



EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Key Tenets of Communicative Language Teaching in High School English Textbooks of Afghanistan, Iran & Iraq

Atefeh Mahdizadeh¹

Mojtaba Maghsoudi² (Corresponding author)

Behdokht Mall-Amiri³

| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
|--|--|
| <p>Received: 18 November 2021 Revised: 12 December 2021 Accepted: 09 March 2022 Online: 14 May 2022</p> | <p>Large bodies of textbooks have been published in past decades which have increasingly been claimed to be based on the tenets of communicative language teaching (CLT). In order to further investigate the claim, this study aimed at delving into the 11th grade textbook currently taught in high schools in Iran, Vision 2, and probed the extent which the tenets of CLT are implemented in comparison to the textbooks of the same level in neighboring countries, Afghanistan and Iraq. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, a sequential quantitative-qualitative mixed method was adopted. A reliable checklist was used to collect their perceptions. Having analyzed the quantitative data, the researcher interviewed nine participants afterwards. Data analysis indicated that English for Iraq was considered to have the richest content whereas English for Afghanistan had the poorest. Furthermore, English for Iraq in comparison with English for Iran and Afghanistan contains the most activities such as explanations, writing and examples which are not the only role of the teachers to cover them. Similarly, English for Iraq has the richest content in terms of meeting students' needs. Accordingly, English for Iran and English for Afghanistan are in the second and third ranks, respectively. However, English for Iraq and Iran are significantly similar in terms of the possibility of replacing whole class and formal instruction predicted in each unit by small group activities whereas English for Afghanistan does not provide such an opportunity. A further content analysis of the qualitative data from the interview showed that these textbooks, contrary to the claims, inherit behavioristic legacy as reflected in their formulaic content which is infertile in terms adaptation and personalization as well as meaningfulness. Accordingly, it is recommended that English for Iraq is set as a successful example of a locally-developed high school textbook for future revisions to be made in English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan.</p> |
| <p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Communicative Language English Language Foreign language Second Language Teaching Textbooks</p> | |

¹ Ph.D. Student, English Language Department, Islamic Azad University, Central Branch, Tehran, Iran, Email:atefehmahdizadeh1361t@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, English Language Department, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran, email: maghsudi@cfu.ac.ir

³ Assistant Professor, English Language Department, Islamic Azad University, Central Branch, Tehran, Iran, Email :bmamiri@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Understanding Textbook is the most commonly used form of instructional material in English teaching programs and is considered to be a fundamental component of such programs since it provides a uniform structured content format. High school textbooks are convenient and compact means of bestowing notional authority and providing a record of what has to be taught and a point of reference for high school teachers (Cunningsworth, 1995; Haycroft, 1998; Litz, 2005).

According to their prominent role in teaching English as a foreign language, it is sensible to assess them in terms of theoretical and practical aspects of current pedagogy and to evaluate their limitations and potential (Nunan, 1991). Although there have been a wide range of studies on non-pedagogical aspects of Iranian high school textbooks such as stereotyping or cultural biases (Beiki & Gharaguzlu, 2017); language-culture issues (Goodarzi & Weisi, 2020); and linguistic authenticity (Khodabandeh & Mombini, 2018), little attention has been paid to current communicative foreign language teaching pedagogy in these nation-wide textbook series, Prospect and Vision. In addition, most of the recent research conducted in Iran on the current high school textbooks have not adopted a comparative perspective in which the Iranian locally developed material is contrasted with its counterparts from other countries.

To fill in this gap, this study attempted to delimit the scope of current Iranian high school English textbooks evaluation to the main tenets of communicative approach to L2 teaching (CLT) which has been claimed to be met as the foundation of authoring Prospect and Vision. Moreover, this study, unlike many previous ones, adopted a comparative perspective to shed a lime light on the potentials and shortcomings of this locally developed textbook. In doing so, the researchers attempted to select two other locally developed high school textbooks from Afghanistan and Iran which share considerable social and cultural values with Iran to form a sensible platform of comparative evaluation of textbooks. Generally, communicative approach to language teaching is seen as “language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes” (Brown, 2001, p. 43). However, it is definitely challenging to put an authentic version of CLT into practice.

Since the textbooks evaluated in this research are claimed to have incorporated CLT, in order to evaluate these textbooks, the extent to which the main tenets of CLT are met has to be evaluated. In order to do so, according to Holliday (1994), evaluators need to consider the developmental nature of CLT rather than the serial perspective pre-dating it:

The serial view sees communicative language teaching as just another method to be considered amongst all the others. A developmental view, on the other hand, sees the advent of communicative language teaching as an important breakthrough ... Once this breakthrough is appreciated, it is no longer possible to go back to choose an earlier method if communicative language teaching does not appeal. What is needed is a further development of the communicative approach (p. 166).

Accordingly, it may be argued that the pedagogical challenges which have to be resolved in so-called communicative textbooks are their effectiveness in terms of conceptual organization, and meaningful integration, as well as personalization which crisscross with design and organization of textbooks, and selection and adaption of material.

“Design is the level of method analysis in which we consider (a) what the objectives of a method are; (b) how language content is selected and organized within the method, that is, the syllabus model the method incorporates; (c) the types of learning tasks and teaching activities the method advocates; (d) the roles of learners; (e) the roles of teachers; and (f) the role of instructional materials.” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 24)

This implies that the older presentation-practice-production (PPP) model is no longer applicable as an organizing principle of many communicative textbooks. Considering meaningful integration, as a cohesive unifying CLT principle for staging instructional content, sequencing and staging of the teaching material is based on both cognitive and language factors (Willis & Willis, 1996; Chen, 2021). In accordance with such an approach pedagogical tasks are recognized and included in textbooks to pave the way for negotiation of meaning and interaction (Hall & Hewings, 2001; Wei et al., 2018). Moreover, meaningful integration implies that each stage is sequenced in a way that a teaching unit facilitates the next one and or consolidates the preceding one so that an integrated ‘whole’ is created.

Accordingly, conceptual organization gains significance and the type of syllabus and curricular assumptions is important. Although notional functional syllabi were initially introduced to organize communicative textbooks contents, later they were accused of featuring similar effects to those of a structural syllabus associated with PPP (Lightbown & Spada, 2001), and unpredictability acquired elements and order (Long 1988). CLT syllabus is expected to bring opportunities for learning via interaction (Hall & Hewings 2001) away from dividing or categorizing L2; that is, the abstract realm of language system sacrificed to pave the way for transaction and interaction (Brown 2000). Hence “real-world” topics are more effective bases for conceptual organization of CLT textbooks as they are more comprehensive and inclusive than

functions or notions. This implies that topics can be pedagogically expanded and contextually adapted to meet the integration and personalization underpinnings of CLT.

“For teachers who are required to use a certain text, course development is the adaptation of the text, for the content of the text determines the content of the course. However, the text is not the course; rather, what the teacher and students do with the text constitutes the course. Textbooks are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities and interests of the students in the course. The material in a textbook can be modified to incorporate activities that will motivate students and move them beyond the constraints of the text.” (Hall & Hewings, 2001, 188)

This implies that the current CLT paradigm, unlike previous structural syllabus promoting a “conventionalized set of procedures to fit all contexts” (Brown 2001, p. 15), accounts for individual differences such as age, interest, etc., linguistic variation, learner motivation, and unpredictability of learner’s language use (Brown 2001). In other words, CLT is open to variation and accounts for inadequacy of prescriptive and pre-determined methodologies. This is also debatable under the core concept of adaptability of the content and is sometime discussed under the term “emergent methodology” as emphasized by Holliday (1994, p. 177), and Edge (1996, p. 11) which counts on the “professional expertise” of EFL teachers in handling teaching-learning variables and adapting material to emerging conditions. Accordingly, communicative textbooks need to include enough room for anticipative and facilitative adaptation of material, e.g. personalization.

Based on the aforementioned tenets of CLT, textbooks need to contain built-in expanding and enriching alternatives to account for a variety of pedagogical tasks, learning styles, presentation techniques, and expected outcomes. In other words, textbooks need to be adaptable and exploitable in terms not only topic but also language options and scope. That is, textbooks need to be evacuated from imposed prescriptive content pre-empting, co-opting, or ignoring, authentic and personally participation of learners which promoted learners’ engagement via personalization (Rahman et al., 2018).

Personalization, as elaborated above, is seen as means of raising learner’s intrinsic motivation and investment in teaching-learning process. Thus, creative learner involvement which goes beyond mere classroom participation to learner’s share in decision making is expected to be promoted in communicative textbooks rather than pre-determined situations, specified role options and preplanned language (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Accordingly, textbook need to feature scaffolding space for appropriate learner scenarios and welcoming language options promoting learner engagement and investment in teaching-learning process. In other words, communicative

textbooks need to be flexible enough to not only liberate teachers from publisher/author's direct control and curb their dependency on textbook frames but also provide relative freedom for learners in the process of deciding on material and content to be taught (Tomlinson, 2003). Based on the purpose of the study and the elaborated tenets of CLT, the following research questions guided this study:

- 1- How do EFL teachers perceive key tenets of CLT in high school English textbooks of Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq?
- 2- What are the aspects of similarities and differences of the high school English textbooks of Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq in terms of adherence to the key tenets of CLT, as perceived by EFL teachers?

2. Research Method

The present study enjoyed a sequential quantitative-qualitative mixed method. The quantitative method of the study was a survey design to probe the participating teachers' perceptions of the teaching materials aimed to be evaluated in this study, namely, English for Afghanistan, English for Iraq and English for Iran (Vision2). That is, the variable was teachers' perceptions of the textbooks in terms of including the tenet of CLT which was measured on an interval scale. Moreover, based on the results of the quantitative analysis, a semi-structured interview was employed to collect qualitative data to especially shed more light on the observed differences among these three textbooks. It is worth mentioning that the textbooks for comparative approach to the comparison of the material developed in these three countries were adopted due to the fact that Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq are socio-culturally similar, especially, in terms of cultural and religious values. Additionally, the language teaching context of these countries are very similar considering the role of English as a foreign language in these countries and their being located in expanding circle (Kachru, 1986). However, it has to be mentioned that these countries are to some extent different in terms of educational resources in terms educational facilities and human resources, to name a few. These three countries are also dissimilar to some extent in terms of their official foreign language policy and their demographic distribution of learners in terms of cultural and religious background.

The sample of the study included junior and senior high school teachers holding post-graduate degrees in teaching English as a foreign language who were selected via convenient sampling method from different cities, namely, Arak (n= 7), Babol (n= 5), Bandar-Abbas (n= 5), Isfahan (n= 9), Mashhad (n= 5), Tabriz (n= 6), Tehran (n= 13). The participants were 50 Iranian high school (22 female and 28 male) teachers selected conveniently. Their ages ranged from 39 to 47. They all held MA in language teaching except one who had a PhD in teaching English. Among

these teachers who participated in the quantitative survey stage were 9 (4 female and 5 male) volunteers who agreed to take part in the qualitative phase, the interview, aiming at in-depth critical investigation of their perceptions.

Three textbooks were evaluated in this study. The first one was *Vision 2* authored by a committee of Iranian textbook writers and published by the Ministry of Education in 2021 in 108 pages. It encompasses three units each of which covers between 26 to 32 pages. Unit one (Understanding People), unit two (A Healthy Lifestyle), and unit three (Art and Culture) feature the same format and layout. Each section begins with a warm-up vocabulary section followed by a conversation and a listening comprehension questions. New words are introduced next and the reading comprehension section appears afterward. Then, grammar lesson and exercises appear, and are followed by a listening and speaking section which focuses on a speech event such as shopping and asking for prices (in unit one). Additionally, pronunciation activities appear in this section. Writing section which dominantly includes controlled writing activities appear in the final section of each unit. It is claimed that the textbook is promoting CLT approach while emphasizing Islamic-Iranian cultural values, meaningful content, appropriate feedback provision and constructive learning experiences.

The second one was *English for Afghanistan (Grade 11)*, which was developed by the Directorate General of Curriculum Development & Compiling of Textbooks under the supervision of the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan in 2011. The book consists of 12 units as follows: (1) Fire, (2) Safety in the Home, (3) The Spread of Islam, (4) The Food which We Eat, (5) Afghanistan Yesterday and Today, (6) The Environment, (7) Oil, (8) Communication, (9) A Refreshing Drink, (10) Olympic Games, (11) Shopping, (12) Health Care. The book is published in 198 pages, and each unit covers between 10 to 19 pages. Each unit begins with a discussion section followed by a reading comprehension section. Word study and grammar sections come next. The unit continues second reading comprehension section proceeded by a writing section. The third reading comprehension section appears as the final section of each unit. The authorial group of the textbook claimed this textbook is aimed at connecting language, religion and culture, providing motivating content, increasing learning opportunities through interaction, integrating language skills and group work.

The third textbook was *English for Iraq* originally authored by Caroline de Messieres and revised by the Editorial and Adaptation Committee of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Iraq in 2014. The book was published in 174 pages including eight units each of which cover between 10 to 15 pages. Unit 4 and 8 are dedicated to review of the previous units and the other

units cover a variety of topics as follows: (1) Language Learning, (2) Education, (3) Travel, (4) Family and Friends, (5) Health and Fitness, (6) Science and Technology. Each unit begins with a listening comprehension section followed by an academic reading comprehension section. The vocabulary section and the grammar section, which is related to a language function, come next. A writing section and a further listening comprehension section are the ending sections of each unit. The textbook also contains a list of grammars and functions reference, checklist for written work, transcripts, and new words.

A checklist encompassing the major principles of CLT (group work, error correction quality and quantity, the significance of grammar, learner role and contribution, and teacher role) based on Razmjoo and Riazi's (2006) instrument including 18 items followed by a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) totally disagree to (5) totally agree. The maximum possible score indicating the most favorable attitude was 120, whereas 24 was the minimum score indicating the most unfavorable attitude. To determine the validity of the checklist, in a pilot study, a factor analysis was conducted resulting in six factors including, group work (3 statements), significance of grammar (5 statements), teacher role (6 statements), and learner role (4 statements). Using Cronbach alpha, the reliability of the checklist was calculated to be 0.79.

The study began with developing an evaluation checklist and confirming its validity and reliability via piloting it among 20 high school teachers in Arak (n= 4), Isfahan (n= 6) and Tehran (n= 10). Having written the items based on the original instrument developed by Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), the preliminary data were collected and further inferential statistical analyses were conducted. Having confirmed the usefulness of the instrument, the researchers distributed it among the 50 participants who had enough time to answer the items on a five-point Likert scale. It is worth mentioning the teachers were informed about the purpose the study and were assured that their responses would be used for this research only.

The participants were asked to complete the checklist three times with a five- to seven-day interval having thoroughly reflected on each textbook. Accordingly, each participant filled three checklists, each of which for a separate textbook. Since a quantitative survey provides a shallower focus than a qualitative one, a qualitative survey was also used to further the enquiry through a holistic and interconnected evaluation of the textbooks (Fowler, 2002). Accordingly, the researchers had the opportunity to access further explanation or qualification of the participants' reflections while they freely expressed their opinions (Dornyei, 2010) which may form a small-scale but informative basis for in-depth evaluation (Bell 2010). The interviews were voice recorded and then transcribed.

Nine out of 50 participating teachers were volunteered to take part in a semi-structured interview in which they commented, complimented and criticized different aspects of the three textbooks which they had been reflecting on for a week. They were asked to critically reflect on the three textbooks in terms of their potentials for implementing the main tenets of CLT, as elaborated in this study. The interview questions were design based on the key principles of CLT highlighted in the related literature and were slightly modified after being piloted with two high school teachers other than those participated in the interviews. The interview questions mainly aimed at investigating the teachers' ideas with regard to the potentials of the three textbooks in terms of adaptability, personalization, meaningfulness and emergence of the contents. The participants were interviewed on one-on-one basis via video-call in Persian and each session lasted no more than 20 minutes. Descriptive statistics, frequency and percentage were used to report the teachers' evaluation of the different aspects of textbooks based on CLT principles. Furthermore, chi-square test was used to compare the observed statistics for the three textbooks.as previously mentioned, the interviews were voice-recorded and then transcribed. Content analysis of the interview transcriptions were conducted through coding and classifying them into themes.

3. Findings

The results of the quantitative analysis of the data collected via the checklists are presented first and the findings from qualitative analysis of the data from the interviews are explained. As elaborated earlier, 50 high school teachers participating in this study evaluated the three textbooks from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq separately and reported their evaluation on three separate copies of the checklist. The frequencies and percentages of their responses were calculated and then compared to draw their general attitude toward CLT features of these three textbooks (Table 1). In order to have a better presentation of the results, the alternatives showing agreement (Strongly Agree and Agree) and the ones showing disagreement (Strongly Disagree and Disagree) were combined (Table 1).

Table 1
Teacher Attitude in Terms of Frequency and Percentage

| Items | Textbook | Agree | | Undecided | | Disagree | |
|---|----------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | <i>f</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>p</i> |
| 1. Grammatical correctness is emphasized in each unit. | English for Afghanistan | 18 | 36 | 9 | 18 | 23 | 46 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 24 | 48 | 9 | 18 | 17 | 34 |
| | English for Iraq | 25 | 50 | 10 | 20 | 15 | 30 |
| 2. Group work activities are sufficiently included in each unit. | English for Afghanistan | 10 | 21 | 10 | 20 | 30 | 60 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 19 | 38 | 16 | 36 | 15 | 30 |
| | English for Iraq | 40 | 80 | 10 | 10 | - | - |
| 3. Grammar is presented as a means not an end in each unit. | English for Afghanistan | 12 | 24 | 22 | 44 | 16 | 32 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 21 | 42 | 17 | 34 | 12 | 24 |
| | English for Iraq | 47 | 94 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 4. There is an opportunity for learners to suggest the content and activities of the lesson. | English for Afghanistan | 14 | 28 | 11 | 22 | 25 | 50 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 12 | 24 | 23 | 46 | 15 | 30 |
| | English for Iraq | 21 | 42 | 20 | 40 | 9 | 18 |
| 5. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. | English for Afghanistan | 12 | 24 | 21 | 42 | 17 | 34 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 22 | 44 | 11 | 22 | 17 | 34 |
| | English for Iraq | 32 | 64 | 6 | 12 | 12 | 24 |
| 6. Opportunities are provided for teachers' feedback on the appropriateness. | English for Afghanistan | 11 | 22 | 23 | 46 | 16 | 32 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 19 | 38 | 17 | 34 | 14 | 28 |
| | English for Iraq | 31 | 62 | 8 | 16 | 11 | 22 |
| 7. The role of teacher as an "authority" and "instructor" is not promoted. | English for Afghanistan | 33 | 66 | 10 | 20 | 7 | 14 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 23 | 46 | 15 | 30 | 12 | 24 |
| | English for Iraq | 10 | 20 | 27 | 54 | 13 | 26 |
| 8. The learner-centered approach to language teaching is encouraged in every unit. | English for Afghanistan | 7 | 14 | 23 | 46 | 20 | 40 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 19 | 38 | 18 | 36 | 13 | 26 |
| | English for Iraq | 44 | 88 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| 9. The content is organized in a manner which it is impossible to meet the needs of all in a large class. | English for Afghanistan | 28 | 56 | 17 | 34 | 5 | 10 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 23 | 46 | 22 | 44 | 5 | 10 |
| | English for Iraq | 13 | 26 | 3 | 6 | 34 | 68 |
| 10. The content moves beyond the knowledge of the rules of a language. | English for Afghanistan | 34 | 68 | 11 | 22 | 5 | 10 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 21 | 42 | 13 | 26 | 16 | 32 |
| | English for Iraq | 38 | 76 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| 11. Group work activities are practically presented in each unit. | English for Afghanistan | 17 | 34 | 31 | 62 | 3 | 6 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 21 | 42 | 14 | 28 | 15 | 30 |
| | English for Iraq | 22 | 44 | 18 | 36 | 10 | 20 |
| 12. The teacher needs to have many different roles while teaching this textbook. | English for Afghanistan | 11 | 22 | 31 | 62 | 6 | 12 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 23 | 46 | 14 | 28 | 13 | 26 |
| | English for Iraq | 36 | 72 | 8 | 16 | 6 | 12 |
| 13. Language is presented as a vehicle for doing something. | English for Afghanistan | 11 | 22 | 10 | 20 | 29 | 58 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 20 | 40 | 11 | 22 | 19 | 38 |
| | English for Iraq | 38 | 76 | 10 | 20 | 2 | 4 |
| 14. Activities such as explanations, writing and | English for Afghanistan | 21 | 42 | 11 | 22 | 18 | 36 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 18 | 36 | 28 | 56 | 4 | 8 |

| Items | Textbook | Agree | | Undecided | | Disagree | |
|---|----------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | <i>f</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>p</i> |
| examples are not the only role of the teachers | English for Iraq | 38 | 72 | 12 | 24 | - | - |
| 15. Tasks and activities are based on the students' needs | English for Afghanistan | 14 | 28 | 19 | 38 | 17 | 34 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 11 | 22 | 32 | 64 | 7 | 14 |
| | English for Iraq | 46 | 92 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| 16. Small group work can replace whole class and formal instruction predicted in each unit. | English for Afghanistan | 11 | 22 | 18 | 36 | 21 | 42 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 17 | 34 | 26 | 52 | 7 | 14 |
| | English for Iraq | 21 | 42 | 19 | 38 | 10 | 20 |
| 17. Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is not emphasized. | English for Afghanistan | 22 | 44 | 26 | 52 | 2 | 4 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 27 | 54 | 17 | 34 | 7 | 14 |
| | English for Iraq | 22 | 44 | 12 | 24 | 16 | 32 |
| 18. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks | English for Afghanistan | 27 | 54 | 21 | 42 | 2 | 4 |
| | English for Iran (Vision2) | 42 | 84 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 8 |
| | English for Iraq | 22 | 44 | 27 | 54 | 1 | 2 |

The majority of the participants, according to Table 1, agree that the tenets of CLT such as group work, teaching grammar as a means but not an end, meeting learners needs and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning, focus on the appropriateness, and adoption of learner-centered approach has been better met in English for Iraq than other two textbooks. However, the majority of participants, as reported in Table 1, stated that, with regard to English for Afghanistan and English for Iran (Vision) 2, CLT principles are roughly practical in large classes and sometimes are impractical. Overall, regarding the 18 items of the checklist, the teachers had positive perceptions toward the implementation of CLT principles in English for Iraq whereas they were fewer optimists about the implementation of the CLT principles in Iranian textbook. In addition, it can be argued that they perceived English for Afghanistan to be far from the tenets of CLT.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that the teachers' viewpoints with respect to the implementation of the CLT principles in English for Iran (Vision) 2 is relatively in line with their ideas about English for Afghanistan than those about English for Iraq. This is mainly visible with regard to the items which are related to domains of CLT which promote the instruction of grammar as a means of communication (items 3, 10, 13), the roles a teacher need to play in a class in order to put the potentials of the textbook into practice (items 6, 7, 12, 14, 18), and the learner-centered approach embodied in different sections of the textbooks (items 5, 8, 9, 15). As shown in Table 1, there have been many instances of discrepancy among the perceptions of the participants in terms of the reflections of the tenets of CLT in the material.

In order to further explore their perceptions, a qualitative approach was adopted and the interview data were further analyzed to have a more in-depth understanding of the issue. As stated by Kvale (1996, p. 11):

“The mode of understanding implied by qualitative research involves alternative conceptions of social knowledge, of meaning, reality, and truth in social science research. The basic subject matter is no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted.

It was stated earlier that the semi-structured interview data from nine teachers were transcribed and further analyzed using content analysis method through which the data were codified and the emerged codes were categorized under relevant themes. The first question is the most important theme was about the potential of these textbooks for adaptability as one of the tents of authentic, evolving CLT. With this regard, eight teachers believe that English for Afghanistan is poorly adaptable and 5 teachers believed so about 2 since:

“There are few exercises in English for Afghanistan and English for Iran (Vision) 2 that encourage students to use language they know to talk about shared knowledge of the world they experience, or would help them face a gap whereby the teacher can rescue them by introducing new language” (Participant 4)

The main reason may be the fact that these textbooks are coated by communicative exercises which actually supplement structure based syllabi. As Participant 2 said,

“Much of the language in Afghan and Iranian textbooks is already laid out so that the students have to just go through the exercises on after another. They seem to be written for classrooms where students have limited language ability and motivation and need to be spoon-fed and do a series of exercises to see and practice vocabulary and structure.” (Participant 5)

However, six teachers believed that English for Iraq has a good potentiality for adaptability since:

“There are some activities which potentially allow for ... communication... and even low-level students and large classes can experience the realization of communicative activities.” (Participant 9)

In addition, inconsistency among the sections of English for Afghanistan was hinder a sound implementation of the tents of CLT, as stated by 4 teachers whereas the participants did not stated any point about inconsistency in English for Iran (Vision) and English for Iraq. As Participant 3 stated:

“I find the book [English for Afghanistan] patchy and the contents of the units cleverly tied together; however, sometimes the objective is obscure and so the content is unusable.”

With regard to personalization, the second main tenet of CLT elaborated previously, seven respondents believed that these three textbooks are average in terms of personalization. While two respondents believed that English for Iraq has a better room for personalization:

“I find it [English for Iraq] have some tasks that can help learners be genuinely engaged with the content and language.” (Participant 7)

However, the English for Iran (Vision) and English for Afghan were thought to be restricted to controlled activity and provide little room for innovative use content and language to share students' personalized content in a class.

“Little [personalization exists] in English for Iran (Vision) and almost none in Afghan textbook since they guide students through a set of structured exercises that are restricted to the topic and language presented.” (Participant 1)

It is noteworthy that, as eight teachers stated, context is not needed for personalization since:

“These textbooks are well-adapted with the cultural norms, topics and issues the student may be interested in and little effort is needed to adapt and extend the topics in the textbook based on the particular group.” (Participant 3)

Moreover, there seems to a barrier to personalization in all these textbooks in that major adjustments have to make to extend or expand the dialogues and pair work activities.

“All of them, in general, contain group work activities which are often developed enough, and need expansion and modification. The same goes for the conversation exercises” (Participant 4).

With regard to the second question, in order to see if the participants considered the textbooks taught in high schools of Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq similar in terms of their adherence to the tenets of CLT, the researcher conducted a series of Chi-square tests to compare the perceptions of the participants as measured in this study. The results of the analyses are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2
Chi-square test for pairwise comparison of teachers perceptions about the reflection of the tents of CLT in the high school textbooks of Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq

| English for Afghanistan – English for Iran (Vision) | English for Iraq – English for Iran (Vision) | English for Afghanistan – English for Iraq |
|---|--|--|
|---|--|--|

| CLT principles | X^2 | df | p | X^2 | df | p | X^2 | df | p |
|---|-------|----|-----|-------|----|-----|-------|----|-----|
| 1. Grammatical correctness is emphasized in each unit. | 2.78 | 2 | .24 | .28 | 2 | .86 | 4.61 | 2 | .09 |
| 2. Group work activities are sufficiently included in each unit. | 17.95 | 2 | .00 | 25.16 | 2 | .00 | 76.32 | 2 | .00 |
| 3. Grammar is presented as a means not an end in each unit. | 3.98 | 2 | .13 | 33.10 | 2 | .00 | 55.35 | 2 | .00 |
| 4. There is an opportunity for learners to suggest the content and activities of the lesson. | 9.94 | 2 | .00 | 4.81 | 2 | .08 | 18.50 | 2 | .00 |
| 5. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. | 6.06 | 2 | .04 | 4.70 | 2 | .09 | 18.87 | 2 | .00 |
| 6. Opportunities are provided for teachers' feedback on the appropriateness. | 3.25 | 2 | .19 | 6.65 | 2 | .03 | 18.26 | 2 | .00 |
| 7. The role of teacher as an "authority" and "instructor" is not promoted. | 4.49 | 2 | .10 | 8.60 | 2 | .01 | 22.60 | 2 | .00 |
| 8. The learner-centered approach to language teaching is encouraged in every unit. | 8.82 | 2 | .01 | 29.00 | 2 | .00 | 62.34 | 2 | .00 |
| 9. The content is organized in a manner which it is impossible to meet the needs of all in a large class. | 1.13 | 2 | .56 | 79.30 | 2 | .00 | 76.81 | 2 | .00 |
| 10. The content moves beyond the knowledge of the rules of a language. | 11.15 | 2 | .00 | 13.58 | 2 | .00 | 4.30 | 2 | .11 |
| 11. Group work activities are practically presented in each unit. | 17.43 | 2 | .00 | 1.97 | 2 | .37 | 8.58 | 2 | .01 |
| 12. The teacher needs to have many different roles while teaching this textbook. | 13.93 | 2 | .00 | 7.88 | 2 | .01 | 26.83 | 2 | .00 |
| 13. Language is presented as a vehicle for doing something. | 8.76 | 2 | .01 | 25.19 | 2 | .00 | 63.41 | 2 | .00 |
| 14. Activities such as explanations, writing and examples are not the only role of the teachers | 20.42 | 2 | .00 | 16.46 | 2 | .00 | 25.64 | 2 | .00 |
| 15. Tasks and activities are based on the students' needs | 9.74 | 2 | .00 | 51.19 | 2 | .00 | 47.73 | 2 | .00 |
| 16. Small group work can replace whole class and formal instruction predicted in each unit. | 14.05 | 2 | .00 | 2.17 | 2 | .33 | 9.84 | 2 | .00 |
| 17. Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of | 5.45 | 2 | .06 | 6.40 | 2 | .04 | 19.53 | 2 | .00 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|---|-----|-------|---|-----|------|---|-----|--|
| grammar is not emphasized. | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks. | 15.53 | 2 | .00 | 25.23 | 2 | .00 | 1.60 | 2 | .44 | |

As shown in Table 2, the Chi-square test results reflected the existing differences between the pairs of textbooks as perceived by the participating teachers. Accordingly, in terms of emphasizing grammatical correctness each unit, the textbooks were perceived to be similar. With regard to the inclusion of group work activities in each unit, English for Iraq was the superior one whereas English for Afghanistan was the poorest. In English for Iran grammar was perceived to be presented as a means not an end in each unit whereas in English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan, grammar was presented mostly as an end. In English for Iraq and English for Iran (Vision2), there exist opportunities for learners to suggest the content and activities of the lesson whereas in English for Afghanistan there are significantly fewer chances to do so. Based on the results in Table 2, in English for Iraq and English for Iran (Vision2), learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning but this is not a common approach in English for Afghanistan. While in English for Iraq opportunities are provided for teachers' feedback on the appropriateness, teachers do not have enough chance to do so once teaching English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan. Moreover, in English for Afghanistan and English for Iran (Vision2), the role of teacher as an "authority" and "instructor" is promoted more strongly than English for Iraq which violates the communicativeness of the textbook.

English for Iraq is the most successful of these three textbooks in terms of promoting learner-centered in language teaching in every unit whereas English for Iran (Vision2) was perceived to be in the second rank. In English for Afghanistan the content is organized in a way that is relatively impossible to meet the needs of all in a large class. According to the results in Table 2, English for Iran (Vision2) also relatively suffers from the same problem in comparison to English for Iraq. Based on the participants' perceptions it can be argued that the content of both English for Afghanistan and English for Iraq moves beyond the knowledge of the rules of a language whereas this was not perceived to be true for English for Iran (Vision2). In terms of the practicality of group work activities in each unit English for Iraq and English for Iran (Vision2) were found to be similar and superior to English for Afghanistan. Moreover, English for Iraq was found to be the most demanding textbook in this study in terms of the variety of roles a teacher needs to have while teaching this textbook; English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan were ranked second and third, respectively.

In terms of presenting language as a vehicle for doing something, English for Iraq was considered to have the richest content whereas English for Afghanistan had the poorest. Furthermore, in English for Iraq in comparison with other two textbooks, contains the most activities such as explanations, writing and examples which are not the only role of the teachers to cover them. In this regard, English for Afghanistan is the poorest of these textbooks. Similarly, English for Iraq has the richest content in terms of meeting students' needs. Accordingly, English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan are in the second and third ranks, respectively. However, English for Iraq and English for Iran (Vision2) are significantly similar in terms of the possibility of replacing whole class and formal instruction predicted in each unit by small group activities whereas English for Afghanistan does not provide such an opportunity. In English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan direct instruction of grammar rules and terminology of grammar is well-emphasized whereas in English for Iraq, it is not considered as important. Unlike English for Iran (Vision2), English for Afghanistan and English for Iraq are perceived to be comprehensive enough in terms of their content so that the teacher does not need to supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks of his own or supplementary sources.

All in all, with regard to the six main tenets of CLT examined in this study, it can be concluded that English for Iraq and English for Iran (Vision2) are comparable in terms of group work and both of them are richer than English for Afghanistan. Moreover, in English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan both tend to present grammar according to PPP approach than communicative approach to ELT and are both more teacher centered than English for Iraq once supporting fewer teacher roles. Last but not least, in terms of learner roles, English for Iraq has the richest content, especially, when it comes to meeting learners' needs.

4. Discussion

This enquiry was taken on based on the belief that high school textbooks are problematic to be used for communicative language teaching, irrespective of how strongly they claim to be so. The survey of the participants' perceptions indicated that such an assumption is true. The three high school textbooks surveyed in this study were shown to inherit serious difficulties and limitations in terms of meeting the tenets of CLT. Especially, English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghan were a little more hopeless than English for Iraq, if learner engagement opportunities and teacher roles are considered.

Although these textbooks meet the contextual values and norms of an Islamic society, they may inherit some flaws hindering the implementation of CLT principles since they shape the basic

program for teaching-learning content in high schools. The main drawback of these textbooks, especially English for Afghan and English for Iran (Vision2) was that their content was strictly structured so that little room is left for engaging learner's interest and immediate needs. Such content is minimally flexible and adaptive so that leaves no room for a more-or-less in-process instruction (Chan, 2021).

A further noticeable difference exists among the textbooks in terms of the extent to which controlled non-productive activities can hinder the implementation of the tenets of CLT in these textbooks. A more positive evaluation of English for Iraq in comparison to English for Iran (Vision2) and English for Afghanistan, it can be argued that the more controlled and structured are the activities, the lower the possibility of applying CLT principles, no matter to what extent the content meets the contextual values and learners interest. This especially pertains to the actual needs of the learners (Rahman et al., 2018). Although the existence of such activities cannot be blamed since such textbooks need to meet the conditions of low-level students, there is a need to include a more challenging and freer activities to account for the needs of high-level learners as well. If the logic is to employ controlled practice for high school classrooms where students have imperfect English language ability and/or L2 motivation, or for those who need to be spoon-fed, there can be a counter argument in favor of the students who have higher language ability and are not going to waste their time re-studying the "old" and "simple" content. However, as Ellis (1988) pointed out, even the existence of such controlled activities is prone to criticism.

Not only are controlled activities inadequate for meaningful communicative activity, but they also are insufficient practicing appropriate language and scaffolding (Thornbury 1999). As stated by the respondents, these textbooks, especially, English for Afghanistan and English for Iran (Vision) lack sufficient modeling or explicit guidelines on appropriacy so that students can benefit. In addition, these activities, as Swan (1985) warns, do not have any (information) gap to motivate further interaction and negotiation of meaning. Similarly, the textbooks, especially Iranian and Afghan one, are infertile in terms of the chances for personalization, and, thus, the potential for learner investment (Allwright, 1982).

Limited personalization, seen as a form of self-expression activities in these textbooks, except English for Iraq, deteriorates the focus on meaning and hinders students from generating their own language. This consequently demotivates students to participate in communicative activities (Edwards et al., 1994; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Rahman & Pandian, 2018) to produces their own ideas, discourse models, and lexical items (Miura 1997).

All these textbooks were claimed to provide communicative and interactive tasks; this, however, was partially affirmed by the participants of this study. These textbooks seem to work against personalization, content adaptation and meaningful presentation of content leading to a deprived content suppressing learner engagement and investment (Wei et al., 2018). This may be due to the fact that content of these high school textbooks are pseudo-communicative and are basically presented according to PPP model which is deficient in terms of offering productive activities. This pseudo-communicativeness may result from the false belief that implementing a notional functional syllabus equals CLT content; however “the methodology which realizes a notional-functional syllabus may be a presentation methodology which involves virtually nothing in the way of genuine communication” (Willis, 1990, p. 57).

In terms of meaningfulness of content, especially in English for Afghanistan and English for Iran (Vision), due to the fact that the language is pre-determined and is focused on usage than use (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), little room for implementation of CLT principles are left. Accordingly, lack of authentic communicative restricts expression, interpretation, and negotiation and, thus, hinders the development of “primary abilities within any target competence” (Hall & Hewings, 2001, p. 12).

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was mainly to evaluate the high school textbooks of English as a foreign language in Iran and two other neighbor countries which share the same religious and cultural values. In order to so perceptions of 50 EFL teachers were drawn upon through devising a comparative mixed method approach to have a better view of the extent to which the tenets of communicative language teaching have been applied to their content. The showed that the textbooks the Iranian textbook, English for Iran (Vision2), and Afghan textbook, English for Afghanistan, were comparable in terms of their drawbacks, i.e. implementing group work, teacher roles and learner roles. Nevertheless, English for Iran (Vision2) was generally perceived to be little superior to English for Afghanistan in these regards. English for Iraq, however, was perceived to be well-developed in terms of implementing the tenets of CLT, especially in terms of adaptability, and personalization. It also is worth mentioning that the Iraqi high school textbook enjoyed a better potential for meeting various learner needs, implementing learner-centered activities and encouraging various teacher roles. Since, in comparison to other two textbooks, it avoided as “global” or “one-size-fits-all” perspective (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986).

It can be argued that the major reason behind the deficient presentation of CLT principles in these textbooks is their adherence to PPP methodology promoting a pre-determined procedural organization of content. It seems that the authors of these textbooks assumed that the teachers going to teach the content are not experienced enough to handle a “truly” communicative content and/or the learners are not proficient enough to engage in communicative activities and interact in a class. Accordingly, they tried to compromise between CLT principles and PPP methodology to produce a “user-friendly” content fitting the high school context of their home countries. However, these pre-packaged global materials, as perceived by the participants of this study, guide the classes to non-communicative activities and limits context-based methodological adjustments of content and local alternative adaptation.

Since these textbooks are deprived of authentically communicative interaction, it is suggested that modifications are made or supplementary material is provided to these textbooks so that the constraints posed by the pre-determined and formulaic content are abandoned in favor of an emergent communicative promoting a unpredictable use and uptake (Lightbown & Spada, 2001) and learning outcomes (Long, 1988).

In other words, it is suggested that major revisions are made in English for Afghanistan and English for Iran (Vision2), so that the content is open to both teacher investment, making necessary contextual adaptations, especially in terms of teaching method, and learner investment, in terms of providing opportunities for meaningful interaction and personalization of the content. The core concept and suggestion, then, would be a preparation of a revisable content which help high school teachers to fit the content to appropriate method once promoting authentic, pragmatic, functional use of language for communicative purposes (Brown, 2001).

References

- Allwright, R. (1982). What Do We Want Teaching Materials For? *ELT Journal*, 36(1), 5-18.
- Beiki, M., & Gharaguzlu, N. (2017). The Analysis of Iranian English School Text Book: A CDA Study Based on Norman Fairclough's 1989 Model. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 55-67.
- Bell, J. (2010). *Doing Your Research Project Maidenhead*. Oxford: Open University Press.
- Brown, H.D. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
- Brown, H.D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

- Chan, J. Y. H. (2021). Four decades of ELT development in Hong Kong: Impact of global theories on the changing curricula and textbooks. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(5), 729-753.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing Your Course book*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Dornyei, Z. (2010). *Questionnaires in Second Language Research*. New York: Routledge.
- Dubin, F. and Olshtain, E. (1986). *Course Design: Developing Programs and Materials for Language Learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Edge, J. (1996). Cross-cultural paradoxes in a profession of values. *Tesol Quarterly*, 30(1), 9-30.
- Ellis, R. (1988). The Role of Practice in Classroom Language Learning. *AILA Review* 5(3), 20-39.
- Goodarzi, A., & Weisi, H. (2020). Deconstruction of Cultural, Racial and Gender Dominance in Iranian Senior High School EFL Textbooks. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 8(32), 11-20.
- Hall, D. and Hewings, D. (2001). *Innovation in English Language Teaching*. London: Routledge.
- Haycraft, J. (1998). *An Introduction to English Language Teaching*. New York: Longman.
- Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context Cambridge*: Cambridge University Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1986). *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes*, University of Illinois Press.
- Khodabandeh, F., & Mombini, R. (2018). Iranian EFL teachers' and students' perceptions towards the first grade high school English textbook (Vision1). *Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice*, 11(22), 141-167.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Lee, J. and Van Patten, B. (1995). *Making Communicative Language Teaching*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lightbown, P. and Spada, N. (2006). *How Languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Litz, D. (2005). Textbook Evaluation and ELT Management: A South Korean Case Study. *Asian EFL Journal*, 21(2), 25-37.
- Long, M. (1988). Instructed Interlanguage Development. In Beebe, L. (ed.) *Issues in Second Language Acquisition: Multiple Perspectives*. New York: Newbury House.
- McDonough, J. and Shaw, C. (1997). *Materials and methods in ELT*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nunan, D. (1991). Communicative Tasks and The Language Curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly* 25(4), 279-295.
- O'Neill, R. (1982). Why Use Textbooks? *ELT Journal*, 36(2), 104-111.

- Rahman, M. M., & Pandian, A. (2018). A critical investigation of English language teaching in Bangladesh: Unfulfilled expectations after two decades of communicative language teaching. *English Today*, 34(3), 43-49.
- Rahman, M. M., Pandian, A., & Kaur, M. (2018). Factors affecting teachers' implementation of communicative language teaching curriculum in secondary schools in Bangladesh. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(5), 1104-1126.
- Richards, J. & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Swan, M. (1985). A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach. *ELT Journal*, 39(2), 76-87.
- Thornbury, S. (1999). *How to Teach Grammar*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Tomlinson, B. (2003). *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wei, L., Lin, H. H., & Litton, F. (2018). Communicative language teaching (CLT) in EFL context in Asia. *Asian Culture and History*, 10(2), 1-9.
- Willis, J. & Willis, D. (1996). *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.