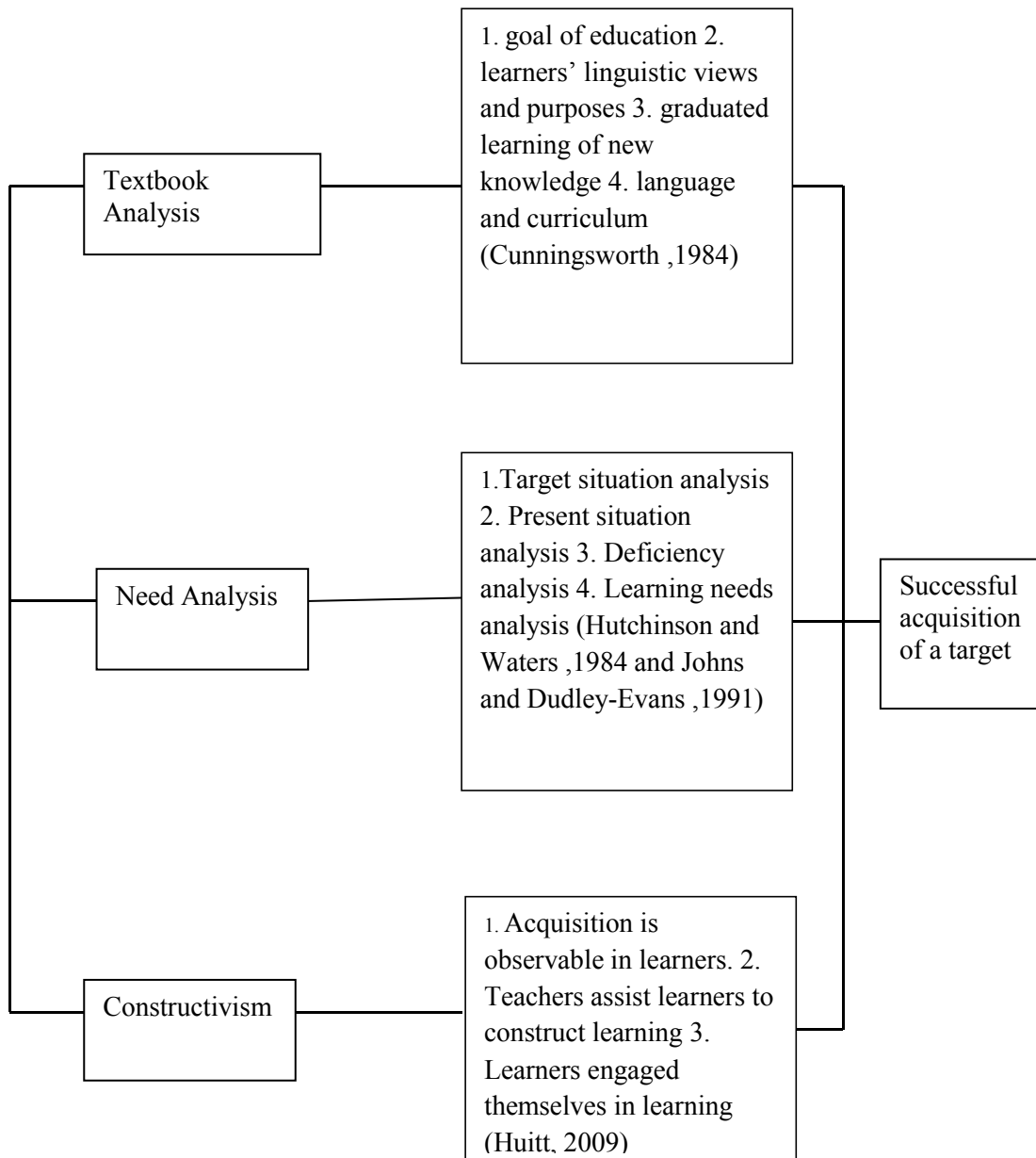


Figure 1.4 Theoretical Framework

1. 10. Conceptual Framework

Textbooks are considered the main materials in English language classrooms in Iran. Therefore, these ELT textbooks should be critically designed and devised to cater the new generation's needs, because they are the main stakeholders of the textbooks. The students should know that they have the right to discuss, give opinions and decide about the materials they are using.

The whole idea of the recent years, especially remarked by Nunan in one of the online interviews (2010) is putting the learners at the center of curriculum and learning process. In other words, the learners should be actively involved in this process. Learners' needs analysis can allow the learners express their needs freely in learning English and later it can help the textbook writers to consider their point of views in textbook writing and design. The English textbooks writers should view the learners as active participants in the process of learning who construct meaning from different resources.

Before designing any textbook, the writers should consider the learners' needs. Textbook writers and teachers are not the only decision makers while designing textbooks. Learners' perspectives and needs also have to be asked and analysed before textbook write up. The textbooks authors have to believe that all the parties involved in the process of teaching and learning have the right to express their perspectives toward the materials they are using.

The researcher of this study believes that learners' needs analysis should be considered as a core of any curriculum design and textbook devise. Textbook writers may investigate the needs of the learners so that the learners will be more motivated to learn the language. Choosing the proper teaching method based on the learners's needs is the other step to be valued. There may be various teaching methods as well as the up-to-date ones, but by the needs analysis results, the most proper teaching method might be chosen. The verification of these two steps may result in a proper textbook design.

Figure 1.5 elaborates that textbook analysis is worthy to be considered because it is a helpful way to develop the knowledge. The framework suggests that three important elements need to be considered namely the textbooks under investigations, the learners' needs and the textbooks analysis. The first assumption is that before a textbook is produced, investigations should be guided by not only the syllabus, writers and teachers but also about the learners' needs because as Shelden (1988) indicates, the textbooks are the heart of the classroom. However, if the textbooks are already in use, investigations should be about whether they meet the learners' needs (as indicated by the two-way arrows). The learners should express themselves about their language skills, interest in learning English, goals in learning English and classroom learning preferences Fathihi (2003) and Haseli Songhori (2008). As Richards (1990) and Gunter, Estes and Schawb (2003) stated the learners' needs is fundamental and crucial to planning and designing materials. Next, the learners' needs and textbook analysis are interconnected, that is the analysis of the textbooks must show that it meets the learners' needs and vice versa (as indicated by two-way arrow) (Chambers, 1977). Subsequently, analysis can only be conducted on textbooks that are in use and published (as indicated by one-way arrow) but not before. The perspectives of the learners toward the textbooks also should be examined. They should comment on the textbooks' practical consideration, layout and design, activities, skills, language type and subject and content based on Litz (2005) study. According to Shelden (1988) textbook analysis by teachers and learners can help in the development of the knowledge as well as ensuring that the learners' needs are met.

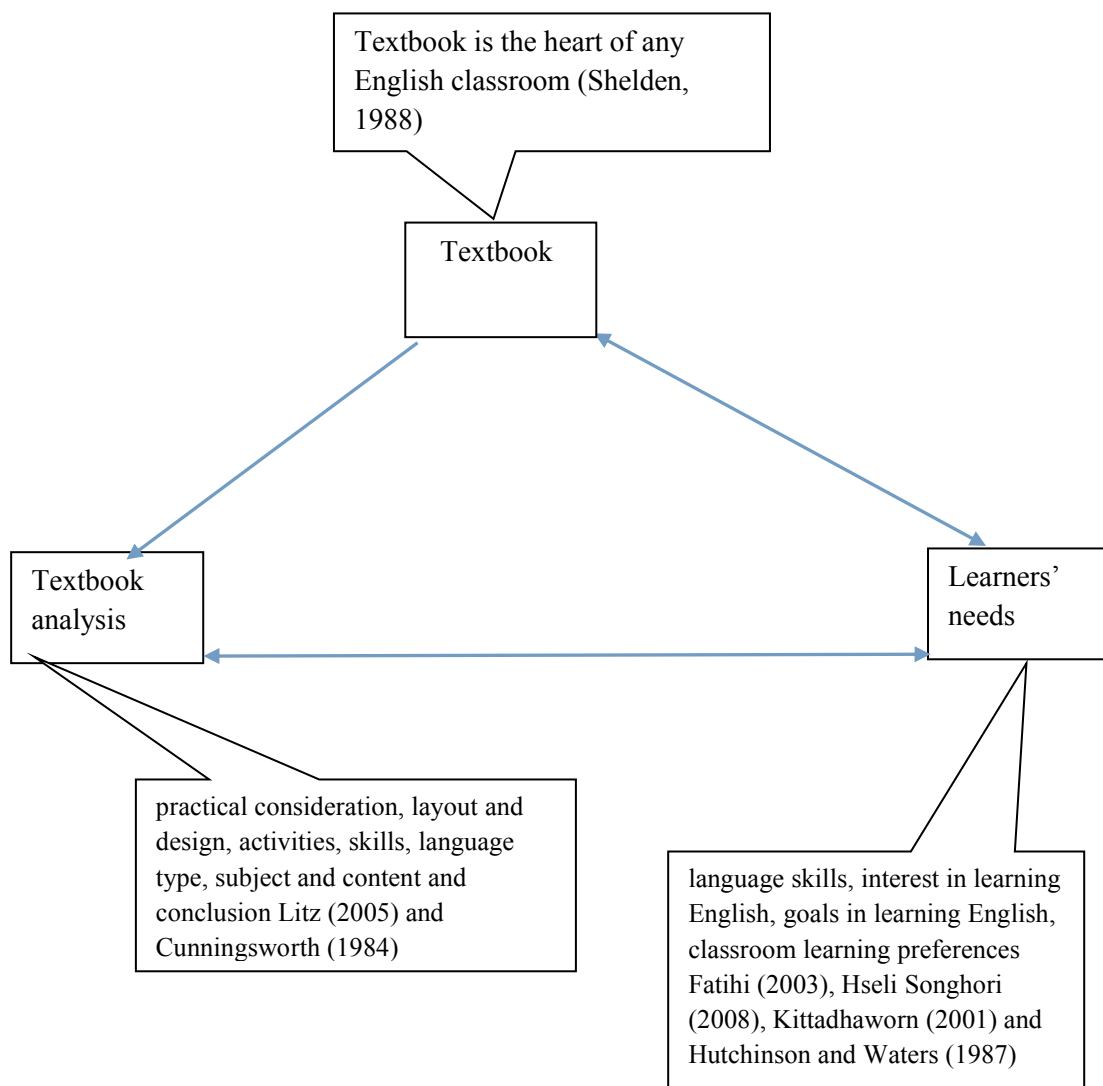


Figure 1.5 Conceptual framework

To sum up, before any textbook write up, learners' needs should also be considered. This is because learners may be able to know the deficiency in their language skills and ability, and in turn, contribute ideas as to what language points the textbooks need to focus on. Although there has been argument that some learners may not know what they need, efforts should be made to acknowledge that active learners may be able to provide some insights into their language needs. After designing the textbook, there should be a textbook analysis by learners to see if the ELT textbook analysis meet the learners' needs. If the textbook is already written and in-use, learners needs analysis and textbook analysis are essential things to be considered as well in order to improve the materials design and content.

1.11 Operational Definition of Key Terms

In this thesis the key terms are defined as follows:

1.9.1 Learners: Learners of this study are the high school students in Iran who are studying in grade 9 (15 years old), 10 (16 years old) and 11 (17 years old).

1.9.2 Perspective: It relates to the state of one's ideas. The learners' and teachers' perspectives will be examined in this study toward the learners' needs and the textbooks.

1.9.3 Needs analysis: Needs analysis includes all the activities used to collect information about students' learning needs, wants, wishes, desires. The needs analysis in learning English will be investigated in the current study.

1.9.4 ELT Textbooks: English language teaching textbooks which are used as a standard work for the study of English in high schools in Iran. The participants of this study will express their perspectives toward the ELT textbooks in Iran.

1.9.5 Learners Needs: The needs of a learner represent the gap between what the learner wants to get out of the learning experience and his or her current state of knowledge, skill, and enthusiasm (Noessel, 2003). The needs of the learners in learning English will be examined in this study.

1.12 Summary

This chapter has presented the introduction to the study in which it discussed many aspects that relates to the research that was carried out. The next chapter is where the literature review of the research will be discussed. Chapter two provides overviews on textbook analysis, needs analysis, language learning theories, syllabus, curriculum, materials design, teachers' perspectives on teaching, learning and

textbook analysis and learners' perspectives on teaching, learning and textbook analysis.

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