

# Teachers' Beliefs on the Effectiveness of Iranian First Grade of Junior High School Textbook in Fulfilling the Stated Objectives

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Doi:10.5296/ijld.v5i4.8578 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v5i4.8578>

## Abstract

The most prominent factor influencing students' learning, in any instructional program, is the textbook (Litz, 2001). Due to such an importance, the textbook is regarded as the ELT program heart and an essential constituent to many EFL/ESL classrooms. Therefore, textbooks should be evaluated and selected as carefully as possible to avoid any adverse consequences (Sheldon, 1988). Thus, this study intends to investigate the effectiveness of Iranian first grade Junior High School English textbook from the teachers' points of view. To achieve the goals of study, 100 male and female EFL teachers from junior high schools were randomly selected. They were given a researcher-designed, 5-point Likert scale questionnaire including 45 items for investigating their beliefs on the effectiveness of the textbook regarding eight main factors: grammar, general features, listening, vocabulary, speaking, comprehension, writing, and teacher guide. In addition to the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview conducted for providing qualitative information about the EFL teachers' beliefs based on the questionnaire and knowing the participants' underlying reasons for their beliefs they offered in written questionnaire. The results of study revealed that female teachers, by getting higher mean scores in some factors such as grammar, vocabulary, and writing, showed that they are more satisfied with the effectiveness of these parts, while male teachers were more satisfied with general features, listening, speaking, comprehension, and teacher guide.

**Keywords:** Belief, textbook, textbook evaluation

## 1. Introduction

As a basic teaching tool in an English language learning and teaching context, textbook can play a vital role in a process of innovation (Kirkgoz, 2009). “A textbook is a reference with complete series of materials and activities from which the most suitable or useful issues can be selected” (Zohrabi, Sabouri, & Behroozian, 2012, p.p.15). A textbook can play a crucial role in making students to enjoy learning out to become successful in learning, too. Also, each of instructional materials such as textbook should be as complete as possible to meet all students’ needs and wants. The evaluation of a textbook can be done at every stage of usage to find its deficiencies and improve it. Any judgment about textbook selection will affect the classroom activities, teachers, and students. To improve the books shortage and create more effective textbook before the instruction, the author should ask teachers for help. Teachers mostly use textbook, so before and after publishing a textbook, some teachers should study, assess, and provide comments on it (Zohrabi et al., 2012).

During the last decades, there is a dispute among professionals and educators on whether to use textbooks in teaching English or not. In spite of such a debate, and even with the development of technology that provide using different educational materials such as software and higher quality teacher-made materials, the demand for textbooks increasingly enhances that is observable through extending new series and new textbooks by different publishing industries each year (Garinger, 2002).

## 2. The Importance of Teacher’s Beliefs

Ogott and Odera (2012) hold the idea that teacher attitudes are important variables in classroom application and very vital in the teaching and learning process because of the relationship between attitudes and action. They, also, concluded from their study that gender, years of experience, high academic and professional qualifications had positive influence on teachers’ attitudes and vice versa.

As Richards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001) pointed out teachers' beliefs play a crucial role for teacher development. Teachers' beliefs can be a part of the process of understanding how to conceptualize their work. In other words, to understand how teachers deal with the work, it is required to know their attitude and beliefs. Furthermore, for the novice teachers, classroom experience and interaction with colleagues influence their attitude and beliefs about the pedagogical principles. So, professional development engaging teachers in expressing their beliefs and opinions provide opportunity for greater self-awareness.

Teachers' conceptualizations of language, learning, and teaching can be understood through their belief system (Richards et al., 2001.). Xu (2012) believed that teachers’ beliefs and attitudes are essential for comprehending and developing educational procedure. They closely guide language teachers to adopt their teaching strategies for coping with their daily language teaching challenges, influence their general well-being, and in turn, shape language learners’ learning environment, their motivation and their language achievement and ability. There is growing evidence to indicate that teachers are highly influenced by their beliefs, which in turn are closely linked to their values, to their views of the world, and to their understanding

of their place within it. Beliefs play an important role in many aspects of teaching, as well as in life. They are involved in helping individuals make sense of the world, influencing how new information is perceived, teachers' beliefs have a greater influence than the teachers' knowledge on the way they plan their lessons, on the kinds of decisions they make, and on their general classroom practice. Teachers' beliefs are central to determining their actual behavior towards students.

Teachers' beliefs are considered to understand how teachers conceptualize their work, how they make decisions and how they choose their practices. Some definitions and the nature of teachers' beliefs are about their effects on teaching, learning and intelligence. Teachers' beliefs about learning and intelligence can explain the difference in the use of critical thinking activities in the classroom. Hence, the effective attitudes and actions employed by teachers ultimately can make a positive difference on the lives of their students (Massa, 2014).

### *2.1. Textbook Development*

In the process of education, teachers, students, and textbooks are considered as three major elements of education. Many educators are in agreement with this view that textbooks are the most important part of education. So, every textbook regarding to the students and teachers' needs and interests, expectations, course objectives and dynamics of the classroom should be selected with great care and effort (Sarem, Hamid & Mahmoudie, 2013).

Generally, there are five elements in language instructions, learners are the center of it, and material controls it. Teachers and learners as the important elements of instruction heavily rely on the materials. So, materials used to have an underlying instructional approach, method technique suiting the learners and their needs (Ghorbani, 2011). Similarly, Zohrabiet al (2012) believed that there are five elements in language teaching system: teachers, learners, materials, and evaluation. As the third element of teaching, materials such as textbooks should be practical, applicable, and tangible for students.

As learners are at the center of any educational context, material developers and teachers should pay more attention to the learner's needs, demands, and also their interest. They manipulate and formulate materials to motivate and challenge them. Although print materials such as textbooks are increasingly available in every educational environment, some fail to satisfy the learner's needs in different classroom situations. Therefore, teachers and material developers should be equipped with skills to verify the texts and task in such materials. Creating an authentic text or materials is one the main point related to educational curriculum. It is suggested that authentication of materials can be done by utilizing real and natural English language resource and media in the classroom (Baral, 2009).

Judging the qualities of a textbook is a difficult task. It may be because there is no any scientifically based methodology of textbook evaluation. Besides, aspects by which textbooks have been evaluated can only be relative, not absolute (Hrehovick, 2002). So, he suggested three major criteria for evaluating textbooks. The first one was tendency towards descriptivism, the second criteria was orientation towards linguistic aspect of evaluation, and the last one

was lack of theoretical foundation underlying the selection of evaluative criteria.

## *2.2. Textbook Evaluation*

Any textbook should be used judiciously since it cannot provide the requirements of every classroom setting. Hence, every teacher should be able to assess textbook's strengths and weaknesses. English language teachers in training need to be acquainted with the principles of textbook evaluation. They can be given practice in analyzing textbooks in order to find out whether the organization of materials is consistent with the objectives of a given English language curriculum. When trainee teachers examine the selection of items of speech, grammar, and vocabulary in a textbook and evaluate the way it presents reading and writing activities, they are at the same time improving their competence in the language. The textbook is a tool, and the teacher must know not only how to use it, but how useful it can be. It will involve adapting textual materials to the needs and interests of pupils (Williams, 1983).

It is clear that course book assessment is fundamentally a subjective activity, and that no neat formula, or system will ever provide a definitive basis for evaluation. But, perhaps the use of similar evaluative parameters will help to make it a more coherent, thoughtful enterprise than it often is at present. Textbook assessment is not a once-only activity. When a course book is selected, its success or failure can only be meaningfully determined during and after its period of classroom use. The course book ultimately needs to be appraised in terms of its integration with, and contribution to, the longer-term goals (Sheldon, 1988).

Williams (1983) has suggested that textbook has to be assessed in terms of the following criteria: The completeness and appropriateness of the items presented; the activities suggested for practicing the items selected; the sequencing of vocabulary, particularly the functional load, rate and manner of entry and re-entry; and the relevance of its contexts and situations. Furthermore, he suggested that ESL textbook should: 1. Give introductory guidance on the presentation of language items and skills 2. Suggest aids for the teaching of pronunciation: e.g. phonetic system 3. Offer meaningful situations and a variety of techniques for teaching structural units 4. Distinguish the different purposes and skills involved in the teaching of vocabulary 5. Provide guidance on the initial presentation of passages for reading comprehension 6. Demonstrate the various devices for controlling and guiding content and expression in composition exercises 7. Contain appropriate pictures, diagrams, tables, etc.

There are some studies (Barzegar, Sarami, & Bafghi, 2013; Farzaneh, Kohandari, & Nejadansari, 2014) confirming the positive effects of textbooks on the students' academic achievement, but no study has investigated teachers' attitudes toward the effectiveness of textbooks and the effects of textbooks on students. Thus, this study is designed to investigate the beliefs of Iranian teachers on the extent to which the newly developed EFL textbooks taught in Iranian junior high school conforms to the stated objectives. The present study addresses the following question.

**Research Question:** Is there any significant difference between English teachers' attitudes toward the effectiveness of first grade of junior high school newly developed English

textbook in terms of their gender?

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Participants*

To unravel the teachers' beliefs as the main concern of the present study, 100 EFL teachers from junior high schools located in Neyshabur, Iran, as the participants of this study, were randomly selected. They included male and female teachers holding Associate degree, Bachelor degree, and Master's degrees. They were told that their participation was entirely voluntary, their responses would remain anonymous, and confidentiality would be maintained. Out of 100 teachers, 52 were male and 48 were female with different ages. The teachers as participants of this research taught both in urban and suburban reigns. All of them were Persian native speakers with different teaching experiences.

The next group of participants was selected from the participants who answered the questionnaire at the second stage of study. Out of 100, only 15 participants were chosen to be interviewed.

#### *3.2. Instrumentation*

##### *3.2.1. Textbook Analysis Questionnaire*

A self-designed, 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire was administered to elicit data about EFL teachers' beliefs on the effectiveness of Iranian first grade Junior high school textbook. The questionnaire composed of two parts. The first part focused on background personal information about teachers (such as gender, academic degree, and English teaching experience). The second part included 45 items investigated the teachers' beliefs on the effectiveness of Iranian first grade High School Textbook. The items were classified to eight main factors: General, Grammar, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking, Comprehension, Writing, and Teacher guide, ranging from "very high", "high", "average", "low", to "very low". Then the teachers as the participants of the study were asked to tick based on their own ideas.

The results of reliability analysis exhibited that the reliability of the questionnaire for each factor is nearly high (Cronbach's alpha for General=.84, Grammar=.71, Listening=.74, Vocabulary=.84, Speaking=.75, Comprehension=.86, Writing=.79, and Teacher guide=.86).

##### *3.2.2. Semi-structured Interview*

A semi-structured interview was prepared for this research and fifteen volunteers, who were keen to utter their ideas and attitudes freely, participated in it. The purpose of conducting interview is to fully understand and analyze the factors required in the questionnaire, and also find more details about teachers' point of view. Everyone was interviewed around 10 to 15 minutes, and their speech was recorded by an mp3 player.

#### *3.3. Data Collection Procedure*

At the first step, the researcher designed a questionnaire for reaching the objectives of the study. One week prior to its administration, the questionnaire was piloted with three expert

teachers to check the content validity of the questionnaires. Then, the teachers undertook a detailed discussion about the questionnaire, and their suggestions were incorporated into the questionnaire. In this case, the experts suggested some changes in the content and face of the questionnaires items. Then, the questionnaire was revised based on their comments by the researcher.

In the next stage, it was given to high school teachers who taught English at first grade. The questionnaire required the participants to determine their own attitudes toward the effectiveness of first grade high school English Text book.

Apart from answering the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview was conducted for providing qualitative information about the EFL teachers' beliefs based on the questionnaire to gain more in-depth information from the participants and to learn about the participants' underlying reasons for their beliefs. Audio-recorded interviews started with main open-ended question related to the objectives of the study. This type of open-ended questions and one-to-one interview gave EFL teachers a different context in which made their beliefs more explicit.

This study employed a quantitative approach to analysis of teachers' attitude toward first grade English text book. The items in the questionnaire were classified to eight factors such as General, Grammar, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking, Comprehension, Writing, and Teacher guide. Then, the mean of each factor was computed based on the participants' gender and academic degree. SPSS (version 19) was used in order to run the one-way ANNOVA and Independent Sample T-test to find out whether the differences among the eight factors chosen by different participants were significant.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

To explore the research question, descriptive statistics were used. The results are shown in table 4.1.

Table4.1.Descriptive statistics for male and female teachers' beliefs

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
General features	Male	52	44.24	9.83	1.82
	Female	48	44.14	9.47	1.35
Grammar	Male	52	13.31	3.89	.72
	Female	48	13.51	3.20	.45

Vocabulary	Male	52	20.13	5.33	.98
	Female	48	21.36	5.13	.73
Listening	Male	52	8.34	2.66	.49
	Female	48	8.00	2.79	.39
Speaking	Male	52	11.79	3.23	.60
	Female	48	11.65	3.25	.46
Comprehension	Male	52	9.96	3.77	.70
	Female	48	9.93	3.03	.43
Writing	Male	52	7.31	2.40	.44
	Female	48	8.10	3.19	.45
Teacher guide	Male	52	12.13	3.63	.67
	Female	48	11.72	2.91	.42

This table shows that out of 100 participants, 52 were male and 48 were female teachers. It can be seen that there is minor difference between male and female teachers' mean scores about eight factors, and such a slight difference can be seen in the standard error of the mean and standard deviation, too.

#### 4.2 Inferential Statistics

According to the hypotheses of this study that compare the means regarding to eight factors including Grammar, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking, Comprehension, Writing, General features, and Teacher guide, it is essential to determine the equality of variances, so One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used.

Table 4.2. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

		General	Grammar	Vocabulary	Listening	Speaking	Comprehension	Writing	Teacher-guide
N		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	43.8916	13.2771	20.8193	8.0964	11.6867	9.98	7.83	11.82

	Std. Deviation	9.41977	3.56922	5.25019	2.69876	3.19270	3.41	2.92	3.13
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.119	.119	.131	.124	.142	.08	.12	.11
	Positive	.069	.063	.078	.080	.090	.08	.08	.11
	Negative	-.119	-.119	-.131	-.124	-.142	-.08	-.12	-.10
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.086	1.087	1.195	1.133	1.289	.79	1.14	1.00
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.189	.188	.115	.154	.072	.54	.14	.26

a. Test distribution is Normal.

According to the data given in the above table, all the variables including Grammar, General features, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking, Comprehension, Writing, and Teacher guide are normally distributed ( $\text{sig} < .05$ ). Since all the variables (Grammar, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking, Comprehension, Writing, General, and Teacher guide) have normal distribution, and the participants divided to two groups of male and female, Independent Samples T-test was used in this part. The results are shown in Table 4.3

Table 4.3. T-test for comparing male and female teachers' beliefs about eight factors

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper



<b>Grammar</b>									
Equal variances assumed	1.50	.22	-.24	76	.80	-.19	.81	-1.8	1.42
Equal variances not assumed			-.23	50.30	.81	-.19	.85	2	1.51
								1	
<b>General features</b>									
Equal variances assumed	.03	.84	.04	76	.96	.098	2.25	-4.3	4.58
Equal variances not assumed			.043	57.175	.966	.098	2.27	8	4.65
								-4.4	
								5	
<b>Vocabulary</b>									
Equal variances assumed	.189	.66	-1.00	76	.31	-1.22	1.22	-3.6	1.20
Equal variances not assumed			-.99	57.14	.32	-1.22	1.23	5	1.23
								-3.6	
								9	
<b>Listening</b>									
Equal variances assumed	.11	.73	.53	76	.59	.34	.64	-9.3	1.62
Equal variances not assumed			.54	61.29	.59	.34	.63	-9.2	1.61
<b>Speaking</b>									
Equal variances assumed	.261	.611	.184	76	.85	.140	.761	-1.3	1.655
Equal variances not assumed			.184	59.25	.85	.140	.759	7	1.65
								-1.3	
								7	
<b>Comprehension</b>									
Equal variances assumed	5.18	.026	.036	75	.97	.028	.783	-1.5	1.58
Equal variances not assumed	8		.034	49.62	.973	.028	.826	3	1.68
								-1.6	
								3	

<b>Writing</b>										
Equal variances assumed	1	1.75	.19	-1.15	76	.25	-.791	.685	-2.1	.573
				-1.24	71.44	.219	-.791	.638	5	.480
Equal variances not assumed									-2.06	
<b>Teacher guide</b>										
Equal variances assumed		.531	.468	.543	75	.58	.408	.75	-1.0	1.908
				.514	49.56	.60	.408	.795	9	2.00
Equal variances not assumed									-1.18	

Results obtained from Leven' s Test show that there is trivial difference between variances of male and female teachers' beliefs about all eight factors, which cannot be generalized to the whole population. Also, the results of t-test for equality of means reveal that there is trivial difference between mean scores of male and female teachers beliefs about these factors, which cannot be generalized, too. Therefore, it can be stated that male and female teachers in this population have the same beliefs about all eight factors.

## 5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implication

With such an importance in teachers' attitude and textbook evaluation fields, the current study investigated the teachers' beliefs on the effectiveness of Iranian first grade of junior high school textbook based on eight factors including General features, Grammar, Listening, Vocabulary, Speaking, Comprehension, Writing, and Teacher guide. At first, teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of the selected book regarding to the eight factors were compared with each other in terms of their gender. As data collection revealed, there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' beliefs about all eight factors. Females by getting higher mean scores in some factors such as Grammar, Vocabulary, and Writing showed that they are more satisfied toward the effectiveness of these factors than males. But, General features, Listening, Speaking, Comprehension, and Teacher guide are those factors that were more satisfying for males.

The findings of this study will be highly valuable for textbook writers to become aware of the main factors for selection of a textbook and gain a clear picture of how the textbook really works. Besides, the findings are invaluable for authors whose expectations are to determine what a textbook should contain at a certain level by informing them of the factors which are considered essential in the process of textbook selection. On the other hand, they become aware of the shortages and demerits of the book discussed, prohibit from its future publishing

by its deficits, and invest their time and energy on textbooks with excellent qualities. Moreover, the results of this study pave the way for the teachers to become aware of the role of textbooks in the process of learning and teaching, how to evaluate a textbook, and how to use it in the line of special course objectives. Hence, they reflect on their current method of teaching, look for the main causes of their success and failure, and reconsider their selection of a special textbook. The most important point is that in most countries, textbooks are prepared by the Ministry of Education. However, this does not mean that teachers should be passive in their career. They can evaluate the book and find the most suitable techniques to teach in the classroom and at the same time they can provide feedback to the ministry of Education so as to improve the textbooks.

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