

The Potential Role of Tasks in Iranian Pre-university Textbooks

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Abstract

The present study investigated the potential role of tasks in engaging Iranian EFL learners in task-supported language learning, affecting on learner-centered instruction and the correspondence between the objectives and contents in current pre-university English course book (Learning to Read English for Pre-University Students). To do this, 100 Iranian EFL teachers of pre-university grade were invited to participate in this study. They were asked to fill out a 5-point Likert scale checklist (adapted from Lawrence, 2011). The checklist was initially piloted on 20 EFL teachers in order to see to what extent the items were clear and comprehensible to the subjects of the study and to find out the internal consistency or reliability of the items. The results of statistical analyses indicated that teachers tended to agree on the point that tasks have significant capability in engaging learners in communicative language use or task-based language learning. The vast majority of the teachers expressed that using tasks in textbook can improve learner-centered instruction. The evaluation of the textbook showed the contents are corresponded to their objectives.

Keywords: learner-centered instruction, EFL learners, pre-university textbook, tasks, task-supported language learning textbook evaluation

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) textbooks play an important role in language classrooms. Textbooks not only represent “the visible heart of any ELT program” (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237), but also “play an important role in language teaching and provide a useful resource for both teachers and learners” (Çakit, 2006, p. 4). Accordingly, a textbook is considered as a teaching material for the teacher and a learning material for the learner and is regarded as one of the essential aspects of the total teaching and learning process (Awasthi, 2006).

Textbooks, as an important component of any language course, play a crucial role in teaching and learning language all over the world. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) mentioned, “the textbook is an almost universal element of teaching. No teaching-learning situation, seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook” (p. 315). Tomlinson (1998) defines a textbook as a book “which provides the core materials for a course” and it contains many issues by considering all the points that students need to learn during a course period. Generally, a book includes four-skill activities, grammatical information, vocabulary studies, and different language functions. Sheldon (1987) defines the term textbook as a published book that is produced for commercial purposes whose explicit aim is to assist foreign learners of English in improving their linguistic knowledge and communicative ability. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) focused on the value of the textbook particularly in periods of change and identified four conditions for smooth and effective changes. First, it needs to become not only a learning program for language content, but also a vehicle for learner and teacher training. Second, it must provide support and help teachers to

manage the classroom. Third, it provides the teacher with a clear picture of what the change will look like through structured scripts. Fourth, if the textbook is adopted on a school basis, it can get the support of others, and thus relieves the teacher of burden of responsibility for introducing changes.

Evaluation of English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks has a long history, though with different viewpoints, and different methods. On the one hand, they are supposed to transmit some information and knowledge; on the other hand, they are considered as an instrument employed by scholars. McGrath (2002) asserted that “materials could include realia: real objects such as a pencil, a chair or a bag and representations such as a drawing, a photograph of a person, house or scene” (p. 7). Carter and Nunan (2001) defined it as “the process of measuring the value of learning materials. This can be predictive pre-use evaluation, ongoing whilst-use evaluation or retrospective post use evaluation” (p. 223). Harmer (2001) made a distinction between evaluation and assessment. He stated that “the assessment of a coursebook is an out-of-class judgment as to how well a new book will perform in class. Coursebook evaluation, on the other hand, is a judgment on how well a book has performed” (p. 301). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define evaluation, in general, as a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose.

The evaluation of ELT textbooks and the materials they contain play significant roles in foreign language teaching through enabling educators, teachers, and administrators to assess whether the textbook is the most adequate one to the target learners in divergent levels and teaching settings (Arikan, 2008). In addition, in Zhang’s (2007) view, the evaluation process will involve elements of comparison especially where existing materials are being challenged by newly produced materials.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) described the notion of evaluation regarding to the fact that evaluation is basically a matching process, which concerns matching learners’ needs to available solutions. Cunningsworth (1995) mentioned another benefit of material evaluation suggesting that through identifying strengths and weaknesses in textbooks, optimum use can be made of strong points, and weaker points can be adapted or substituted from other books. He illustrated that coursebooks should: correspond to learners’ needs; help to equip learner to use language effectively for their own purposes; facilitate students’ learning process; have a clear role in mediating the target language and the learner.

Tomlinson (1998) defines materials evaluation as the systematic judgment of the value of materials in relation to the aims of the materials and the learners who are using them. What is more he points out that evaluation can be pre-use focusing on predictions of potential value. It can also be while-use focusing on awareness and description of what the learners are doing with the materials and it can be after-use so as to find out what happened as a result of using the instructional materials. Cunningsworth (1984) suggested a set of guidelines placing an emphasis upon the underlying principles of material evaluation:

1. Relate the teaching materials to your aims and objectives;
2. Be aware of what language is for and select teaching materials which will help equip your students to use language effectively for their own purposes;
3. Keep your students’ learning in mind;
4. Consider the relationship between language, the learning process and the learner.

Yumuk (1998) states that generally in the literature, materials evaluation is considered to be an ‘interactive process’ which involves a deeper analyses of the materials used. This further implies ‘the dimension of focusing more closely on the interaction between teacher, learners and materials as an integral part of materials evaluation’ (p.11). Ellis (1997) defined two types of materials evaluation: a predictive evaluation and a retrospective evaluation. A predictive

evaluation is designed to make a decision regarding what materials to use, whereas a retrospective evaluation designed to examine materials that have actually been used. A brief review of the literature relating to materials evaluation reveals that the research focus to date has been more or less exclusively on predictive evaluation. Retrospective evaluation provides teachers with information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the used syllabus. It also serves "as a means of testing the validity of a predictive evaluation, and may point to ways in which the predictive instruments can be improved for future use" (Ellis, 1997, p. 37).

Ellis (1997) indicated that there are two main ways, which teachers can carry out predictive evaluation. One is to rely on evaluations carried out by expert reviewers who identify specific criteria for evaluating materials. However, in reviews of individual coursebooks the criteria can be inexact or implicit. The other way is that teachers can carry out their own predictive evaluations by making use of various checklists and guidelines available in the literature. The idea behind using such guides is to assist teachers carry out a predictive evaluation systematically. As Sheldon (1988) states, "it is clear that coursebook assessment is fundamentally, a subjective, rule- of-thumb activity, and that no neat formula grid or system will ever provide a yardstick" (p. 245).

As mentioned above, there is a need to evaluate materials retrospectively because such an evaluation provides the teacher with feedback so as to determine whether it is worth using the material again. Thus, Ellis (1997) states that "a retrospective evaluation serves as a means of testing the validity of a predictive evaluation and what is more, it may point to ways in which the predictive instruments can be improved for future use" (p. 37).

Tomlinson (2003) believes that materials evaluation is a procedure that involves measuring some or all of the following:

1. The appeal of the materials;
2. The credibility of the materials to learners, teachers, and administrators;
3. The validity of the materials;
4. The reliability of the materials;
5. The ability of the materials to interest the learners and the teachers;
6. The ability of the materials to motivate the learners;
7. The value of the materials in terms of short-term learning;
8. The value of the materials in terms of long-term learning;
9. The learners' perceptions of the value of the materials;
10. The teachers' perceptions of the value of the materials;
11. The assistance given to the teacher in terms of preparation, delivery and assessment;
12. The flexibility of the materials;
13. The contribution made by the materials to teacher development;
14. The match with administrative requirements.

As can be understood from the above definitions, both predictive and retrospective evaluations aim at making the teaching and learning environment more effective. They both help teachers to make appropriate judging concerning the effectiveness of their teaching including the materials they used.

Literature Review

There is a wealth of academic literature on the evaluation of English language textbooks. Bruder (1978) proposes the use of a checklist of eight criteria: level, objectives, style, language, age, time, convictions, and competency. He claims that these criteria should be considered from the viewpoints of teachers and students. Cunningsworth (1995) discusses the principles and

criteria for course analysis. The criteria are discussed under the following headings: language content, selection and gradation of language items, presentation and practice of new language items, developing language skills and communicative abilities, supporting materials motivation and the learner, conclusions and overall evaluation. At the end of the book, he provides a checklist that should be used in course evaluation. Tu'eimah (1985) suggests three different tools: a tool for language teaching textbook analysis, a tool for language teaching textbook evaluation, and a tool for measuring language teaching textbook readability. The analysis tool consists of fifteen categories. These are the book's physical make up, the nature of the course, pre-preparation studies, the language of the book, method of teaching, language skills, grammar, vocabulary, linguistic drills, assessment and evaluation, cultural content, aids and activities, individualized learning, the teacher's manual and others. The evaluation tool consists of eight categories: pre-preparation studies, language content, language skills, methods of teaching, drills and evaluation, aids, physical make up, and overall impression. Then, Tu'eimah (1985) suggests the use of cloze tests for measuring readability. Sheldon (1988) provides an expansive checklist of 53 questions classified under 17 major criteria: rationale, availability, user definition, layout and graphics, accessibility, linkage, selection and grading, physical characteristics, appropriacy, authenticity, cultural bias, educational validity, practice and revision, flexibility, guidance and overall value for money.

Skierso (1991) suggests that after collecting some background information about the learner, the teacher, the course, and the institutional objectives, an evaluation of the material can be done under the following criteria: the textbook (bibliographical data, aims and goals, subject matter, vocabulary and structures, exercises and activities, layout and physical make up) the teacher's manual (general features, supplementary exercises, methodological and pedagogical guidance, linguistic background information).

Cunningsworth (1995) provided two main approaches to evaluate the coursebook. The first is the impressionistic overview, which entails a preliminary sift through a lot of new material from which to choose. The second approach is the in-depth evaluation which is a complementary approach to the first one, but in this approach close examination is carried out as to "how specific items are dealt with, particularly those which relate to students' learning needs, syllabus requirements, how different aspects of language are dealt with, etc." (Cunningsworth, 1995, p. 2). Therefore, Cunningsworth (1995), suggested the use of different checklists to evaluate the coursebook. They are based on criteria such as claims of the coursebooks, types of materials evaluation, and purposes of materials evaluation. For evaluation, he suggested the following areas of the coursebook:

1. Aims and approaches
2. Design and organization
3. Language content
4. Skills
5. Topic
6. Methodology
7. Teacher's guide

Littlejohn (1998) rejected Cunningsworth (1995) checklists, claiming that they would "involve making general, impressionistic judgments on the materials" (p. 192). Instead, he suggested a general framework for analyzing materials. This framework consists of three main concerns. First, the aspects of materials that we should examine from a pedagogical perspective can be grouped under two main points: publication and design. The term publication refers to the physical aspect of materials and how they appear as a complete set or book" and design refers to

"the thinking underlying the materials. The second concern deals with the key aspects of tasks and poses three questions. The first question is related to three things: process, focus and operation. Process refers to the actual role of learners in the classroom activities; focus refers to whether language form or meaning is focused. The second question deals with the participation in classroom activities highlighting the forms of activities and the different forms of classroom participation. The last question deals with the content of the task. The third concern asserts the importance of evaluating the overall aims of the materials, content and tasks selection and sequencing, teachers' and learners' roles, demands of learner's knowledge, effects, skills and abilities and the role of materials as a whole.

Hedges (2000) suggested a two-stage process for evaluating the relevance of a book to a particular group of students. "The first stage is to assess the content of a book in relation to its professed aims. The second is to assess the book against the needs and context of the intended learners" (p. 357). She also lists five main categories. Each category includes a number of questions that vary according to learner factors, institutional setting, and sociocultural context. These are: the view of language, the view of language learning, learner, the view of education and the environment of learning.

McDonough and Shaw (2005, p, 59) provide a flexible two-stage model for the comprehensive evaluation of coursebooks. A brief external evaluation includes criteria which gives an overview of the organizational foundation of the coursebook, "as stated explicitly by the author/publisher" through the cover, introduction and table of contents statements. Following this is an in-depth internal investigation of the coursebook, "to see how far the materials in question match up to what the author claims as well as to the claims and objectives of a given teaching program. The researcher will follow the model provided by McDonough and Shaw (2005) because the model's procedural format and flexibility will allow the researcher to select a coursebook, a predictive evaluation, and to fully assess the strengths and weaknesses of the coursebooks in question, a retrospective evaluation. Furthermore, taking a retrospective approach to the evaluation will give the researcher "insight into the organizational principles of the materials," and thus highlight "realistic ways of adapting the materials to a particular group of learners" (McDonough & Shaw, 2005, p. 60).

Dougill (1987) prepared a framework for textbook evaluation that has a range of items from the points pertaining to the syllabus, the units, the subject matter to form and course components. There are four main points in evaluating materials:

- Face validity: The extent to which the course is transparent, i.e. the aims and underlying intentions are clear.
- Generative push: The extent to which the course enables students to generate language outside the classroom.
- Coherence or pattern: The extent to which the course hangs together as a package.
- Affective depth: The extent to which the content touches the inner person.

McGrath (2002) reviewed many checklists and methods used in evaluating materials in recent literature. He distinguished three main stages in evaluation: pre-use, in-use, and post-use evaluation. Focusing on the post-use evaluation for course books, he developed criteria for choosing a suitable method of evaluation. These criteria consider the following steps:

1. The first step is a consideration of relevant contextual factors and the gathering of information analysis of the material
2. The second step is a close evaluation using the checklist method which should require careful tailoring "to the needs of the learners and the teaching context and the need for periodic updating recognized" (McGrath, 2002, p. 56).

3. The final step is the decision making phase which can be reached through a careful and systematic approach that addresses the questions of validity and reliability.

McGrath (2002) believed that a good checklist should provide comprehensive information of the sort that will facilitate evaluation and comparison while making as few demands on the evaluator as possible, to lead for the selection of the materials which are appropriate for the context but also contribute to the advancement of learning and teaching in that context. In addition, he discussed the procedures for adapting and supplementing materials. The material can be supplemented through the provision of additional exercises "borrowed from other published materials or specially written for the target learning group" (McGrath, 2002, p. 102).

Tomlinson (2003) acknowledged that an evaluation should be criterion-referenced in order to avoid these mistakes or reduce them. It can make it more principled, rigorous, systematic and reliable. While-use evaluation involves measuring the value of materials whilst using them or whilst observing them as being used. This type of evaluation is more reliable than pre-use evaluation in the sense that it makes measurements rather than prediction. It can measure short-term memory and what is happening in the learners' brains but cannot measure durable and effective learning (Tomlinson, 2003). Post-use evaluation which is the most valuable as it can measure the actual effect of the materials on the users. In other words it can measure the actual outcome of the use of the materials and thus provide the data on which reliable decisions about the use, adaptation or replacement of the materials can be made.

This type of evaluation can be used to measure both short-term and long-term effects. It can measure motivation, impact, achievability, instant learning and many other short-term effects. On the other hand, it is useful for measuring long-term effect regarding its durable learning and application. The problem is that it is time and effort consuming activity.

Duff, Wong and Early (2002) added that the Canadian L2 experience supports the imperatives of both designing and evaluating English language teaching textbooks and material which immediately address the cultural-linguistic context of application. Studies carried out on two groups of fourth-grade French-speaking L2 learners over the span of one academic semester, validated this assertion. The group which was taught through a standard commercial English language instruction textbook attained a discernibly lower level of linguistic competency than the group which was given the alternate, cultural-linguistic sensitive, textbook (Duff, Wong & Early, 2002).

Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) proposed that L2 material be evaluated according to more pragmatic concerns. As the researchers contend, empirical and experiential evidence suggests that even upon the attainment of a high degree of L2 competency, L2 students do not acquire conversational fluency and often misuse words, leading to their interpretation as rude (Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004). In response to this particular concern, Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) assert that L2 teaching material should be evaluated according to their practical value and their worth assessed on the basis of whether or not they embrace the imperatives of teaching conversational/practical linguistic skills.

It takes a long time to design and prepare a textbook that is useful for a large group of teachers and learners. The English Language teaching practices in Iran are heavily dependent upon textbooks. Textbook designers may not evaluate each part of the book critically and they are not aware of the relationship among textbooks, teachers and students. It is therefore of great importance to evaluate newly developed textbooks in order to make sure about their quality in pursuing pedagogical goals.

According to Sheldon (1988), the selection of a textbook is an important decision in course design since it is necessary to consider factors such as professional, financial, and political

investment. Chambers (1997) mentioned that the process of textbook selection is not an easy job, since many people may be involved in the selection procedure and different opinions may oppose to the use of any specific textbook.

Nitta and Gardner (2005) conducted an evaluative study to investigate the occurrence of conscious-raising (C-R) and practice tasks in nine contemporary ELT textbooks. They developed a framework of conscious raising and practice task types, applied it to the aforementioned textbooks and then identified a number of current trends. The research focused on three grammatical items, namely present perfect, second conditional and reported speech. Five types of form-focused task types were identified. These are: grammar-conscious tasks, interpretation tasks, focused communication tasks, grammar exercises and grammar practice activities. The first three types of tasks were categorized as conscious-raising tasks (C-R tasks) and the last two types were categorized as practice tasks. After examining the textbooks, the researchers reported the following observations:

1. In the overall structure of the grammar section, every course book examined basically follows a Presentation - Practice approach.
2. Both inductive and deductive approaches to grammar presentation are identified in the materials but more preference for inductive presentation is observed.
3. Both C-R and practice tasks are employed in the most materials. Only focused communication tasks do not recurrently appear.
4. Shifting from interpretation-based C-R tasks to production-based practicing tasks is a typical procedure in all the materials examined.
5. Contemporary ELT textbooks usually juxtapose C-R tasks with practice tasks.

Thein (2006) conducted a study to evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of the textbooks used for teaching English to religious studies students at Myanmar Institute of Technology. Questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations were used to collect data from both teachers and learners. The study aimed at investigating the extent to which teachers and learners expectations match the objectives of the program in developing the students' communicative skills and critical thinking. The findings revealed that the textbooks used in the program were not suitable for the following reasons:

1. The textbooks did not contribute to achieve the needs and wants of both teachers and learners.
2. They were not effective to promote students' critical thinking.
3. They were not effective in improving the students' communicative skills for everyday life situations.

Thein (2006) suggested that the textbooks must be localized to meet the teachers' and learners' needs. He also emphasized the importance of adapting activities that encourage collaborative learning, natural and experiential interactions to help young people think critically.

Çakit (2006) examined the students and teachers' attitudes towards the textbook for ninth grade high school of Turkey. Eleven criteria were applied and the results indicated that both teachers and students had negative attitudes regarding majority of the features of the textbook. The results suggested the need for simplifying reading passages in terms of vocabulary and structures, adjusting the level of materials with the age of learners and taking into account different learning styles preferred by students.

In Iran, a number of studies have been conducted to evaluate textbooks. Ansary and Babaii (2002) evaluated ELT textbooks based on approach, content presentation, physical make-up, and administration concerns. The result of their study showed that these characteristics are not present in each and every textbook. In another study, Yarmohammadi (2002) used Tucker's model to evaluate the pre-university textbooks. He found that these textbooks are not authentic

and no attention was paid to oral skills. However, very scarce number of studied focused on the role of tasks in current Iranian ELT textbooks.

The purpose of the present study is to evaluate pre-university English language textbook, which is taught to students at public, and non-profit high schools in Iran based on the model proposed by Lawrence (2011). Two major criteria are going to be investigated in this study: the use of tasks and activities in textbook and overall fitness of textbook with the recommended approaches and strategies.

The first assumption of this study is that ELT materials as other textbooks present a particular worldview. In fact, “cultural capital” and “selected knowledge” (Keshavarz & Malek 2009, p. 9) included in textbooks present a specific point of view to students regarding the real world. It is worth mentioning that this perspective is designed based on the interests of the elites.

The researcher evaluates this textbook for two reasons: first, as textbooks are the foundation stone in the English language program in Iran, the content of English textbooks affect the learning of the students. The content of English textbooks must not have errors because these errors learnt by the student as the correct one will have adverse effects on his/her learning and evaluating it is an educational necessity and second, the evaluation can help teachers consider strengths and weaknesses in the textbooks in question, make use of strong points and adapt or substitute from other textbooks.

With regard to the purpose of the study, the following research questions were posed:

Q1. With regard to teachers' attitudes, does the pre-university English language textbook have the potential to engage learners in task-supported language learning?

Q2. With regard to teachers' attitudes, do the tasks in the pre-university English language textbook have the potential to bring about learner-centered instruction?

Q3. Is there any correspondence between the objectives and the contents of pre-university English language textbook?

Methodology

Participants

Studying the whole population is difficult and sometimes even impossible. This study has led the inclusion of the teachers. The participants of the study therefore, were 100 teachers who were at the time of the study, attending and teaching EFL classrooms of pre-university grade in the city of Isfahan, Iran. Teachers were from both genders. Age and sex variables were not involved as they were not related to the purpose of this particular study. Teachers had at least 4 years of experience of teaching pre-university English textbooks.

Instrument

The employment of checklist with teachers in this study stemmed from the fact that it could provide opportunities to obtain data concerning the evaluation of the language textbook being used by the EFL teachers and students. The checklist was adapted from Lawrence (2011) and it consists of 31 statements with 5 point Likert scale in which responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree to strongly disagree.

The content of the checklist was about three main issues concerning ELT pre-university textbook. The checklist was composed of 31 statements. The first 5 items were asking to what extent textbook can engage learners in task-supported language learning. The next 4 items were pursuing to find what role the tasks can have in addressing the learner-centered instruction. The last 22 items asked the role of tasks in improving language learning skills and sub-skills.

Procedures

Prior to the main study, the copies of the checklists were given to 20 pre-university teachers of English in order to test the internal consistency of the items or reliability. Some of them were sent by e-mail. The checklists were completed and collected. The results of reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
The Evaluation Checklist	.898	.898	31

Having done this, the reliability estimate for the test turned out to be 0.89 which is a high index of reliability. At this stage, the content validity of the checklist was checked by four experts and the items of the test were modified according to their recommendations.

The copies of the checklist were distributed among the participants of study. The checklist of this study was given to EFL teachers who were involved in teaching pre-university ELT textbooks in different high schools of Isfahan, Iran. Before administering the checklist, a complete explanation was given about the aim of the research, the checklist and how they should be answered. EFL teachers were assured that the results would be used for this research and their views would be kept completely confidential. A contact number and e-mail address were given to them and they were asked to contact the researcher if they had any questions regarding the checklist. This phase of data collection was done over a period of one month at the end of 2016 – 2017 educational year because the textbook was used and finished at this time. Data were collected and prepared for statistical analysis.

Results

In order to verify the first research question of the study in finding the potential role of textbook in engaging learners in task-supported language learning, the first 5 items of the checklist were analyzed. The descriptive statistics of the obtained data are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. The descriptive statistics of textbook's potential role in Engaging learners task-supported teaching and learning

Items	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The use of tasks in textbook can provide clear and appropriate purposes and objectives for learning contents.	100	187.00	4.6750	.47434
The use of tasks in textbook can reflect real world practice.	100	192.00	4.8000	.40510
The use of tasks in textbook can require learners to use target language for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome.	100	175.00	4.3750	.86787
The use of tasks in textbook can provide opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, use, expand their existing language resources, and notice how language is used.	100	186.00	4.6500	.48305

The use of tasks in textbook can involve learners in a mode of thinking and doing.

The mean of the responses to all five items is around 4 that represent the *agreement* in Likert type scale. It indicates the fact that participants agreed that the use of tasks in textbook can engage learners in task-supported language learning. The frequency of data regarding different scales is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. *The frequency of data on the textbook's potential role of tasks in engaging in task-supported language learning*

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	25.8	64.5
Agree	13	32.5
No Idea	0.2	0.62
Disagree	0.8	1.76
Strongly Disagree	0.2	0.62
Total	40	100.0

As it is evident in Table 3, most of the participants (64.5%) strongly agreed to the potential use of the textbook tasks in engaging learners in communicative use of language. Figure 1 provides a schematic view of the responses.

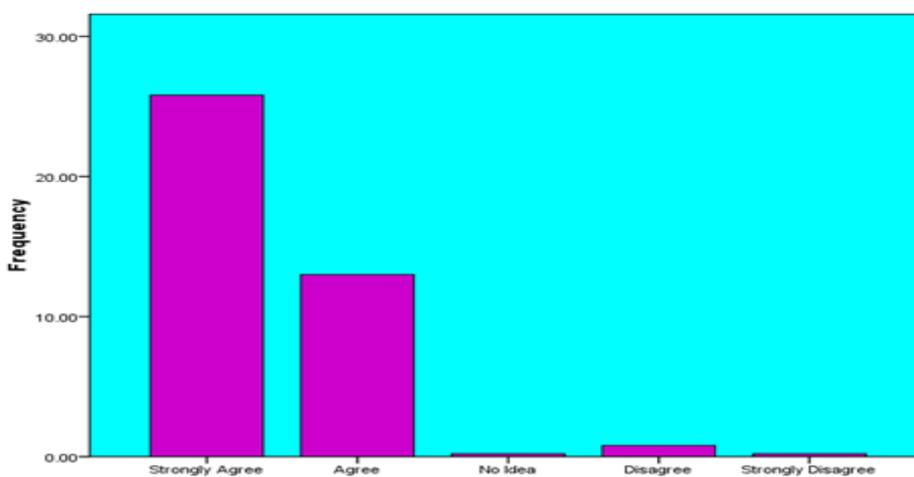


Figure 1. *The frequency of data on the use of tasks in task-supported language learning*

In order to find whether there is any statistically significant difference among the observed data with the expected data from teachers' attitudes towards the use of tasks in engaging learners in task-based language learning, a Chi-square test was performed. The results are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. *Teachers' attitudes towards the use of tasks in communicative use of language*

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Chi-Square	4.900 ^a	14.400 ^a	47.500 ^b	3.600 ^a	15.050 ^c
Df	1	1	4	1	2
Asymp. Sig.	.027	<.001	<.001	.048	.001
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 20.0.					
b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 8.0.					
c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 13.3.					

The results indicate that in all five items, the p-value is statistically significant. Items 6 to 9 in the checklist investigated the potential use of tasks in textbook in promoting learner-centered instruction. The descriptive statistics of teachers' responses to these items are provided in Table 5.

Table 5. *Descriptive statistics of the tasks effects on promoting learner centered instruction*

Items	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
6. The use of tasks in textbook can meet language learners' needs.	40	157.00	3.9250	.99711
7. The use of tasks in textbook can encourage group work or pair work.	40	185.00	4.6250	.49029
8. The use of tasks in textbook can help my learners apply suitable questioning techniques to motivate thinking.	40	177.00	4.4250	.59431
9. The use of tasks in textbook can give opportunities for learners to give their own ideas.	40	180.00	4.5000	.50637

Here, the mean of teachers' responses to the items is around 4 that shows the agreement of participants with all four items. The frequency of the obtained results based on different scales is provided in Table 6.

Table 6. *The frequency of the potential role of tasks in promoting learner-centered instruction*

	Frequency	Percent	
Valid			
	Strongly Agree	18.75	46.87
	Agree	18.75	46.87
	No Idea	1.25	1.87
	Disagree	1	2.5
	Strongly Disagree	0.25	0.62
	Total	40	100.0

Regarding the mean of the obtained responses, 47% of the teachers were *strongly in agreement* and the same 47% of the teachers were in *agreement* with the probable use of tasks in textbook in promoting learner centered instruction. Figure 2 depicts the frequency of the scales.

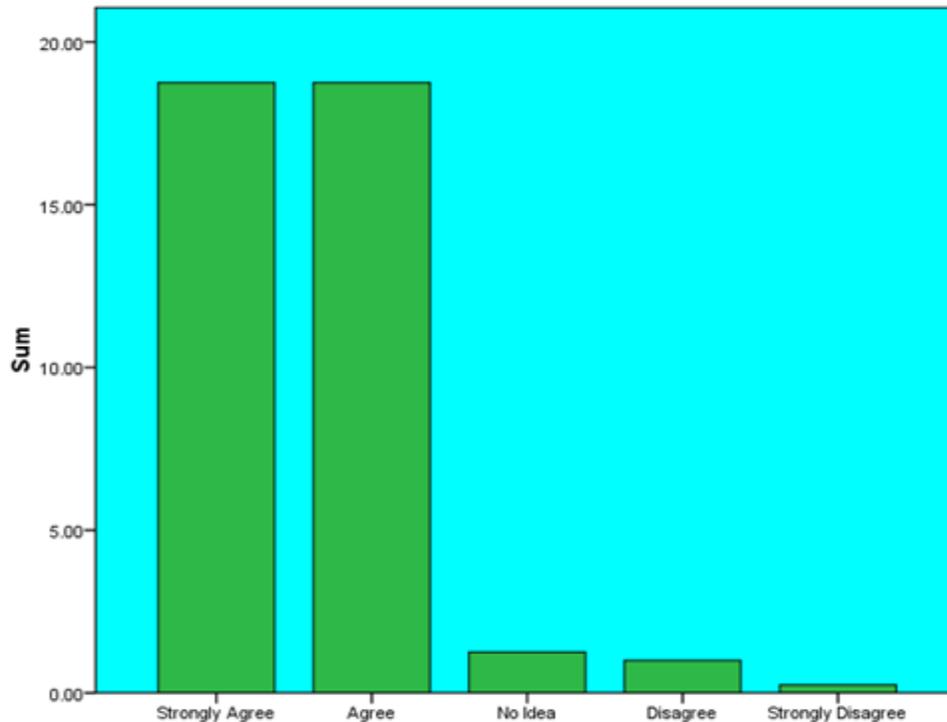


Figure 2. The frequency of the scales in textbook's potential role of tasks in learner-centered instruction

In order to find whether there is any statistically significant difference among the observed data with the expected data from teachers' attitudes towards the use of tasks in promoting learner-centered instruction, a Chi-square test was calculated and the results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Teachers' attitudes towards the use of tasks in promoting learner-centered instruction

	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Chi-Square	33.500 ^a	2.500 ^b	14.450 ^c	.000 ^b
Df	4	1	2	1
Asymp. Sig.	<.001	.004	.001	<.001

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 8.0.

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 20.0.

c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 13.3.

The results indicate that in all four items, the p-value is statistically significant.. Consequently, the adequate evidence was provided in order to reject the second null hypothesis of the study.

In order to answer the third research question of the study, an analysis of pre-university English textbook is provided. The name of the textbook is 'learning to read'. At this grade, the students are preparing themselves for Iranian university entrance examination. Most of the English language questions in this exam are based on reading, vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, the main objective of the pre-university textbook is to help learners improve their reading comprehension. In doing so, the book is structured around reading texts. There are 8 lessons in the book each of which consists of 9 sections. They are: before you read, reading, after you read, comprehension check, sentence function, reading skills, vocabulary review, focus on grammar, grammar digest. The first four sections deal with pre-reading, while reading and post-reading activities. The other five sections are also served for the purpose of reading comprehension. Therefore, it can be stated that the objectives of pre-university textbook correspond to the contents and the third research question of the study is verified.

Discussion

The results of statistical analyses indicated that teachers tended to agree on the point that tasks have significant capability in engaging learners in communicative language use or task-supported language learning. In this regard, the significant evidence was provided to confirm that the use of tasks in textbook can provide clear and appropriate purposes for learning contents, reflect real world practice, require learners to use target language for a communicative purpose, provide opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, use and expand their existing language resources and notice how language is used involve learners in a mode of thinking and doing.

The majority of the teachers expressed that using tasks in textbook can improve learner-centered instruction. More specifically, tasks can meet learners' needs, encourage group and pair work, help learners apply adequate questioning techniques and provide opportunities for learners to give their own ideas.

The present study provided the significant evidence for use of the task-supported activities, learning-centered instruction and correspondence of the objectives and the contents in pre-university textbook similar to the findings of Nitta and Gardner (2005). They found that the participants' attitudes were towards a shift from less interactional, input-based activities to more interactive and production-based tasks in textbooks. This study was an empirical evidence to affirm Thein's (2006) findings in a study evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of the textbooks used for teaching English to religious studies students at Myanmar. The findings revealed that the textbooks used in the program were not suitable, as they did not contribute to achieve the needs and wants of both teachers and learners. They were not effective to improve the students' communicative skills for everyday life situations.

In a study to evaluate *New Bridge to Success* textbook in Turkey, consistent with the present study, Çakit (2006) found that current activities in the textbook did not help learners to improve their language skills namely reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Conclusion

Textbooks are one of the most important components in ELT classrooms. This importance is more significant in Iran where English is taught as a foreign language and the learners do not have enough exposure to it in the society. Furthermore, when the textbook is used on a large scale, its evaluation and making sure that it is the right one for the students becomes

especially more important. In such situations, textbooks play crucial role as they are the main and even the only source of language learning and teaching for the students and the teachers. Textbook evaluation not only after its use, but before its use is valuable. In so doing, the present study focused on the 'task' as one of the influential components before its use in textbook in order to predict the weaknesses and strengths of the textbook and enable the direct and indirect authorities involved in decision making to focus on the task and adapt and supplement them accordingly. The criteria developed for the pre-evaluation of the textbook were considered based on the needs and priorities of the particular group of students.

Pre-university is the last grade of current educational system before entering university in Iran. Passing university entrance exam is of high priority for Iranian high school students. English language tests in this exam examine students' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension. Regarding this matter, it seems that the ELT pre-university textbook is in line with students' objectives, neglected communicative use of language incorporating all language skills and sub-skills. One conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the current activities and exercises in the pre-university textbook failed to increase the teachers' desire to teach English, as they unanimously agreed upon using tasks in the textbook in order to compensate a major part of textbook's shortcomings.

It can be inferred from this study that in contrast to individual and controlled activities in the book, teachers are more likely to use tasks, which appeal to their students' interest, develop group and pair-work and help to finalize the learning process. This integrative pedagogy allows language learners to practice and engage language forms within realistic communicative settings of task-based instruction.

From pedagogical point of view, the present study provided precious implications for EFL syllabus designers as it was implicitly identified some disconcerting problems with the current ELT textbook in pre-university. The results implied that this textbook needs some revisions in terms of the activities. It seems that overemphasis on providing rich reading comprehension texts made the authors neglected the potential role of activities in consolidating the learning process.

To sum up, on the basis of the findings of this study, as well as present research on the topic, there is a strong indication that language learning can be best acquired in task-based activities embedded in the textbook. The results of the present study suggest that the striking potential role of tasks to positively enhance different aspects of language learning should not be underestimated in the current activities of pre-university ELT textbook.

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