



Critical Pedagogy in Textbook Development: A Comparative Study of the Previous and the New Iranian High School English Language Textbooks

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 06 December 2019 Revised: 14 January 2020 Accepted: 26 January 2020 Online: 25 February 2020</p>	<p>Following the approval and implementation of a significant higher-level educational document known as the fundamental transformation of education, an undeniable reform took place in the field of the English language teaching program in general and English textbook development in particular, in the Iranian formal education system. Regarding the English textbooks, as probably the most important component in any ELT program, especially in societies in which English is taught and learned as a foreign language, a notable transformation in topic and content selection has occurred alongside a reform in its approach and structure. Conceiving the importance of this reform, which has been mostly neglected in the available research on the topic, this paper aimed at comparing descriptively and analytically the type of topic and content which has been integrated in the previous and new high school English textbooks. Findings revealed that through applying critical pedagogy in the development of the new textbooks, a pivotal transition from the mainstream ELT to critical ELT has been manifested. In a more precise word, achieving the joint goal of fostering social development and language skill development on the part of learners, the awareness-raising and controversial topics and content have substituted for neutral and sanitized topics and content.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Critical pedagogy Education reform English language teaching Iranian education system Textbook development</p>	

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1. Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in contemporary Iran has gone to extremes. Thus, it is no surprise that in the last four decades, the post-revolutionary system of English language education has undergone various changes and reforms; the last one dates back to 2013. Following the approval of an important educational document known as The fundamental transformation of education, the English language education in the Iranian formal system has experienced its most fundamental, and of course, controversial reform.

The appearance of a new series of English textbooks which are totally different in terms of content and structure from the previous ones has been regarded as a transformation in Iranian English language textbooks development in the formal education system (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2014; Safari & Rashidi, 2015). In this regard, Safari & Sahragard (2015) write that the English textbooks which were on the basis of traditional methods and old-fashioned theories such as grammar translation, rote memorization, mechanical drills, and repetition were entirely changed.

Reviewing and evaluating these new books reveals that alongside some notable structural changes, a functional and an observable shift has occurred in content selection (Safari & Sahragard, 2015). Since this significant reform has not been acceptably documented and analyzed in the growing research on the topic, this paper aims at delving deeply into this issue mostly through comparing the previous and new high school English language textbooks.

2. Background

In this section, an attempt was made to provide the readers with a short but vivid picture of ELT as well as ELT textbooks development in last four decades in Iranian education system.

2.1. A Glance at English Language Education in the Iranian Formal Education System

Today, as Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) write, English is compulsory in the 6-year junior and senior high school curriculum. The curriculum is a top-down one, centrally administered by the Ministry of Education, which dictates all the decisions regarding the textbooks, syllabi and exams.

The undeniable shortcomings of English learning in this centralized public sector, which led to its low efficacy and inefficiency and the growth of a new booming private sector ELT market (Borjian, 2013; Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015; Iranmehr & Davari, 2018) resulted in a reform on the basis of the ratification and implementation of the fundamental transformation of education and the national curriculum, as two higher-level educational documents.

Encountering this situation in which English education has ebbed and flowed, the issue of English education in schools became a widely discussed issue at the national level. As Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) mention, with the increasing spread of English and the emergence of the communicative approach to English teaching, there arose the need for changes in national curriculum. Thus, the public school system has begun to undertake reform and innovation, as traditional methods and materials have been challenged by the demand for communicative and market-oriented approaches. Due to the rising criticism of this inefficient system, finally the picture has begun to change in a way that a new curriculum has been implemented from 2013 onwards (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2014; Safari & Rashidi, 2015; Safari & Sahragard, 2015).

In this new curriculum, as Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) write, English education has been reconceptualized to mainly not only encourage students' active participation in the learning

process and use of the target language in communication, but also encourage teachers to promote students' communicative skills and minimize the use of the mother tongue.

2.2. Public English Language Textbook Development in Post-revolutionary Iran

In situations where English is taught and learned as a foreign language, the role of the textbook, as the main language input in such programs, is outstanding and undoubtedly the Iranian society is not an exception to the rule. The prominence of this element in Iranian formal education system has led to the formation and development of various textbooks in junior and senior high schools in post-revolutionary Iran. While some aspects of this trend especially its structural and methodological have been documented in some works including Aliakbari (2002), Borjian (2013) and Foroozandeh (2011), it has not been analyzed through the lens of content selection.

In all, before the recent reform in English teaching program in 2013 which was accompanied by the appearance of a new series of six English textbooks, the English textbook development in post-revolutionary Iran experienced three phases as: a) 1982-1990; b) 1991-2003; c) 2004-2012 (Foroozandeh, 2011; Ketabi & Talebinezhad, 2009; Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2014). Reviewing the published textbooks in these periods reveals that they mostly underwent methodological changes, and no observable and significant changes occurred regarding the content and topic selection.

In a more precise word, as Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) point out, even a cursory examination of the textbooks taught during the successive years reveals that the methods, contents and aims of teaching English have not undergone essential changes, and their main focus has been reading, grammar and vocabulary. Textbooks have tended to repeat themselves. With little sense of evolution and exploration, students mostly consider these textbooks boring, ineffective, wasteful

and time-consuming. As a result, according to Haddad-Narafshan and Yamini (2011), considerable dissatisfaction among students as well as teachers regarding the textbooks has been recorded.

As pointed out, in 2013, the first volume of a six-series English textbook for junior and senior high schools was released and the five others were published from 2014 to 2018. The first three textbooks developed for the junior high school were entitled Prospect and the second three textbooks for the senior high school were entitled Vision (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017).

Evaluating these newly-published textbooks indicates that in addition to total methodological changes, the topics and the content of these books have been observably changed. Avoiding so-called neutral and non-controversial topics (Gray, 2010) and tending to include and cover social and real-life topics are the first features of these new textbooks that catch one's attention.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the current research is based on the position of two opposing trends in the field of applied linguistics in general and English language teaching in particular, i.e. mainstream ELT vs. critical ELT. Thus, in the following these two opposing camps of thought are introduced; then their tendency in topic and content selection in English textbooks are dealt with. Finally, the status of critical pedagogy in ELT is elaborated and the rationale for its application in such textbooks is briefly dealt with.

3.1. Mainstream ELT vs. Critical ELT

While in the second half of the 20th century the spread of English, specifically through ELT, was considered as a favorable and pedagogical development, the appearance of an increasing wave

of critical books has been effective in stimulating a considerable degree of soul searching within applied linguistics in general and ELT profession in specific (Davari, et al., 2014; Gray, 2002; Johnston, 2003).

Not surprisingly, influenced by this decisive critical turn (Cook, 2005; Gray, 2010; Kumaravadivelu, 2006) which was inspired by the appearance of some significant critical works especially the publication of Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism* in 1992, the 1990s turned into a milestone in critical studies in applied linguistics in general and ELT in particular. According to Johnston (2003), possibly the most significant development in ELT in the 1990s was the acceptance of this idea that ELT is and always has been a profoundly and unavoidably political activity. Anderson (2003) writes that since the 1990s the concepts of ELT and ELT profession have undergone radical changes and this field has experienced an intellectual shift (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2012).

Encountering this situation, there is no doubt that ELT has undergone some radical changes and cannot be confined to the traditional or mainstream features and attitudes which have been mostly current in this field. The advent of the growing critical as Gray (2010) writes, was accompanied by renewed interest in critical pedagogy as an approach to ELT – an activity which is seen as inherently problematic, value-laden and necessarily political.

According to Ghaffar-Samar and Davari (2012), the main gist of this opposing controversy can be introduced in the way that the mainstream ELT presents itself as a mere educational activity, publicizes native-based or the Center varieties of English especially the American and British ones, introduces itself as the only legitimate reference of planning, develops and produces methods, materials and programs, advertises the homogenization of culture and educational goods

influenced by global standardization carrying from the Center to the Periphery, and shrewdly equates learning English in its Center variety with global understanding (see Kubota, 2002). In contrast, the outstanding appearance of the critical ELT has significantly challenged and complicated the mainstream ELT. This new critical camp of thought proposes that ELT functions as a vehicle for imposing western capitalist values and beliefs, and then tries to question the cultural and social relevance and appropriateness of center-produced methods and materials, focuses on the political, cultural, social, economic and ideological aspects of ELT, challenges the established and globally known tenets and bases of ELT and promotes critical pedagogy as an alternative approach to the mainstream pedagogy; in this way, this new critical camp of thought has tried to manifest itself mightily (Davari, et al., 2014).

3.2. Sanitized Topics vs. Awareness-raising Topics

Textbook development is one of the outstanding arenas in which the confrontation between the critical ELT and the mainstream ELT is tangible. Reviewing and analyzing the current ELT textbooks especially the international or global ones that in Gray's (2000) words, are produced in English-speaking countries and is designed for use as the core text in language classrooms around the world, shows that their topics and content are mostly Center-oriented or in sharp contrast with the Periphery countries' atmosphere. In this regard, Canagarajah (1999) maintains one effect of globalization is the imposition of Center materials on the Periphery. In his words, such textbooks are thematically and culturally "inclusive" and "inappropriate". For example, Banegas (2010) asserts that such books are criticized not only for avoiding provoking topics, but also for presenting a romantic view of countries such as Britain or the USA. In his terms, in an attempt to avoid some controversial and real issues, material writers opt for selecting themes that are rooted in the British or American culture. Akbari (2008a) also maintains that a problem of commercially produced textbooks is their disregard for the real-life concerns. In this regard, Akbari (2008b) writes:

Almost all of these textbooks are sanitized and neutralized (Gray, 2001, p. 159) to make sure they do not lose their market potential, and in this process most of the topics of interest for a critical or postmethod pedagogy are removed.... Most of the topics one encounters in commercially prepared textbooks deal with harmless issues such as travel, shopping, holidays, and food recipes, leaving little room for social transformation and political-awareness raising (p. 645).

Analyzing such global textbooks, Gray (2002) also writes:

Although course books are designed explicitly for the teaching of English language they are also highly wrought cultural constructs and carriers of cultural messages. Here I focus on the ways in which these texts, against a background of increasing globalization, represent the English speaking world for pedagogic and commercial purposes (p. 152).

Facing this situation, Gray (ibid.) introduces and criticizes such global books as follows:

These course books are also commodities which have to be sold globally to a variety of very different markets. Unlike the course books which are produced for the young learner/secondary school market the underlying philosophy of 'one size fits all' means that the progressive and ethical dimension is all too often undermined by the perceived need to sanitize content. This means that content is limited to a narrow range of bland topics and is predominantly aspirational. But 'one size fits all' also means the exclusion of the local (p. 166).

Thus, it is not surprising to see the appearance of a growing wave of books and research papers that not only criticizes such global course books' topics and content, but also insists on

incorporating socially and culturally global and local awareness-raising topics and content in ELT books. This critical trend, which is mostly recognized as critical pedagogy (CP) in the growing literature on the topic (Akbari, 2008a ; Kumaravadevelu, 2012), proposes an alternative approach in topic and content selection in ELT textbooks, which is elaborated in the following section.

3.3. The Application of Critical Pedagogy in English Textbook Development

Among the critical trends in the field of ELT in general and English textbook development in particular, critical pedagogy has the most significant status. While, according to Canagarajah (2005), the concept of critical pedagogy in the ELT profession dates back to 1980s, Akbari (2008a) mentions that it has only been relatively recently that we have seen heightened interest in its principles and practical implications. In his words, most of the discussion on CP has been limited to its rationale and not much has been done to bring it down to the actual world of classroom practice, for which it was originally intended. In his words, what critical pedagogues are after is the transformation of society through education, including language teaching. Encountering this rationale for application of critical pedagogy in English language textbooks, the suggestions of Rashidi and Safari (2011) in ELT materials development might be revealing:

- a) ELT materials should develop learners' communicative abilities while applying these abilities to raise learners' critical consciousness of the world around them and the ability to act on it.
- b) If the materials have a joint goal, then ELT materials for critical pedagogy are expected to have two major outcomes: social development and language skill development on the part of the learner.
- c) The topics and themes included in ELT materials should be generative to invoke considerable discussion and analysis.

- d) Source of the themes of the materials should be derived from the learners' life situations, needs and interests.
- e) ELT materials should take into account the learner's role as a decision-maker and subject of the act.
- f) In terms of evaluative activities, it was expected that students develop their critical consciousness in line with their language mastery.

In line with such suggestions, the practical hints provided by Akbari (2008a), in the process of application of critical pedagogy in English textbook development, can be enlightening. Since in his words, critical pedagogy is an attitude to language teaching, which relates the classroom context to the wider social context and aims at social transformation through education, ELT textbooks for critical pedagogy are expected to have two major outcomes of social development and language skill development. Achieving this goal, through reviewing the growing literature on the topic such as Gray (2000, 2002 & 2010), Akbari (2008a & 2008b), Maley (2004), Read (2017), Matsuda (2006), Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2012 & 2014), Kumaravadevelu (2012), etc. the following practical hints and their rationales for the application of critical pedagogy in the development of English textbooks are worth introducing:

- a) Integrating global issues: Since today learners of English want to become effective users of this language in the global context, integrating global issues, as a missing link in mainstream ELT materials, needs to be fostered. Avoiding some harmless topics such as travel, shopping, festivals, holidays, etc. common in mainstream ELT textbooks, which in Akbari's (2008a) words, leave little room for social transformation and awareness raising, critical pedagogy maintains that provoking topics including world peace, inequality, poverty, environmental conservation, etc. can provide suitable content for English textbooks (for more information, see Read, 2017).

- b) Using local topics: As Akbari (2008a) asserts, critical pedagogy takes the local as its point of departure and local here includes the overall actual experiences and needs of learners. From this point of view, commercially produced coursebooks, which form the backbone of instruction in many mainstream language teaching contexts, lack the required sensitivity to be able to address such concerns and disregard the localness of learning and learning needs. In his words, critical pedagogy objects to a blanket approach to syllabus design where all students are assumed to have a common set of communicative goals.
- c) Incorporating source culture: According to Gray (2002 & 2010), using target culture in the mainstream ELT books seems to uphold the Center values and living standards, leading to the perception that the target culture is superior to the student's. Thus, avoiding the cultural hegemony of this language in the mainstream ELT materials, based on the critical pedagogy, integrating source culture in the local ELT materials is an alternative approach. Regarding the rationale behind this approach, Akbari (2008a) writes:

Most cultural content, however, has been from the target language, since the justification has been that those who want to learn a new language want to communicate with the users of that language, and successful communication would be impossible without familiarity with the cultural norms of the society with whose speakers the learner is trying to forge bonds. This assumption, of course, holds true for those groups of learners who want to migrate to countries such as the US or UK for work or study. The reality in which many other language learners find themselves, nevertheless, is different (McKay 2003).

3.4. The Rationale for Applying Critical Pedagogy

It is believed that critical pedagogy can provide an arena in education in which the learners are seen as active doers and thinkers, rather than merely passive recipients of information and knowledge. Insisting on two features of creativity and criticality, critical pedagogy integrates creative thinking, critical thinking and social responsibility in a way that enables learners as well as teachers to relate significant issues to their own lives. For example, in this regard, Ruas (2017)

points out that through integrating such issues we can turn the classroom into a place where learners stop to think about some trivial issues, learn about key issues outside mainstream media and develop their productive skills by speaking and writing about meaningful issues to work towards a fairer, healthier and more sustainable world.

With regard to critical thinking, playing a key role in the deeper processing and production of language learning, as Hughes and Dummett (2019) write, involves reflective thinking, the habit of questioning assumptions and inquiring more deeply; rational thinking, the ability to follow arguments in a logical and disciplined way and reasonable approach that individuals keep on objective, open mind and are sensitive to what is fair and balanced.

From this perspective, critical thinking as an indivisible part of the overall educational process, involves the basic skills of analysis, inference, explanation, interpretation, evaluation and self-regulation (Sampedro & Hillyard, 2004).

Regarding creative thinking, as Read (2017) points out, through its integration in English lessons, learners develop relevant cognitive skills, such as observing, questioning, comparing, contrasting, imagining and hypothesising, that they need in all areas of the curriculum. In her words, the development of creativity in ELT can increase learners' engagement and motivation in studying a foreign language, promote their ability to think in a flexible way, provide a basis for the development of more sophisticated, conceptual and abstract creative thinking in future and so on.

Undoubtedly, through these elements, namely critical thinking and creative thinking as well as social responsibility that all together provide the foundation of critical pedagogy in education in

general and language learning in particular, the rationale behind the application of this approach in English language learning becomes justifiable.

4. Research Method

As pointed out, the recent reform in the development of Iranian high school English language textbooks has not been solely limited to structural and methodological changes, but their topics and content have been observably changed. Showing this shift, in this paper, three previous senior high school textbooks (first, second and third grades) titled as Right Path to English and three new senior high school textbooks (first, second and third grades) titled as Vision were descriptively and analytically compared with regard to their topics and content based on the theoretical framework of the research. In doing so, first the topics and the content of the lessons were reviewed and then were classified and analyzed on the basis of their themes and functions.

5. Result

In this section, firstly the books are introduced; then they are analyzed and compared based on the theoretical framework of the research.

5.1. A Snapshot of the Previous and the New English Textbooks

Providing a snapshot of the textbooks, the topics, themes and the functions of the previous and the new English textbooks are extracted as follows:

5.1.1 The Previous Textbooks

English 1, 2, 3 which were taught at the first, second and third grades of the senior high schools had 9, 7 and 6 lessons respectively. To gain an insight on the lessons' topics, themes and functions, the following table has been provided:

Table 1: The topics, themes and functions of Book 1 (Old system)

Topic	Theme	Function
The Kindergarten Man	the Biography of Friedrich Froebel, the founder of the first kindergarten	Information (Biography)
The Funny Farmhand	using monkeys in picking coconuts	Information (Fact)
A Story about Newton	a real story about Newton's absent-mindedness	Amusement (Real Story)
The School Bus	a story about Tom, a student who went to school by a snowplow in a snowy day	Amusement (Story)
Learn a Foreign Language!	the importance of learning a foreign language	Advice + Amusement (Story)
The Boy Who Made Steam Work	a real story about James Watt, the inventor of steam engine	Information (Fact)
Highways in the Sky	birds migration in autumn	Information (Fact)
Eat, Clothes, Eat!	an ethical anecdote	Advice (Story)
The Holy Prophet	a short biography of the Holy Prophet	Information (Biography)

Table 2: The topics, themes and functions of Book 2 (Old system)

Topic	Theme	Function
Washoe and the Puzzles	solving puzzles by a monkey	Amusement (Story)
The Other Side of the Moon	the structure of the Moon	Information (Fact)
Holland's Toy Town	a tiny toy city in Holland	Information (Fact)
Charles Dickens and the Little Children	the life and goodness of Charles Dickens	Information (Real Story)
The Little Old Man Who Could Not Read	a happening about an illiterate old man	Amusement (Story)
Hic, Hic, Hic	What the hiccup is and introducing Mr. O'Leary the holder of world's record for hiccupping	Information (Fact)
How Are You?	Greetings' function	Information (Fact)

Table 3: The topics, themes and functions of Book 3 (Old system)

Topic	Theme	Function
TV or not TV	the position of TV in modern life	Information (Argument)
The Value of Education	Education as a means to achieving an end	Advice (Fact and Opinion)
Memory	remembering and forgetting in the brain	Information (Fact)
The Olympic Games	history of the Olympics	Information (Fact)
Every Word is a Puzzle	the invention and story of words	Information (Fact)
What is a Computer?	the structure and function of computers	Information (Fact)

Having a glance at the above topics, themes and functions revealed that they are mostly confined to the texts that give information, amusement and in a few instances advice. Before analyzing them, a snapshot of the new books is also provided.

5.1.2 The New Textbooks

It is worth noting that these books, known as Vision 1, Vision 2 and Vision 3, which are currently taught in the first, second and third grades of senior high schools have 4, 3 and 3 lessons respectively. To gain an insight on the lessons' topics, themes and functions, the following table has been provided:

Table 4: The topics, themes and functions of Book1 (New system)

Topic	Theme	Function
Saving Nature (Endangered Animals)	endangered animals esp. the Persian cheetah	information+ awareness+ responsibility
Wonders of Creation (A Wonderful Liquid)	wonders of solar system and blood	information+ enquiry
The Value of Knowledge (No Pain No Gain)	Introducing Razi as a Persian scientist + introducing Edison	information+ encouragement
Travelling the World (Iran: A True Paradise)	Introducing Iran's natural and historical attractions	encouragement+ self-esteem+ responsibility

Table 5: The topics, themes and functions of Book 2 (New system)

Topic	Theme	Function
Understanding People (Languages of the World)	the importance and variety of languages esp. the mother tongue	information+ awareness+ responsibility
A Healthy Lifestyle (Having a Healthier and Longer Life)	the importance of food, sport, etc. in having a healthy lifestyle	information+ awareness
Art and Culture (Art, Culture and Society)	The position of art and culture in every society+ the arts in Iran	information+ self-esteem

Table 6: the topics, themes and functions of Book 3 (New system)

Topic	Theme	Function
Sense of Appreciation (Respect your Parents)	Introducing Dr. Gharib as a dedicated physician+ respecting others esp. the parents	information+ responsibility
Look it Up! (How to Use a Dictionary)	Introducing various dictionaries and their functions + introducing an old Persian dictionary	information+ self-esteem
Renewable Energy (Earth for Our Children)	The importance of energy in life+ respecting environment	information+ awareness+ responsibility

5.2. Analysis and Comparison

In this section, the results of analysis of the previous and new textbooks are provided.

5.2.1. Results of analysis of the previous textbooks

The findings from their review and analysis of the previous textbooks can be presented as follows:

- a) The content and the themes of these books are confined to stories, biographies or some descriptive passages whose functions are mostly providing information and amusement. In this regard, such themes can be analyzed from two aspects. First, the presence of sanitized or neutral topics is evident. According to Gray (2000) and Akbari

- (2008b) such harmless issues leave little room for any social transformation and awareness raising. Second, most of these topics and content are in the context of target culture. More precisely, except the lesson about the Holy Prophet (Book 1, lesson 9), using the biographies of the western figures and characters such as Newton, James Watt, Friedrich Froebel, etc. is an obvious sign of the prevalence of the mainstream approach in such books. Thus, as Gray (2000 & 2010) writes, they are highly wrought with cultural constructs and carriers of western cultural messages.
- b) The lack of source culture in such books is noticeable. It seems that using target culture in such books upholds the Center values and living standards and ignores the interests and needs of the learners. In this regard, the issue of the inappropriacy and inclusivity of such content, as Canagarajah (1999) notes, is strongly raised.
- c) Beside the absence of local culture in these books, the absence of global and local issues as real-life concerns is totally tangible. There is no doubt that through integrating such issues we cannot turn the classroom into a place where learners stop to think about some trivial issues, learn about key issues and develop their productive skills by speaking and writing about meaningful issues to work towards a fairer and healthier world (Ruas, 2017).
- d) The findings show that such content is limited to a narrow range of bland topics. Certainly through topics and themes of lessons such as The School Bus (Book 1, Lesson 4), Hiccup (Book 2, Lesson 6), Washoe (Book 2, Lesson 1), etc., fostering social development on the part of the learners is impossible.

- e) Last but not least, there is no doubt that teaching such themes cannot be generative to invoke considerable discussion and analysis in classrooms.

5.2.2. Results of analysis of the new textbooks

On the contrary, the review and analysis of the new textbooks result in the following findings:

a) Avoiding neutral and sanitized topics on the one hand and integrating controversial topics and content are completely evident. The presence of global and local issues is evidence to the claim. Through using these topics and themes we can see that as well as providing information for the learners, the main function has been fostering awareness and responsibility. Even in a lesson such as Look it Up! (Book 3, Lesson 2), that attempts to provide some facts and information about dictionaries, presenting facts about the tradition of making Persian dictionary ten centuries ago, can foster self-esteem in the learners.

b) Integrating source culture in these books has made them different from the former generations of post-revolutionary Iranian English textbooks. Emphasizing the glories and honors of the source culture can lead to the perception that the target culture is not superior to the student's. The inclusion of issues including the Persian architecture (Book 3, Lesson 3), Persian animal species (Book 1, Lesson 1), Persian natural and historical spectacles (Book 2, Lesson 4), Persian great scientists and figures (Book 1, Lesson 3), and Persian fascinating arts (Book 2, Lesson 3) are noticeable examples of this trend.

c) Since the themes of these books having been derived from the learners' real-life situations, needs and interests, it is expected that not only learners show more interest towards them, but also it is predicted that more discussion and participation are encouraged on the part of the learners.

d) The emphasis on some moral principles including respecting parents (Book 3, Lesson 1), protecting the environment (Book 1, Lesson 1), appreciating our figures and honors (Book 1, Lesson 3), respecting other languages (Book 2, Lesson 1), etc. can lead to the formation of a suitable atmosphere for social and moral development alongside language development.

Professionally speaking, facing these findings, we may assert that the suggestions and hints provided by a growing number of critical researchers on the topic have been practically applied in Iranian context.

Regarding the rationale for such a change, since on the one hand the global textbooks are not methodologically or culturally appropriate in many contexts all over the world (Gray, 2012), and on the other hand the previous textbooks had been mostly developed based on the tenets of the mainstream ELT (Akbari, 2008a), achieving the goals of the upper-level documents has involved a change in the development of Iranian English textbooks.

Since among the critical trends in the field of ELT in general and English textbook development in particular, critical pedagogy has the most significant status, it seems that CP has been chosen as a benchmark for this change.

Analyzing the new textbooks revealed that the inclusion of the tenets of CP including local culture, local issues and global problems, aiming at enhancing social development along with language development on the part of the learners, has been in line with the hints provided by Akbari (2008a), Canagarajah (1999), Gray (2010 & 2016), Kumaravadivelu (2012), Matsuda (2006), and Rashidi and Safari (2011).

In all, through these findings we can claim that as Gray (2016) writes, the integration of such topics, themes and content can turn the classroom into a place where learners stop thinking about trivial topics. In such a situation, through integrating real-life and awareness-raising topics, they can develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills along with language skill.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, it was attempted to review and compare the topics and the content of the previous and the new English textbooks to find out the transformation that the new generation of English textbooks has experienced. In short, the main findings of this study are concluded as follows:

- a) While before the last reform in English education which began in 2013 as noted before, the English textbooks have experienced three phases of change, reviewing them revealed that the changes were mostly structural and methodological.
- b) In the recent reform of English education, which was influenced by the upper-level educational documents, the structure and content of the books were revolutionized. Integrating communicative approach has been accompanied by some notable changes in the construction of the new textbooks.
- c) Reviewing the topics and the content of the textbooks revealed that critical pedagogy has been practically applied in these textbooks. Selecting global issues as well as local topics and attending to local culture are evident in new textbooks.
- d) While the previous textbooks were mostly confined to sanitized or so-called neutral topics, the emergence of the awareness-raising and controversial topics has been outstanding.
- e) Contrary to the previous textbooks in which the social development of the learners was neglected, through such socially responsible content in the new textbooks, the joint goal of namely the social development and language skill development on the part of learners has been followed.

The findings also promise some principal implications. First, they will redound to the benefit of materials developers integrating the principles of critical pedagogy and its components in developing EFL textbooks at various levels and different skills. Since the ever developing world of educational arena calls for textbooks whereby learners' social development is ensured, the findings of the present research can provide the material developers with an approach in which the joint goal of fostering social development and language skill development on the part of learners can be achieved.

The results of this study can also reveal the researchers' awareness of the dominant hegemonies of ELT textbooks which are delicately conveyed through such textbooks. The researchers are also suggested to conduct further studies triangulating the present findings through questionnaires and interviews checking teachers' and students' perceptions about the topics and content of the previous and new textbooks.

Although in the present work our proposed framework was innovatively employed in comparing the locally-developed textbooks, it would be also fruitful if studies are undertaken to compare other ELT textbooks. Thus, this study can be replicated to compare the locally-produced and internationally-produced ELT textbooks with different levels, and regarding different language skills.

Another possible line of research is investigating the teachers' attitude about the recent reform in the Iranian ELT program in general and ELT textbooks in particular. In addition, surveying the perception of Iranian students regarding the topics and content of such textbooks would be worth considering.

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