

Textbook Evaluation: EFL Teachers' Perspectives on "Pacesetter Series"

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to evaluate *Pacesetter Series* (Strange and Hall, 2005), an EFL course book series, in four levels of *starter*, *elementary*, *pre-intermediate*, and *intermediate*, being currently instructed at several language institutes in Iran. The purpose of this study is to determine the appropriateness of the series in Iranian EFL contexts. Litz (2000) questionnaire was exploited to examine the series thoroughly in all essential aspects. Sixty four EFL teachers rated the series. The results of descriptive statistics indicated that there is an overall consensus among the teachers that *Pacesetter* rightly addresses the needs of the learners in a communicative curriculum. However, two salient points are still worth further addressing. The first issue is that the series does not sufficiently underscore the speaking skill. The other concern involves the incorporation of European culture in every skill and skill-related activities as it may cause frustration and bafflement on the part of Iranian adolescent foreign language learners since they are unfamiliar with certain aspects of the target language culture. One way to remedy the two aforementioned issues is that the teachers using this series can think of other substitute exercises to solve the problem.

Keywords: textbook evaluation, pacesetter, Litz questionnaire, EFL teachers in Iran

1. Introduction

EFL textbook markets are replete with various appealing materials published by different companies, thus making it even harder to choose one over the other. This profusion makes the evaluation of textbooks indispensable. Ellis (1997) also underscores the need for course book evaluation. Correspondingly, many researchers have evaluated different textbooks through the application of checklists and questionnaires. Thus, analyzing different textbooks seem to be of central importance to the selection and exploitation of the most prolific and contextually appropriate material. In the similar fashion, the present paper is an attempt to evaluate *Pacesetter*, an EFL course book series being currently instructed in EFL contexts. The series, which comprises four textbooks, levels beginners, elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate respectively. Although, the series is an admittedly well-organized piece of material to underscore the needs of adolescents, it was perceived by the researchers that it still may suffer from certain drawbacks with regard to its application in an EFL context.

1.1 Review of the Related Literature

There is a vast body of literature on textbook selection and evaluation in an EFL setting.

These studies mainly revolve around the exploitation of textbook evaluation checklists. Kayapinar (2009), for example, in evaluation study of two textbook packages, namely, *opportunities* and *New English File* incorporating 134 teacher's survey results, points out that there is not an overall positive view of the aforementioned course book packages among teachers and the course books must be adapted in a way to meet learners' needs and interest at nationwide scope. He suggests that the materials used in the teaching process should be evaluated on a regular basis to be kept renewed.

In another study by Dominguez (2003), the representation of gender in examples, dialogues, and job positions in both texts and examples of *New Interchange Intro* were examined. As mentioned in the paper, there is an upsurge in ESL system of Canada to adopt the series due to its perceived uniqueness. Hence, the study aimed at establishing the appropriateness of the *New Interchange Intro* for diverse multination dwellers of Canadian cities. She concluded that the *New Interchange Intro* was a worthwhile source for the teachers as it takes into account both multicultural and multiracial settings. Dominguez highlights the soundness of the textbooks for considering learners' settlement and integration needs especially in beginner levels and offering a balance in portraying the two genders.

In a different study, Litz (2005) evaluated *English firsthand 2* applied in all beginners EFL classes in one of the

universities of Suwon, South Korea to find out its suitability for the intended language program. The data was gathered from eight teachers as well as five hundred students using two course book evaluation questionnaires and a need analysis survey questionnaire. The findings suggested that the weak points of *English Firsthand 2* are few and far between in a way that are overshadowed by many other advantages that the book has to offer. The book is believed by Litz (2005) to be appealing for many English language teachers and learners. It encompasses a great number of supplementary materials. The logical organization of the textbook in terms of coherence and clarity boosted by a topic-based notional-functional syllabus with the aim of facilitating communicative competence was another advantage mentioned by Litz. The textbook applied a multi-skill syllabus to integrate the four skills along with the development of vocabulary and grammar and offered teaching and learning strategies which promoted top-down and bottom-up listening exercises and process versus product approaches to writing. EF2 was believed by Litz to be communicative on the whole in that it constantly supported an activity approach towards teaching and learning.

Applying Cunningsworth's four guidelines, Ranalli (2002), also, evaluated *New Headway* upper-intermediate which was instructed at the Foreign Language Institute of Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea. He revealed that the textbook follows a present-practice-produce approach to learning as units of the book offer a semi-authentic context for examples and the target language patterns ending with controlled and semi-free exercises. He also maintains that the methodology of the textbook is too preoccupied with the knowing of grammatical rules and developing analytic knowledge which hinders further learners' preparation for unplanned discourse and predictable achievements in language ability. Moreover, Ranalli holds that although inductive learning leads to learners' motivation and better comprehension, the book seems to be encouraging a modified inductive approach to learning per se. In terms of adaptability, he believes that the book might be exposing some restrictions on both teachers and learners to adjust the content.

Intriguingly, textbook evaluation has been practiced in the Iranian context, as well.

Raseks, Eslami, Esmaili, Ghavamnia, and Rajabi (2010) have evaluated four ESL textbooks: *Top Notch*, *Interchange*, *Headway*, and *On your mark* at elementary-level in two phases applying McDonough and Shaw's internal and external evaluation in order to find out which one is a better option for an EFL class. The findings of their study suggested that *Top Notch* provides learners with more motivating themes and topics in comparison with the other three textbooks under scrutiny. However, the layout and units are not parallel to what is stated in the table of contents while the other three books do exhibit such quality. The dialogues in *On your marks* are shorter and more comprehensive for a beginner learner than the other books, but the book provides reading sections that are rather unchallenging for the intended audience. The *New Interchange* also presents the key vocabulary under each unit title at the end of the book, in a proper order, however its topics revolve around American culture thus introducing unfamiliar concepts to outsiders. Finally, although *Headway* contains authentic listening tasks, the pictures portrayed in *Headway* are black and dull for the intended audience.

Interchange third edition has also been evaluated according to Littlejohn's framework in another study by Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayyedi (2009). The study was set to find out the values of the newest version of *Interchange* in particular, the correspondence between the newly developed and widely used *Interchange* textbooks, third edition, and their stipulated objectives, and the strengths and weaknesses of the series. The findings of their study indicated that the *Interchange* series (third edition) owns several pedagogical values nonetheless, it suffers from certain drawbacks. The tasks of the series can be considered productive with regard to promotion of communicative competence and are promoting in that they give learners the opportunity to personalize the newly learnt pieces of language through production. On the other hand, the series lack of auditory and visual activities could render disadvantage since it does not exploit sensory channels in the course of learning. Furthermore, there exists a gap with regard to 'fiction' such as personal accounts, tales, etc. Sahragard et al. (2009) assert that the book seems rather unsuccessful to develop communicative competence as the ultimate goal which the authors claim the textbook is striving for.

Riazi and Mosalanejad (2010) studied English textbooks instructed at three high schools and pre-university level to examine the learning objectives embedded in them applying Bloom's taxonomy. They reported that the higher-order learning objectives are very much included in the pre-university text book under study.

1.2 The Objectives of the Study

Since there has been no study to explore *Pacesetter* in an Iranian context, the major thrust of this study is to fully evaluate the series. To this end, the study addressed the following questions: 1. What do Iranian EFL teachers think of *Pacesetter* series in terms of its appropriateness and suitability in Iran EFL educational setting as measured against Litz Teacher Textbook Evaluation Form? 2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of *Pacesetter* series in an

Iranian EFL context?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Sixty four Iranian EFL teachers, having minimum three years teaching experience of the series under study from different language institutes voluntarily took part in this study. It was believed that these teachers had a good command of what the content, design, and objectives of the series might be.

2.2 Instrumentation

2.2.1 Textbook

The material selected for evaluation was *Pacesetter* textbook series. The series is a set of leveled EFL textbooks that carries adolescent learners from starter to intermediate level of proficiency. *Pacesetter* has been authored by *Derek Strange* and *Diane Hall* and released by Oxford University Press in 2005. Each book encompasses 15 units. For each unit, the topic, grammar, function, vocabulary, four skills, and pronunciation have been outlined in the initial pages. The series, as stated in the blurb, follows a communicative paradigm highlighting the role of context and learners' engagement in the process of learning and enjoys a problem-solving approach to grammar. The authors further claimed that the topics are motivating enough to raise students' interest and the systematic method of presenting new words would probably assists learners to develop their own strategy of tackling vocabulary. They also maintain that integration of skills has been taken into account. The four textbooks are complemented by a workbook, a CD or a cassette, and a teacher's manual.

2.2.2 Checklist

A 10-point likert scale Teacher Textbook Evaluation Form developed by Litz (2005) ranging from 'highly agree' to 'highly disagree' with reliability index of .81, using Cronbach's alpha formula was applied in this study. The questionnaire includes forty items on the whole and seven subcategories each scrutinizing a specific textbook facet: practical consideration, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, and conclusion. Nevertheless for the ease of statistically defining and coding, the number of scales was reduced to five. **Cronbach's alpha** reliability calculated index for this questionnaire filled out by 64 EFL teachers was .84, which is a very high value.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

To conduct the study, Litz's Teacher Textbook Evaluation Form was distributed to 64 EFL teachers. They were asked to fill their personal information such as: teaching experience of the textbook under study, and the level of course book they have been teaching. They were also required to write any shortcomings they might have faced in the series. After collecting the questionnaires, the researchers inserted the data in SPSS software program for further analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

The main practice of this section is to evaluate the textbook according to the raters' given responses. To answer the first question of study "*What do Iranian EFL teachers think of Pacesetter Series in terms of its appropriateness and suitability in Iran EFL educational setting as measured against Litz's Teacher Textbook Evaluation Form?*" descriptive statistics was run to compute the total mean score and standard deviation of each section. The results for the analysis of mean score and standard deviation of each section are displayed in Table 1:

Table 1. Result of descriptive statistics for each section

Feature	Mean	Standard deviation
Practical considerations	4.33	0.15
Layout and design	4.16	0.12
Activities	4.18	0.05
Skills	3.95	0.26
Language type	4.24	0.12
Subject and content	4.21	0.12
Conclusion	4.29	0.20

3.1 Practical Considerations

As shown in Table 1, the mean score and standard deviation of *Practical considerations* are 4.33 and ($SD=0.15$) indicating that most teachers agreed on this part. This section consists of five items mainly assessing the view of teachers on reasonability of textbook's price, the ease of accessibility, publishing qualification, textbook package, and author's approach to teaching methodology. As indicated in Table 2, the mean score for all 5 subcategories of practical consideration is over 4 and it shows that the price of the course books seem satisfactory comparing to other books in the market. It is also easily accessible and relatively newly published in 2005. The textbook comes in conjugation with a teacher's manual, a workbook, and an audiotape cassette/CD. The textbook papers are also of prime quality. The typography of the textbook series is intelligible and the lively colors used in tables, boxes, and pictures seem to well suit the needs of adolescents. In addition, the authors' methodology seems to suitably fit the needs of the youngsters and to pursue the primary goal set by Language institutes, that is, to foster communicative competence.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for *Practical considerations* sub-sections

	N	Minimum	Maximum	mean	Standard deviation
Practical considerations1	64	2.00	5.00	4.09	.88
Practical considerations2	64	3.00	5.00	4.52	.74
Practical considerations3	64	2.00	5.00	4.14	.85
Practical considerations4	64	.00	5.00	4.47	1.12
Practical considerations5	64	2.00	5.00	4.47	.74
Valid N (listwise)	64				

3.2 Layout and Design

The mean score and standard deviation for *layout and design* of the series are 4.16 and 0.12, respectively (See table 1). It shows that most teachers were happy with layout and design of this series. This category comprises eight items measuring the teachers' opinion on 'overview of the functions, structures, and vocabulary, appropriateness and clarity of layout and design, textbook organization, adequacy of vocabulary list and glossary, inclusion of adequate review sections and exercises, inclusion of an adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions, the provision of guidance in teacher's book on how the textbook can be used to the utmost advantage, and the straightforwardness of the objectives to both the teachers and the learners.

The results in Table 3 show that the overall mean in all subcomponents of *layout and design* is over 4 indicating that most teachers had the same opinion with regard to *layout and design*. All four textbooks under study consist of 15 units and three *Consolidation* sections. Each *consolidation* follows a block of five units. For each unit, the topics, grammar, function, vocabulary, reading, listening, writing, speaking, and pronunciation are specified in the table of contents. The target vocabulary in each unit belongs to a particular semantic group and is highly contextualized through the consumption of either reading or listening passages. In addition, there is a section in 'Review' part of each unit which requires students to add the new words to their notebooks. The new target structure is also stated in the form of formulaic phrases.

Furthermore, the sequencing of each unit of *Pacesetter* series adheres to the present-practice-produce approach and organized as follows: A warm-up task aiming at activating the learners' schemata (background knowledge), the introduction of new structures accompanied by suitable task exercises to engage the learners in the process of learning, and writing and speaking tasks to provide the learners with the opportunity to produce and personalize the language they have just learnt with respect to their favorite topics and the daily events and then the "review" and "Grammar and practice" section follow. The mean of this part shows that the teachers also approved the clarity and appropriateness of the textbook layout and organization.

Moreover, most raters agreed on the fact that the elements of each unit are efficiently established around interesting topics pertinent to daily life of the learners. The content of each unit is organized in a way to activate the students' background schemata, to engage them in the process of learning, and to require them personalize the target elements to their own lives and to produce their own meanings.

In addition, a glossary for all the newly-presented words is offered in the workbook. A word list is also prepared at

the beginning of each unit in teacher's book to give a clear image of what should be emphasized in teaching of each unit. However, there is inconsistency among teachers with respect to this criterion. One reason for this inconsistency can be attributable to paucity of a glossary at the end of student's book as it might decrease the opportunity for self-learning with respect to vocabulary sub-skill.

Consequently, each unit of the textbook is followed by a review section and 'Grammar & Practice' exercises. In addition, there is a multitude of exercises included in each unit. The workbook also contains a variety of activities that are compatible with the target structures introduced in each unit. In the review sections, the target grammatical structure is overtly presented such as "We use *since* when we want to talk about ..." or 'We use *could, would, can* for making request.' This representation of target grammar in the shape of formulaic expressions is accompanied by freer exercises which require the learners to work in pairs or groups. There is a part in the review section which asks learners to insert the new vocabulary in their notebooks. *Freewheeling*, which contains enjoyable freer activities such as games or word puzzle, is also always included in the review section.

Next, the teacher's book in all four levels gives a number of testing recommendations one of which is through oral work in class in a way to encourage a dynamic assessment of students' progress and to promote reflective teaching. There is also a progress test in teacher's book for each level.

In addition, the Teacher's book in every level of the series contains a detailed elaboration on the methodology to be exploited and the type of procedure to be implemented. There are various teaching recommendations, answer keys to all activities including the provision of optional activities in case of substitution, and so on. Furthermore, the teacher's book offers hints on how to teach the target background culture and which exercises of the workbook should the teachers allocate for a particular target linguistic structure.

Finally, the grammar of each unit is also stated at the beginning of that unit, immediately after the topic. The objectives are also restated in teacher's book to give the teachers guidance on what should be emphasized during the course of that unit.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for *Layout and Design* sub-sections

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Layout & design1	64	2.00	5.00	4.23	.94
Layout & design2	64	3.00	5.00	4.28	.78
Layout & design3	64	3.00	5.00	4.19	.81
Layout & design4	64	2.00	5.00	3.80	.92
Layout & design5	64	3.00	5.00	4.28	.64
Layout & design6	64	2.00	5.00	4.19	.92
Layout & design7	64	3.00	5.00	4.33	.65
Layout & design8	64	2.00	5.00	4.00	.89
Valid N (listwise)	64				

3.3 Activities

The obtained mean score of *activities* is 4.18 while the standard deviation is 0.05 (see Table 1) indicating that teachers were happy with the activities of this series. This section included seven items (see Table 4) eliciting the raters' responses with respect to whether the textbook series provides an even distribution of controlled versus free or accuracy-based versus fluency-based exercises, whether it provides an opportunity for sufficient communicative and meaningful practice, whether the incorporation of individual, pair, and group work suffices. The context of grammatical points and vocabulary items, the degree of realness and motivation of the context in which the new language elements are presented, the degree to which the tasks are conducive to the internalization of newly-introduced language, and the degree to which the textbooks' activities can be modified or supplemented easily.

Richard (2006) states that a balance of accuracy and fluency should be embraced by the teacher and the priority given to either one is a matter of decisions made on the spot by the teachers. The *Pacesetter* series is replete with tasks such as information-gap activities, role-playing, completing a table, free writing, etc that are deemed to be

communicative in that they attempt to foster fluency in the learners. In addition, the series seems to offer other activities that are more obsessed with accuracy. Questions that require learners' controlled answer, fill-in-the-blank, scrambled words, and matching are good illustration for these types of activities offered in *pacesetter* series. Most of the raters believed that the book has pursued a balance of activities approach to teaching and learning, thus taking into account the importance of accuracy and fluency to cultivate language acquisition.

The tasks designed in *Pacesetter series* such as role play, acting out, filling out forms, writing letters, completing tables, information-gap exercises, jigsaw puzzles, etc, are deemed to promote both a meaningful and communicative practice of the target language.

The series puts forth a range of activities which tap individualized performance as well as working in cooperation with peers. Those activities that are more drill-like and less communicative require learners to work individually and check the answers with other students afterwards whereas the less controlled freer activities entails working in groups to produce the responses as well as to check them.

A close analysis of the textbook revealed that the new grammar as well as vocabulary is introduced in a motivating and authentic context in that they reflect the needs of learners to communicate using the language offered in an authentic context resembling that of the target language. Furthermore learners are encouraged to acquire the language through discovery learning and negotiation of meaning. As mentioned earlier, the book encourages students to work in cooperation with others which in turn leads to students' further motivation.

Litz (2005) implies that those activities that do not require the group interaction evoke independent responses. In other words independent-response-activities require students to check the answers in the groups upon doing them individually. The raters agreed on the fact that the *Pacesetter* activities promote creative, original, and independent responses.

The presentation of each skill is complemented by the appropriate skill tasks. The internalization of newly introduced language takes place, as mentioned before, by an equalization of controlled and freer activities, that is, the students should first practice the target structure in more controlled activities and then proceed to another stage where they must apply what they have just learnt to talk about the things in real life. In addition, the target structures organized in a recursive manner, in that, they are repeated in each level of the series with the aim of rectifying mistakes in the learners' interlanguage, thus establishing the target structures.

Teachers were mostly in harmony that the activities in the four textbooks can be easily substituted and modified. With regard to the Iranian context of use, some activities in *Pacesetter* series fall short of expectation and ultimately need to be modified or excluded. Fortunately, there is a great chance of modification and substitution of some activities with those that are deemed more productive by Iranian teachers.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for *Activities* sub-sections

	N	minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Activities1	64	3.00	5.00	4.14	.72
Activities2	64	3.00	5.00	4.19	.74
Activities3	64	3.00	5.00	4.47	.67
Activities4	64	3.00	5.00	4.00	.83
Activities5	64	2.00	5.00	4.00	.83
Activities6	64	3.00	5.00	4.28	.71
Activities7	64	2.00	5.00	4.19	.74
Valid N (listwise)	64				

3.4 Skills

As shown in Table 1, the mean score and standard deviation of *skills* are 3.95 and 0.26, respectively that shows teachers had the same view towards the presentation of skills in the textbooks. This section focuses on tapping the raters' opinions as to whether the textbooks under study take into account those skills that the teachers and the learners need the most, whether these materials equalize the inclusion of the four skills, whether they pay attention

to the sub-skills, whether they provide occasions for the practicing of natural pronunciation, and finally, whether the series centers an integration of the four skills (see Table 5).

It has been perceived now and then that the young learners at language institutes are virtually willing to possess some degree of speaking ability upon the completion of two or three courses. In other words, they take their pride from being able to orally communicate in English. In addition, the teachers might be eager to accept the superior role of the speaking skill over the others since it might aid them to maintain the dominant language of the class, that is, the second language. To this end they may also need to take advantage of the opportunities offered in the textbook to promote this skill among the learners and to assist learners to gain the ultimate satisfaction by using the language to speak. Nevertheless, a close examination of the units in each textbook and the findings from the raters ($M=3.8$, $SD=1.03$) revealed that heavier weight is attached to listening, reading, and writing at the expense of speaking. In other words, activities centering speaking might seem to be insufficient in number (see Table 5). The problem can be remedied through designing proper substitutable and supplementary exercises that tap the speaking skill.

As the result shows in Table 5, there is a variance in responses to balance of 4 skills in this series. One reason could be attributed to the importance placed on writing, listening, and reading. A balanced integration of the four skills is one of the authors' proposed testaments to support the textbook's communicative methodology and underlying theoretical grounds. Nevertheless as stated earlier, the provision of the tasks centering speaking skills might be less than those incorporating other skills.

Moreover, grammar and vocabulary have been taken into account in all of the skills and in fact the skill-based activities of the textbooks seem to revolve around these two linguistic elements. In the two initial levels the skill-based activities assess the learners' comprehension and production of simple bits of the language. However, as the grammar and vocabulary of the textbooks become more complicated, the book offers more challenging activities with respect to each skill.

The series, on the whole, gives value to the practice of natural pronunciation. In each textbook, the 'Useful English' section is designed to provide patterns of natural stress and intonation. The 'Pronunciation' section is also an activity designed for this purpose. Moreover, the listen-and-repeat drills provide a chance for the rehearsal of each sound.

Pacesetter series contains exercises that integrate the four skills as in *Pacesetter starter* (page 43): "Read the description of the drink and make a drink for the competition. From the box, choose the things you want in your drink", or the following example borrowed from *Pacesetter pre-intermediate* (page 72): "There is something very unusual about three of these vegetables. Listen and complete the chart."

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for *Skills* sub-sections

	N	minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Skills1	64	2.00	5.00	3.80	1.03
Skills2	64	2.00	5.00	3.80	.928
Skills3	64	3.00	5.00	4.00	.70
Skills4	64	1.00	5.00	4.00	1.18
Skills5	64	3.00	5.00	4.19	.51
Valid N (listwise)	64				

3.5 Language Type

The mean score and standard deviation of *language types* are 4.24 and 0.12, respectively (see Table 1). The results show that most teachers were satisfied with the type of language employed in the series. The *Language type* component encompasses six items (see Table 6) that largely evaluate the view of the raters on the authenticity of the textbook, whether the language of the textbook is at the right level for the intended learners, whether the progression of the grammatical points and vocabulary items are appropriate, whether the grammatical points are presented in conjugation with brief and easy examples, whether the functions presented in the textbooks typify those that the teachers and the learners will probably use, and finally, whether the language of the textbooks puts forth a variety of registers and accents.

The findings in Table 6 revealed that raters agreed that the authenticity has been practiced to a great extent. As stated by Guariento and Morley (2001), at the pre-intermediate levels of language learning authenticity may not only hinder learners form meaningful participation in the process of learning but also demotivate them since it can bring along tedium and bafflement. By the same token, the practiced authenticity in *Pacesetter* can prove problematic to Iranian teenager language learners in some respects since the learners may encounter totally new examples for which they lack certain schemata. For example, there are illustrations using different English actors, foods, writers, places, sports, customs with which learners are unfamiliar. Therefore in this sense authenticity of the text is sometimes considered unproductive.

In addition, the language presented in this series is at the right level for the learners and spot the connection between what the learners' command of the language is and what they are going to learn.

In the 'Grammar & Practice section of each unit a great emphasis is also put on grammar and vocabulary and the aim is that the student encounter these structure again 'cycling' and doing the tasks, they can revise and internalize the target structure. Vocabulary items of the books are also initially presented before a reading or listening activity thus providing the teachers with a chance to pre-teach the items and then in the subsequent section there are a variety of controlled activities in review section as well as the workbook to revise and recycle the vocabulary items for the students.

In *Pacesetter series* learners are presented with brief, easy, and helpful examples (i.e. the target structures are presented in the texts, dialogues, charts, etc). In the 'review' section and 'work it out' drills of each units, there exist examples of the grammatical rules contextualized in some sentences or in pictures.

With respect to the fact that the learners of selected language institutes are practically from the same age group and are homogeneous in terms of their native language and gender, their needs and interests are nearly the same. Hence, there is not a significant variance in their expectations with respect to the language functions. They mostly want to use the textbook to develop communicative proficiency in English. Further analysis of the books also indicated that they do cover a wide variety of functions and basics such as asking about people and objects, describing a house/room, discussing lifestyle and spending choices, talking about films or someone's life, making offers, asking for and giving directions, expressing intentions, making predictions, giving advice, giving requests, reacting to jokes, describing recent events, talking about events in the past, and so on.

Finally, the type of language utilized in the textbook does in fact introduce a multitude of registers, but hardly if at all it exploits a non-native accent in the audio material. Although this is considered as a drawback for the series, many teachers are in favor of exposing students to the standard variety of English.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for Language type sub-sections

	N	minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Language type1	64	3.00	5.00	4.42	.67
Language type2	64	3.00	5.00	4.28	.71
Language type3	64	3.00	5.00	4.23	.76
Language type4	64	2.00	5.00	4.42	.81
Language type5	64	3.00	5.00	4.42	.59
Language type6	64	2.00	5.00	3.71	.95
Valid N (listwise)	64				

3.6 Subject and Content

As displayed in table 1, the mean score and standard deviation for *subject and content* is 4.21 and ($SD=0.12$) which indicates teachers' satisfaction about the subject and content of the books. This section measures the following sub-components (see Table 7): whether the subject and content of the textbook are pertinent to the needs of the intended audience, whether the subject and content of the book are generally realistic, whether the content and subject of the book are interesting, challenging, and motivating, whether there is a sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook, and whether the materials are culturally biased or portray any negative stereotype.

The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to the students' needs at language institutes in that they may raise

learners' awareness and increase their positive attitude toward the target language culture.

In fact, the subject and content of the *Pacesetter series* are realistic and approximate those of the European culture. Most of the subjects presented in the textbook were interesting and motivating to the young learners. However, a few instances of the contents of the textbook under study seem to represent those aspects of the foreign culture for which the learners lack the required background knowledge. For example, in *Pacesetter starter* (p. 124), the unit begins with a task which requires students to look at a map containing the names of seven movies and guess what the name of the director is. It, then, proceeds to another activity where the students were asked whether they knew any of the films in the map or whether they can talk about them. As it was predicted before, none of the students instructed by the researchers could recognize the movies. One way to remedy such a pitfall especially in Young learners' classes is to modify the content with more familiar topics.

Moreover, content and subjects of *Pacesetter series* revolve around a variety of topics such as sport, food, music, art, travel, shopping, etc, found in everyday use of language. The series does not apply any stereotypes, and the representation of gender, age, ethnic groups, and ethnicity are uniform.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for Subject and content sub-sections

	N	minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Subject & content1	64	3.00	5.00	4.09	.53
Subject & content2	64	3.00	5.00	4.28	.64
Subject & content3	64	3.00	5.00	4.04	.74
Subject & content4	64	3.00	5.00	4.28	.64
Subject & content5	64	2.00	5.00	4.38	.86
Valid N (listwise)	64				

3.7 Conclusion

The mean score and standard deviation obtained for *conclusion* are 4.29 and 0.2, respectively (see Table 1). This shows teachers' consensus on total view of this series. This section mainly assesses (see Table 8) the views of the raters on the appropriateness of the series for the language learning aims of the institutes in which it is applied, the suitability of the series for use in small-medium, homogeneous, co-ed classes of university students, the role of the series in raising students' interest in further English language study, and finally, whether the teachers would select the textbook again.

The findings in Table 8 indicate that the teachers held the same view that the *Pacesetter series* was, indeed, appropriate for language learning aims set by selected Language Institutes.

As shown in Table 8, the teachers generally agree that the *Pacesetter series* was suitable for small-medium, homogeneous, co-ed classes of university students; however, co-ed classes is not the case of language institutes in Iran since co-ed education is not allowed in Iranian language institutes. The textbook also raises the students' interest, and the raters agree that they would choose to teach this book series again.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for *Conclusion* sub-sections

	N	minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Conclusion1	64	3.00	5.00	4.33	.57
Conclusion2	64	3.00	5.00	4.33	.65
Conclusion3	64	3.00	5.00	4.42	.67
Conclusion4	64	1.00	5.00	4.09	1.04

To answer the second question of the study: "*What are the strengths and weaknesses of Pacesetter series in an Iranian EFL context?*", the following section offers a list of the strengths and weaknesses of *Pacesetter series*,

respectively. The raters in this study mostly believed in the following strengths of the series:

- The price of the *Pacesetter series* is reasonable; it is easily accessible, and recently published.
- The materials accompanying each four textbooks of the series are satisfactorily sufficient.
- The methodology of the series is compatible to that of the raters and the institutional goals of the institutes in which the series is exploited.
- The series includes a detailed overview of the functions, structures and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit.
- The clarity and appropriateness of the each four textbooks' layout and organization is another forte.
- The content of each unit of all four textbooks is organized in a way to activate the students' background schemata, to engage them in the process of learning, and to require them personalize the target elements to their own lives and to produce their own meanings.
- An adequate number of review sections, exercises, evaluation quizzes, and/or testing suggestions are included in *Pacesetter series*.
- All four teacher's books put forth a great deal of guidance on teaching and presenting the language components.
- The objectives are also restated in teacher's book to give the teachers insights on what should be emphasized during the course of a unit.
- The series follows a balance of activities approach to teaching and learning, thus taking into account the importance of accuracy and fluency to cultivate language acquisition.
- The activities in all textbooks of the series are both sufficiently communicative and meaningful.
- The activities in the textbooks incorporate individual, pair and group work.
- Both sub-skills of grammar and vocabulary are presented in a motivating and realistic context.
- The *Pacesetter* activities promote creative, original, and independent responses.
- The presentation of each skill is complemented by the appropriate skill tasks and the internalization of newly introduced language takes place by an equalization of controlled and freer activities.
- Activities in the four textbooks can be easily substituted and modified.
- All the four textbooks of the series pay adequate attention to sub-skills.
- The series underscores the importance of natural pronunciation.
- The language of the textbooks is highly authentic and at the right level for students' language proficiency.
- The progression of grammar and vocabulary items in each textbook is appropriate for the intended audience (learners).
- All of the four textbooks offer easy examples and explanations for the presentation of grammar points and the language functions introduced in *Pacesetter series* epitomize those that the learners and the teachers will exploit in an envisioned course of SLA.
- The subject and content are realistic, challenging, motivating, and appropriate for students' needs.
- The series offers a variety of subject and contents.
- The series does not apply any sort of stereotypes.

Nonetheless, the series possesses a few shortcomings:

- The student's book at all four levels Lacks a glossary at the end to enhance the opportunity for self-learning with respect to vocabulary sub-skill.
- The Heavier weight that is attached to listening, reading, and writing at the expense of speaking can be considered as another weak spot.
- Although the type of language utilized in the textbooks does in fact introduce a multitude of registers, hardly if at all it exploits a non-native accent in the audio material.

4. Conclusion

The current study was set to evaluate Pacesetter EFL course book series using Litz's teacher textbook evaluation form. To this end, the study sought to establish whether the Iranian EFL teachers think of Pacesetter Series in terms

of its appropriateness and suitability in Iran as EFL educational setting and to spot the strengths and weaknesses of *Pacesetter* series in an Iranian EFL context. The result revealed a striking number of benefits in applying the *Pacesetter series*; however, it suffers a few numbers of shortcomings. It is worth mentioning that the category which the EFL teachers were the most satisfied with is *practical considerations* and the category which EFL teachers were the least satisfied with is *skills* of the book. With respect to the inadequacies of the series pointed out by this survey, language teachers should take responsibility and provide the opportunity for the learners to remedy the problems with substituting more culture-bound activities, to supplement tasks revolving around the speaking skills, and to offer natural examples of non-native accents through the use of authentic materials. In conclusion, language teachers should assume responsibility for compensating any deficiencies of any certain textbook since no textbook is perfect.

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An Analysis of English Business Letters from the Perspective of Interpersonal Function

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Abstract

The Purpose of the present study is to find out the features of English business letters. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics is used as the theoretical framework, mainly, interpersonal function. The English business letter (EBL) is an important written text used for international business communication and it has its own features of text. This paper explores the interpersonal function of EBL in terms of mood, modality, interaction and negotiation and finds that EBL has its unique interpersonal features.

Keywords: English Business Letter, interpersonal function, mood, modality

1. Introduction

Communication has always been highly regarded in commercial circles. In line with the means of communication, business communication can be generally divided into two types: oral communication and written communication. Indeed, written business communication by means of business letters plays a very vital role in establishing and maintaining business relationships both within a firm and with external contacts.

Nowadays English business letter Texts (EBLTs) are indispensable in international trade. A growing number of people use EBLTs in business transaction. Universities and colleges in China offer the course of EBLTs writing to train students' EBL writing skill. To master the interpersonal features of EBLT is very beneficial for those who learn or use EBLTs.

The Purpose of the current paper is to find out the unique features of English business letters from the perspective of interpersonal function. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics is employed as the theoretical framework, mainly, interpersonal function (Halliday, 2000). In the paper, the qualitative analysis is the major research method adopted for the study with a quantitative analysis as a supplement.

The English business letter (EBL) is an important written text used for international business communication and it has its own features of text (Chen Dongchun, 2003). Based on the core theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, i.e. interpersonal function, the paper makes a interpersonal function analysis of the features of English Business Letter Text (EBLT). EBLTs have the salient feature of courtesy and consideration. In this paper, only body part of EBLT is analyzed in terms of mood, modality, interaction and negotiation. The corpora of the paper are composed of nine types of English business letter which are most frequently used in business transaction (16 EBLs are omitted). The corpora of the paper are selected from EBL textbooks both at home and abroad.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars both at home and abroad have conducted researches on English business letters. In China, Wang Xinguo (1997), Li Xuansong (1997), Chen Dongchun (2003), Li Ming (2004), Xu Ju (2004) and Li Junru (2006) conduct researches on EBLTs from the perspectives of linguistic features, textual structure, stylistic characteristics and genre analysis. Liu Jianfu (2004) explores one of the most important functions of language: phatic communion. He Wei & Pang Yunlin make a study of 30 English business letters communicating bad news, in order to reveal the linguistic devices realizing the interpersonal function (He Wei & Pang Yunlin, 2008).

Gimenez (2000) investigates whether the spoken nature of e-mail messages has already started to affect business written communication. He makes an analysis in respect of the register and context of the language and at the style used in commercial electronic mail. Leila Barbara et al do a survey of how English is used for various communication purposes in the Brazilian business setting, namely, different types of business organizations