

## **Iranian English Teachers' Attitudes towards Vocabulary Teaching in the New Series of Iranian High School English Textbooks**

*Saba Alempour Rajabi, Tarbiat Modarres University, Tehran*

*Mohsen Shirazizadeh, Alzahra University, Corresponding author:*

[m.shirazizadeh@alzahra.ac.ir](mailto:m.shirazizadeh@alzahra.ac.ir)

### **Abstract**

The quest for finding the best way to teach L2 vocabulary in EFL classes has been adopted by many researchers for so long, yet the various aspects of vocabulary knowledge keep the search ongoing. One of the main factors in determining the effectiveness of the way in which L2 English vocabulary is taught is the textbook. Textbooks can be very diverse in that they can pursue different methods and attend more or less to various aspects of vocabulary knowledge and learning. English textbooks at high school level in Iran have been rewritten recently, which has made salient changes in the way vocabulary was taught in high school EFL classes. This study explores Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward these changes to find out the effectiveness of the new textbooks in L2 vocabulary teaching and whether they have made an improvement. For this aim, structured interview questions were designed by the researcher. Seven high school EFL teachers, including both males and females, who had at least 5 years of experience were interviewed. Structural content analysis of the interview transcripts was used to find relevant themes. The results suggest that in general, Iranian teachers have a positive attitude toward the new way of L2 vocabulary

teaching applied in high school textbooks and consider it as an improvement. Implications are made for teachers and material developers for further application.

**Keywords:** vocabulary teaching, textbook, EFL teacher, attitude

### **Introduction**

The knowledge and ability to use vocabulary plays a crucial role in language fluency. As researchers agree the number of grammatical and phonological rules in a language is finite, while the number of words is nearly infinite in terms of the human potential to acquire all of them (Richards, 1976). Vocabulary ability is most of the time judged based on the effectiveness of practical communication (Judd, 1978).

Traditionally, in teaching English as a second/ foreign language, vocabulary had been given a secondary place in favor of syntax. Learning grammatical patterns and rules had been assumed necessary in understanding English and communicating in it, while focusing on new words was assumed to be hindering this task and distracting the learners from attending to syntactic patterns (Twaddell, 1973).

Another point in vocabulary instruction is how vocabulary knowledge has been treated as a means and not a goal in itself. Vocabulary has been taught not as a skill but indirectly as a part of listening and speaking (Chastain, 1976). Most people agree that vocabulary should be taught in context for the sake of retention (Nilsen, 1976; Chastain, 1976).

Researchers have suggested two major approaches to vocabulary learning in a second or a foreign language, including 'explicit learning', i.e. learning vocabulary when the focus is on the words to be learnt, and 'incidental learning', i.e. learning vocabulary as a by-product of any language learning activity, such as reading. Evidence shows that Incidental

learning is the dominant way of vocabulary acquisition in the L1 (Nagy, 1997). Incidental vocabulary learning also takes place in the process of L2 acquisition, although after repeated exposure (Waring, 2003). Nation (2001) notes that, "Many L2 learners do not experience the conditions that are needed for this kind of learning to occur". Therefore, according to Nation (2001), explicit instruction is necessary for L2 vocabulary learning. As Riazi (2003) asserts, "textbooks play a very crucial role in the realm of language teaching and learning and are considered the next important factor in the second/foreign language classroom after the teacher." The textbook is the teacher's tool which he/ she should know how to use and also how to take advantage of. Thus, it is important to regularly evaluate the textbooks. As Genesee (2001) states, "evaluation is a process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information. This process enables us to make informed decisions through which student achievement will increase and educational programs will be more successful." (Cited in Riazi & Mosalanejad, 2010, p. 2). Sheldon (1988) names many reasons why textbooks should be evaluated. For instance, he mentions professional, financial, and political investment as factors in deciding which English textbook to use.

Recently, Iranian high school English textbooks have been changed as a new series, called "Vision series", have replaced the old version of English textbooks. These new series are entirely different from the previous textbooks, especially in their method for L2 vocabulary teaching. This is the first time Iranian education system adopts a communicative approach to design high school English textbooks, which is considered as a potential revolution in teaching English in Iranian context. The teaching methodology used in these books is titled as "interactive self-reliance communicative approach", which is a localized version of Communicative language teaching approach (CLT). Some research was conducted in previous years to

examine the effectiveness of the former Iranian English textbooks from various aspects (Jahangard, 2007; Foroozandeh, 2011; Borjian, 2013), including vocabulary teaching (for example, Riazi and Aryashokouh, 2007). A few recent studies have also investigated the effectiveness of the new series compared to the previous textbooks (for example, Ahmadi and Derakhshan, 2015; Kheirabadi and Alavi Moghaddam, 2014).

### **Review of Literature**

Several studies have examined different vocabulary teaching methods (for example, Pany, Jenkins, & Schreck, 1982). In Pany et al. (1982), practicing synonyms and definitions resulted in greater vocabulary learning than did merely giving students the word meanings. These treatments also included example sentences providing a context for the words. According to the findings, both treatments resulted in better learning compared to a third treatment in which students were not given the new word meanings and had to guess them from the context. Thus, giving an explicit definition facilitated vocabulary learning. In another study, Gipe (1979) also showed that a treatment which introduced definitions in the context was more effective than one in which children only studied words in isolation. Vocabulary instruction as part of reading seemed ineffective as well. Moreover, because of the lack of time, direct instruction of word meanings may not be an efficient way for teaching several new words. Incidental vocabulary acquisition by inferring from the context does occur, but it is not enough (Jenkins & Dixon, 1983).

Many English teachers assume that making inferences about the meaning of words is an important process in learning new vocabulary. Evidence shows that L1 learners acquire much of their vocabulary from inferring from context. L2 learners' lexical inference and its link with

vocabulary acquisition are not as well understood and therefore have become the focus of much research (De Bot, Paribakht, & Wesche, 1997; Fraser, 1999; Nation, 2005; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999; Parry, 1993; Prince, 1996). In L2 learning, much of this research did not provide strong evidence. The results of a study conducted by Nassaji (2003) indicated that the intermediate ESL learners were not able to guess word meanings in a reading task. In contrast, Richards (1976) discusses an assumption suggesting that meaning of a word is a much richer concept than we often assume, and this is reflected in the fact that dictionary entries for words usually list a great variety of different or related meanings for each word, showing how the word takes its meaning from the context in which it is used.

In another experimental study, Sonbul and Schmitt (2009) examined the effect of direct teaching of new words, comparing incidental learning to explicit learning. Incidental learning was found to be more effective when combined with explicit instruction. Moreover, the result of a study by Hill and Laufer (2003) showed that post-reading tasks which explicitly focused on new words resulted in better learning of those new words than comprehension questions. In their study, Paribakht and Wesche (1997) compared vocabulary learning by only reading a text to learning through reading followed by various vocabulary exercises. Both treatments led to vocabulary gains, but the latter resulted in richer vocabulary knowledge. Zimmerman (1997) also compared a group which completed interactive vocabulary exercises after reading to a reading-only group and found that the former improved more in vocabulary learning. Thus, it could be inferred from such studies that explicit vocabulary instruction and incidental learning might be more effective in combination.

Considering these contrastive views, it is hard to decide on the best approach to teaching L2 vocabulary. However, the experience of the teachers gained in the real context of their classes can be a reliable source for making judgments on the issue. Based on teacher's judgment, the evaluation and assessment of English textbooks can also be very useful in terms of deciding what approaches and methods are appropriate and could be used in textbooks for teaching L2 vocabulary besides other aspects of language teaching. For example, Jahangard (2007) evaluated the English textbooks that were formerly taught in the Iranian high schools. He discussed the pros and cons of the textbooks. The results of the study indicated that the fourth grade textbook had better features compared to the other three grades of high school textbooks, which needed major revisions. In another study, Riasati and Zare (2011) evaluated the "New Interchange" textbook series based on Iranian EFL teachers' perception and the findings showed the teachers' satisfaction of the subject and the content of the textbooks which were interesting, motivating, realistic and relevant. However, a number of drawbacks were also found in these textbooks including Lack of supplementary teaching materials, use of some items and subjects not appropriate for Iranian culture, and use of some elements beyond the learners' linguistic ability.

Riazi and Aryashokouh (2007) also studied the high school and preuniversity English textbooks taught in Iran and focused on the consciousness-raising aspect of vocabulary exercises in these textbooks. The results revealed that only one percent of the exercises were consciousnessraising, and all of the exercises mainly focused on individual words in isolation with no emphasis on fixed expressions, lexical collocations or grammatical collocations. They concluded that students are mainly told meanings of individual words and they are not taught how words

are used with other words or in what combinations. In a study conducted by Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2015), the Iranian first grade of junior high school English textbook, called "Prospect1" was compared to its old version based on the teachers' perception and the results showed that the new version actually followed CLT and paid more attention to listening and speaking, while the old version did not. In a recent study, Khodabandeh and Mombini (2018) evaluated Vision 1, which is taught at first grade of high school in Iran, from the perception of both teachers and students. Some other current studies have also been conducted to explore the new English textbooks in Iran from different aspects, such as speech acts (Namaziandost & Hashemifardnia, 2019), writing tasks (Aliakbari & Tarlani-Aliabadi, 2018), intercultural analysis (Gholami Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018), etc.

Kheirabadi and Alavi Moghaddam (2014), after giving a brief introduction to the new series, considered them as a turning point in teaching English in Iran and anticipated that this new communicative book may have influential effects on Iranian educational system.

As explained above, the Vision series have been written only recently and few studies have investigated their effectiveness. This study attempts to examine the effectiveness of the new method used for L2 vocabulary teaching in the Vision series as high school English textbooks in Iran, which is almost an unattended issue. The research questions of this study are:

- (1) What are the perspectives of Iranian high school EFL teachers on teaching L2 vocabulary?
- (2) How do Iranian high school EFL teachers evaluate the Vision series in terms of L2 vocabulary presentation and teaching method?

### **Method Participants**

To fulfill the aim of the study, seven Iranian high school English teachers, including four males and three females, were selected through convenient

sampling. All the participants had at least five years of teaching experience. The most experienced teacher has been teaching English in high school for twenty years. The participants of this study taught English in Tehran and Karaj. Pseudonyms are used for the participants for privacy issues.

### **Context**

Iranian public schools are obligated to follow a predetermined curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education in Iran (Moradkhani & Shirazizadeh, 2017). After the revolution in Iran, the English textbooks taught in schools became localized following national, religious and cultural values of Iran (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009). In Iranian Education system, English is taught as an obligatory subject at six grades of high school, including three grades of junior high school and three grades of senior high school. One textbook is taught at each grade three hours a week, and exceptionally four hours a week at third grade of senior high school. In the new system, the final evaluation is consisted of both formative assessment and summative assessment. Ten marks are assigned to assessing reading and writing skills including vocabulary and grammar assessment as well. Speaking and listening skills also take five marks each from the whole test.

### **New English books in Iranian high schools**

Recently, English textbooks taught in Iranian high schools have been replaced by a new series in order to reach the main aim of teaching English as a foreign language, which is enabling learners to use English for communicative purposes according to the Secretariat of the Higher Council of Education (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009). These new textbooks, called the Vision series, have communicative language teaching method and inductive approach at their core and most of their activities are communicative, with no separate sections for vocabulary and grammar (Yaghoubinejad,



Zarrinabadi, & Nejadansari, 2016). According to Kheirabadi and Alavimoghadam (2014) who had evaluated the old textbooks in terms of Authenticity, Gender parity, Cohesion and coherence and Cultural issues, one of the main weak points of the previous textbooks was their traditional methodology which was mostly based on Teaching Grammar and Reading, whereas the new textbooks are thematically designed and mainly attend to communicative purposes by following a CLT approach (Kheirabadi and Alavimoghadam, 2016).

### **Procedures**

Each of the participants of this study was interviewed through Telegram application in English for 20 minutes in average. Then, their recorded voices were transcribed verbatim and inputted into MAXQDA 10, a software for qualitative data analysis. Grounded theory approach was adopted to analyze the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this type of analysis, we assumed an inductive stance and attempted to derive meaning from the data. The overall objective of this analysis was to identify patterns in the data through comparing and contrasting units of meaning, coding these units and then categorizing similar units under the same theme which finally resulted in our thematic structure that is found in the results section.

### **Results**

As mentioned before, seven high school English teachers were interviewed on the issue of L2 vocabulary teaching based on Vision series. The participants will be named by alphabets for the sake of anonymity. Their answers to the interview questions and their related themes are discussed below.

***Q.1. What are the perspectives of Iranian high school EFL teachers on teaching L2 vocabulary?***

This research question aimed at identifying teachers' viewpoints about the best ways of teaching L2 vocabulary in their classes. Analysis of the interview data revealed that (a) teaching words in the context, (b) using pictures and drawings to aid vocabulary teaching, and (c) going beyond the contents of the textbook are the most important points for efficient instruction of vocabulary. These three themes are illustrated and instantiated below:

***a. Teaching words in the context***

All the participants agreed that there is no best way to teach L2 vocabulary in general, though most of them believed some ways are much more effective such as teaching words in the context and not in isolation. They maintained that learning words would be more efficient if the teacher provides the students with sentences in which the words are used. This issue is well reflected in the following excerpt taken from the interview with participant C:

*I think the best way to teach L2 vocabulary is contextualizing them...embedding them into the themes...the lessons...of course in some cases, pre teaching some words could work, but again it should be contextualized...not detached from the context...and I think the vocabulary should not be taught separate from text, in the form of a word list...*

However, participant A had a positive attitude towards word listing as a way of teaching vocabulary and he claimed to have been using it in his classes. He said,

*I use both intentional vocabulary teaching and incidental vocabulary teaching through texts and worksheets, but as my*

*students are at the elementary level of proficiency I make lists of new vocabulary in each lesson and I have them repeat the words during the week between the present session and the coming session, and then I ask them some questions about the vocabulary, but doing so I expect them to repeat the words and as a result of this repetition, the hope increases for their retention of the new vocabulary. However, retention of the words is not enough for learning them. So, I also ask my students to bring to the class example sentences for the new word. This way, they would learn to use the words in the context.*

As participant A declared, his purpose in using word lists is only for the sake of retention. Thus, learning in the context is considered to be effective, while isolation and repetition of the words can increase their retention.

***b. Using pictures and drawings***

Another way suggested by many of the participants was drawing on the board or using pictures for teaching concrete words. Participant B asserted, *“The best way to teach L2 vocabulary is to use pictorial method for concrete and keyword method for abstract words.”* Participant E suggested that, *“For teaching touchable words, the best way is to draw them on the board.”* Participant F also named pictures and photos among effective tools in teaching vocabulary:

*When I want to teach the meaning of words that are difficult to understand, I draw them on the board or I ask students to guess the meaning of the word and draw their guess, so it turns into a game. This way, I make the process of learning fun and the result more durable*

***c. Going beyond textbook content***

Analysis of the interview contents showed that all our participants believed that teachers should not limit themselves to the new words of the book. They maintained that they do not stick to the textbook all the time and sometimes apply other ways and methods for teaching vocabulary. For example, participant A made the following comment:

*I think the book is just a blueprint... I think of book as a kind of source, that provides me with the new vocabulary that I have to focus on, but I do not necessarily see it as providing the method that I have to use. The method that I'm going to use is up to me and up to my decision...the time that I have during my class...and the potentials of my students and other things.*

He further elaborated on how he used creativity in teaching vocabulary:

*...they should be accompanied by worksheets for example, and some excerpts and some adoptions from books and magazines... from different sources...different things from the real world or from news, from music... or introduce them some channels so they can see the real usage of the vocabulary in real sense, not just in some pedagogical materials.*

Participant B had the same opinion about the textbook as he asserted: “*I see the textbook as a source, not a prescription of how to teach vocabulary...or anything. I use the book but don't stick to it. So yeah, I have my own way of teaching vocabulary.*”

However, participant C pointed out the fact that there is a limit in deviating from the textbook caused by institutional rules. He explained:

*To some extent, I have to follow the institutional rules, so I use the methods proposed by the textbooks, but I also try to be creative and have my own ways, like giving some elaborations, and having the students guess the meaning of the words from the context or the pictures...I mostly try to elicit the meanings of the words from the students. So moderately I both follow the institutional guidelines and I also somehow have my own teaching method.*

Participant E declared that it depended on the level and potential of the students. She said, *“It depends on the level of the classes. In high proficiency classes I prefer to stick to the text book and teacher's guide, but in lower intermediate classes I use my own methods. For example, in some of these classes I have to translate the words”*. She also suggested that telling a story using the new words is the best creative method in her point of view.

Therefore, apart from the textbook, the creativity of the teacher and the ability to discern what works best depending on students' level and other situational factors are essential for effective teaching.

***Q.2. How do Iranian high school EFL teachers evaluate the Vision series in terms of L2 vocabulary presentation and teaching method?***

A part of our interviews with high school teachers aimed at investigating their evaluations of high school new textbooks' vocabulary presentation and exercises. In other words, our interview questions delved into teachers' comparison between the Vision series and the former English textbooks taught in high schools. All participants unanimously announced that the new

textbooks are much better than the former ones and considered the change as an improvement. Another major purpose of our interviews was to gain a general evaluation of the Vision series based on the participants' viewpoints. We attempted to delve into the advantages or disadvantages of the new series in general and in comparison, to the former textbooks. Thus, the two main themes of (1) positive points and (2) negative points were extracted from the interviews.

***a. Positive points***

As to the methods of presenting vocabulary, the three main advantages of the new series were found to be in the contextualization of the words, the diversity in presentation methods and following a communicative teaching approach in its presentation of vocabulary. Each of these themes is illustrated below separately:

*(1) Contextualization of the words*

Most of the participants referred to the former textbooks as impractical and inefficient in terms of their L2 vocabulary presentation which were in the form of word lists, introducing new words in isolation. On the other hand, the new series, with their colorful pictures and various sentence examples were considered more effective in teaching vocabulary by everyone. As participant B explained:

*The old textbook presented words in separate lists...I mean out of context. The new words were taught through translation and memorization. In the new textbook, the words are presented by using pictures and example sentences, which is much better.*

Moreover, participant D asserted:

*Memorizing new words as a list is both boring and confusing for students. When a picture or a sentence is given to explain the meaning of a word, it would stick in the students' minds and make the meaning or the context of use much clearer for them.*

participant G also showed her approval of the choice of vocabulary in the new series by asserting that:

*The choice of vocabulary items is proper and near to the everyday needs of students. It doesn't present items which learners may need to use only once in a while and that's a good point. Related context and suitable amount of repetition through different parts of the lesson also have its own benefits.*

Moreover, as participant C mentioned, “*The positive point is that the students are given more opportunities to practice the new words, and they learn the words in context, not in isolation.*”

## *(2) Diversity in presentation methods*

The old textbooks, according to the participants, encouraged teachers to teach the new vocabulary by directly translating them into Persian, while the new books introduced novel techniques and gave teachers more options for teaching the new words.

Participant G talked about how the new textbooks influenced her own way of teaching vocabulary and made it better. She said,

*The former textbooks weren't so successful in the presentation of the words. I personally used both translation and audio methods depending on the level of the class but in the new one I prefer to teach*

*them by the pictures or give an example. Teacher's guides in the new books were also informing, helping me by introducing some new methods and techniques that could be used in teaching new words. For instance, listening to a text was suggested as a new and practical way for explaining the meaning of words, which I found useful.*

Participant C also described the new textbooks and mentioned their impact on the current teaching vocabulary method in this way:

*In new textbooks, there is an aim to use communicative language teaching method and using more...I think there is less vocabulary because the focus is on all four skills, so less irrelevant vocabulary is taught and the vocabulary is more contextualized...there are more examples, more photos...I don't know, other tools except translation are given...of course translation is still used...it is not frowned upon, but to a less extent, whereas the old books gave us no other choice than translating the new words by providing only a list of unrelated words without using them in authentic contexts. The new books are topicbased and the students learn to use the new words to talk about a certain topic.*

As participants C and some of the other participants declared, translation was a popular trend in teaching new words among English teachers before the appearing of the Vision series with its more up-to-date method encouraged using other tools and more creative ways such as drawing pictures, using new words to talk about certain topics, listening to audios, and simulating authentic conversations.

### *(3) Communicative approach*



As most of the interviewees mentioned, the Vision series have followed a communicative approach, which has been a success especially in teaching L2 vocabulary so far. The participants compared the new approach to the old one, considering it to be more effective. Participant C explained:

*Actually in communicative language teaching, the focus is on use of the words in real world contexts, and not just abstract word lists... and also in task based language teaching which is a branch of communicative language teaching, the focus is on getting the knowledge...learning by doing...so in this kind of vocabulary teaching, the learners find the meanings of the words themselves without being given translations...which works better for them. Of course, in CLT, using translation is not frowned upon, because to some extent relying on L1 is justified, but not too much. So these books use this moderate approach, not the direct method which prohibits using L1 translation all together, and not the translation method which uses only L1 so the students have to translate the words each time they want to use the words...they never rely on English definitions or other ways of getting the meaning of the words, like guessing based on the text.*

Participant G also showed her approval of the new book series by asserting that:

*It's obvious that great effort has been invested so that the book would be based on communicative approach and it actually is successful in that because the vocabularies are the common words used for every day talk and the book also presents them in simulated context. So, it can be claimed that the book is doing well.*

On the other hand, participant A pointed out that although the method of the textbook can be helpful, *“it depends on the teacher and how he or she uses the textbook, and how much he or she puts efforts and uses his or her creativity. No one can say that the book is perfect because no book can be regarded as perfect. The book is just a blueprint.”* participant B also made quite a similar point,

*If we ask students to make new sentences with the words and use them in classroom communication, then we can conclude CLT method that has been employed in the new textbook will be effective. So, we can say it mostly depends on the teacher to make use of the materials and even different methods. The book cannot do the teacher’s job... it can only provide new words and some context as a guideline.*

***b. Negative points***

The negative points the participants pointed out were the high difficulty level of some of the words, the lack of using collocations as an important part of vocabulary knowledge.

*(1) The difficulty level of words*

According to some of the participants, the new series included some words with a difficulty level higher than high school students’ proficiency level and not in concordance with the overall level of the textbooks. The existence of such words could be problematic, especially for weaker students.

For example, participant E explained the problem as below:

*Sometimes the difficulty levels of vocabulary and phrases in a lesson or a section don't really match. I mean there might be some words and suddenly a phrase (or a word combination) among them which must be presented in higher levels or at least not among those words because the levels of complexity don't match at all.*

Participant D also mentioned that:

*The new books do not match with the vocabulary size of students, and only studious students can achieve their goal completely, and weaker students have to struggle which sometimes even demotivates them because they think it is their fault, they can't learn those actually too difficult words.*

*(2) Lack of collocations*

Another negative point mentioned by the participants was lack of presenting collocations or lexical bundles in the new books. The importance of using words in collocation with others as an essential part of L2 vocabulary knowledge had been almost ignored in the new series.

Participant C, referred to the lack of presenting collocations in the new textbooks as an important weak point by saying that:

*I think more collocations could be given, more focus on collocations is needed...I think it is very important to teach collocation of words as well because they form an integral part of vocabulary knowledge.*

Participant A also explained:

*In my own experience as a teacher, the ability to use words in their correct collocations is very important both for L2 learners' fluency and accuracy. Knowing a lot of words in English is not enough unless the learners know their collocations and are able to put them together to make meaningful phrases and sentences. Unfortunately, this factor has been neglected in the new books despite all other improvements they contain.*

In general, the positive points of the new series outweighed their negative points and all the participants still believed that the new textbooks are much improved compared to the previous textbooks. Even participant C called this replacement of the textbooks “*a real blessing*”.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study show what Iranian high school English teachers think are effective ways to teach L2 vocabulary in EFL classes, and how they evaluate the Vision series as the new high school English textbooks in terms of vocabulary representation and teaching method.

As explained in the result section, each of the teachers who participated in the study have their own special way of teaching vocabulary, though most of them agreed that teaching words in the context is one of the most effective ways. This result is in concordance with many other studies which provide evidence for the necessity of teaching words in the context and not in isolation (for example, Nilsen, 1976; Chastain, 1976; Gipe, 1979). Kolers observes,

*“Word meanings do not exist in isolation in the reader's mind like so many entries in a dictionary. What a word means to the reader depends upon what he is reading and what he expects to read, the*

*phrase, clause or sentence in which the words appear... Indeed, a very large number of words in a dictionary have multiple meanings, and for some words the definitions are contradictory. For example, scan means to glance at quick and to read in detail, and cleave to join and to separate.” (Quoted by Eskey, 1973; Cited in Richards, 1976, p. 83).*

However, all the participants mentioned other ways they use such as directly giving the meanings of the word, which is a way of explicit teaching. The effectiveness of this method is also supported by much research, which shows that incidental learning of the words from the context is not enough (Jenkins and Dixon, 1983; Nation, 2001; Pany et al., 1982; Sonbul and Schmitt, 2009).

The way the participants evaluated the Vision series and compared them to the former textbooks gives evidence to the productivity of the new books and shows an improvement in Iran's education system. They criticized the former textbooks for introducing new words in the form of word lists without putting them in a context such as an example sentence. They also pointed out the negative impact of the used method in those textbooks which encouraged teachers to merely give a translation of the new words instead of using various in hand methods applied by English teachers all over the world. This result is not in contrast with other research conducted before to evaluate the former English textbooks in Iran (Borjian, 2013; Foroozandeh, 2010; Jahangard, 2007; Riazi and Aryashokouh, 2007).

The Vision series are favored by the participants for using colorful pictures and example sentences in introducing the new words, and the communicative approach the books have pursued is considered by the participants to be much more effective especially in teaching vocabulary. The choice of the new words was also admired by some for being relevant to

interesting topics and useful in everyday conversations. A few weak points were mentioned by the interviewees anyway, for instance the authors have sometimes ignored the level of the students and used some difficult words learning which is challenging for lower level students. The other point was the lack of collocations used in the textbooks, which was considered by the participants as an essential part of the vocabulary knowledge to be gained by L2 learners. This is also concordant with what many researchers and scholars have declared before (Bahns and Eldaw, 1993; Brown, 1974; Conzet, 2000; Jianzhong, 2003). According to Riazi and Aryashokouh (2007), the former English textbooks taught in Iranian high schools also lacked presenting collocations and fixed expressions and students would merely learn individual words which they were not able to use in combination of other words. As Lewis (1997) pointed out, collocations are groups of words occurring together with high frequency. Teaching collocations is an important issue in L2 vocabulary instruction, since teaching collocations and also lexical bundles can enhance fluency even at low levels of proficiency (Porto, 1998).

The key role of teachers in evaluating textbooks has been pointed out by Bhanegaonkar and Mahfoodh (2013) as, “*teachers are a key factor in the successful implementation of curriculum changes and particularly in textbook*” (p.2). As Cunningsworth (1995) asserts, evaluation of textbooks should be done based on the users’ opinions and since teachers and students are the major users of textbooks, their opinions should be collected and analyzed. Also, teachers need textbooks in the classroom to lean upon, and in contexts such as Iran, teachers have to stick to the textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, evaluating these textbooks is the teachers’ responsibility and an essential part of their job (Ansari & Babaii, 2002). Based on most of the participants’ perception and also the result of

some studies (for example, Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015), the new series of Iranian English textbooks seem to follow CLT approach as its main approach to English teaching. However, according to some of the teachers the attempt to apply CLT in Iranian high school English classrooms has not been very successful in the matter of leading to active participation of students in authentic conversations, which is considered to be one of the core concerns of this approach in general.

Despite these criticisms, the Vision series have still been considered better than the former textbooks and as Kheirabadi and Alavi Moghaddam (2014) asserted in their article, could be a turning point in teaching English in Iran, yet in need of some revision.

### **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to evaluate the new high school English textbook series, "Vision Series", taught in Iran in terms of L2 vocabulary instruction method based on Iranian experienced EFL teachers' attitude and perception. The qualitative results of the study revealed a general satisfaction among teachers in case of L2 vocabulary presentation in the new textbooks, especially in comparison to the old versions. The findings indicated improvement in the new series, although some criticisms and drawbacks were also pointed out by the experienced teachers. The stated negative points can help the textbook authors and policy makers revise and improve these series, and high school English teachers can attend to these flaws as well and make up for them by being creative and using various techniques and tools. Last but not the least, teachers as professional practitioners must be involved or at least consulted in revising English textbooks and their classroom experiences should be taken into account.

## References

- Ahmadi, A., & Derakhshan, A. (2015). An evaluation of the Iranian junior high school English textbooks "Prospect1" and its old version "Right Path to English1" from teachers' perceptions. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 4(1), 37-48.
- Aliakbari, M., & Tarlani-Aliabadi, H. (2018). Categorization of writing tasks in Iranian senior high school English textbooks. *International journal of applied linguistics*, 28(1), 119-146.
- Ansari, H., & Babaii, E. (2002). *Universal characteristics of EFL*. ESL textbooks: a.
- Bhanegaonkar, M., & Mahfoodh, M. (2013). New approach for evaluating EFLM: An eclectic developed checklist. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 3(10), 1-8.
- Bahns, J., & Eldaw, M. (1993). Should we teach EFL students collocations?. *System*, 21(1), 101-114.
- Borjian, M. (2013). *English in Post-revolutionary Iran: From Indigenization to Internationalization*. (Vol. 29). Multilingual Matters.
- Brown, D. F. (1974). Advanced vocabulary teaching: The problem of collocation. *RELC Journal*, 5(2), 1-11.
- Chastain, Kenneth. (1976). *Developing Second-Language Skills: Theory to Practice* (2nd ed.). Chicago, McNally.
- Conzett, J. (2000). *Teaching collocation: Further developments in the lexical approach*. M. Lewis (Ed.). Thomson Heinle.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your coursebook*. Macmillan, Heinemann: Illinois Press.
- De Bot, K., Paribakht, T. S., & Wesche, M. B. (1997). Toward a lexical processing model for the study of second language vocabulary acquisition: Evidence from ESL reading. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 309-329.
- Farhady, H., & Hedayati, H. (2009). Language assessment policy in Iran. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 29, 132-141.



- Foroozandeh, E. (2011). History of High School English Course Books in Iran: 1318-1389 (1939-2010). *Roshd Foreign Language Teaching journal*, 26 (1), 57-69.
- Fraser, C. A. (1999). Lexical processing strategy use and vocabulary learning through reading. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 21(2), 225-241.
- Genesee, F. (2001). Evaluation. In T. Carter and D. (Eds). *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages* (pp. 144-150). Nunan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gholami Pasand, P., & Ghasemi, A. A. (2018). An intercultural analysis of English language textbooks in Iran: The case of English Prospect Series. *Apples: Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 12(1).
- Gipe, J. P., & Arnold, R. D. (1979). Teaching vocabulary through familiar associations and contexts. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 11(3), 281-285.
- Hill, M., & Laufer, B. (2003). Type of task, time-on-task and electronic dictionaries in incidental vocabulary acquisition. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 41(2), 87-106.
- Jahangard, A. (2007). Evaluation of the EFL materials taught at Iranian high schools. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 9(2), 130-150.
- Jenkins, J. R., & Dixon, R. (1983). Vocabulary learning. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8(3), 237-260.
- Jianzhong, P. (2003). Colligation, collocation, and chunk in ESL vocabulary teaching and learning [J]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 6, 438-45.
- Judd, E. L. (1978). Vocabulary teaching and TESOL: A need for reevaluation of existing assumptions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 71-76.
- Kheirabadi, R., & Alavi Moghaddam, S. B. (2014). New horizons in teaching English in Iran: A transition from reading-based methods to communicative ones by "English for School Series". *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 5(4), 225-232.
- Kheirabadi, R., & Alavimoghaddam, S. B. (2016). Evaluation of Prospect series: A paradigm shift from GTM to CLT in Iran. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7(3), 619-624.
- 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.

- Lewis, M. (1997). Pedagogical implications of the lexical approach. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition* (pp. 255-270). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moradkhani, S., & Shirazizadeh, M. (2017). Context-based variations in EFL teachers' reflection: The case of public schools versus private institutes in Iran. *Reflective Practice, 18*(2), 206-218.
- Nagy, W. E. (1997). On the role of context in first-and second-language vocabulary learning. In N. Schmitt, and M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary description, acquisition and pedagogy*, (pp. 64–83). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Namaziandost, E., Hashemifardnia, A., & Hosseini, S. E. (2019). Investigating speech acts in Iranian junior high school English textbooks. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 9*(2), 82-90.
- Nassaji, H. (2003). L2 vocabulary learning from context: Strategies, knowledge sources, and their relationship with success in L2 lexical inferencing. *TESOL Quarterly, 37*(4), 645-670.
- Nation, I. S. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Ernst Klett Sprachen.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2005). Teaching and learning vocabulary. In *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 605-620). Routledge.
- Nilsen, Don L. F. (1976). Contrastive semantic vocabulary instruction. *TESOL Quarterly, 10*, 99-104.
- Pany, D., & Jenkins, J. R. (1978). Learning word meanings: A comparison of instructional procedures. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 1*(2), 21-32.
- Pany, D., Jenkins, J. R., & Schreck, J. (1982). Vocabulary instruction: Effects on word knowledge and reading comprehension. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 5*(3), 202-215.
- Paribakht, T. S., & Wesche, M. (1997). Vocabulary enhancement activities and reading for meaning in second language vocabulary acquisition. *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy, 55*(4), 174-200.
- Paribakht, T. S., & Wesche, M. (1999). Reading and “incidental” L2 vocabulary acquisition: An introspective study of lexical inferencing. *Studies in second language acquisition, 21*(2), 195-224.
- Parry, K. (1993). Too many words: Learning the vocabulary of an academic subject. *Second language reading and vocabulary learning, 109-129*.

- Porto, M. (1998). Lexical phrases and language teaching. *English Teaching Forum*, 36, 22-26.
- Prince, P. (1996). Second language vocabulary learning: The role of context versus translations as a function of proficiency. *The modern language journal*, 80(4), 478-493.
- Riasati, M. J., & Zare, P. (2011). Textbook evaluation: EFL teachers' perspectives on "New Interchange". *Studies in Literature and Language*, 1(8), 54-60.
- Riazi, A. M. (2003). What do textbook evaluation schemes tell us? A study of the textbook evaluation schemes of three decades. *Anthology Series-Seameo Regional Language Centre*, 52-69.
- Riazi, A., & Aryashokouh, A. (2007). Lexis in English Textbooks in Iran: Analysis of Exercises and Proposals for Consciousness-Raising Activities. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 11(1).
- Riazi, A. M., & Mosalanejad, N. (2010). Evaluation of Learning Objectives in Iranian High-School and Pre-University English Textbooks Using Bloom's Taxonomy. *TESL-EJ*, 13(4).
- Richards, J. C. (1976). The role of vocabulary teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 77-89.
- Sheldon, L. E. (1988). Evaluating ELT textbooks and materials. *ELT journal*, 42(4), 237-246.
- Sonbul, S., & Schmitt, N. (2009). Direct teaching of vocabulary after reading: Is it worth the effort?. *ELT journal*, 64(3), 253-260.
- Twaddell, F. (1973). Vocabulary expansion in the TESOL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 61-78.
- Waring, R. (2003). At what rate do learners learn and retain new vocabulary from reading a graded reader?. *Reading in a Foreign language*, 15(2), 130.
- Yaghoubinejad, H., Zarrinabadi, N., & Nejadansari, D. (2017). Culturespecificity of teacher demotivation: Iranian junior high school teachers caught in the newly-introduced CLT trap!. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(2), 127-140.