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TURKISH EFL LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES
ON INTERCHANGE SERIES
YABANCI DİL OLARAK İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENEN TÜRK ÖĞRENCİLERİN
INTERCHANGE SERISINE BAKIŞ AÇILARI

Kübra ŞENDOĞAN

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Abstract

Textbooks are of great importance for English Language teaching, especially in an educational setting. ELT textbooks are seen as a facilitator type of ELT material. Finding the appropriate textbooks for the learners and the intended outcomes is a challenging issue. After choosing and using a book, it is significant to monitor its strengths and weaknesses. This paper aims to evaluate the *Interchange 5th* edition series. The results of the research provide data to the stakeholders as to whether the given series is suitable for the target audience. In addition, the book's strengths and weaknesses, and how much it responds to needs is also informational for publishers.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, ELT, Interchange, Turkish students

Öz

Ders kitapları, özellikle eğitim ortamında, İngiliz Dili öğretimi için büyük öneme sahiptir. İngilizce öğretimi ders kitapları, kolaylaştırıcı bir eğitim materyali olarak görülmektedir. Öğrenciler ve hedeflenen çıktılar için uygun ders kitaplarını bulmak zorlu bir konudur. Bir ders kitabı seçip kullandıktan sonra, güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini izlemek önemlidir. Bu makale *Interchange 5.* baskı serisinin bir değerlendirmesini yapmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma sonuçları, seçilen serinin hedef kitle için uygun olup olmadığı hususunda ilgililere veri sağlayacaktır. Ayrıca, kitabın güçlü ve zayıf yönleri ile öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarına ne kadar cevap verdiği yayıncılar için de bilgi sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ders kitabı değerlendirmesi, İngiliz dili eğitimi, Interchange, Türk öğrenciler

Introduction

Textbooks play a significant role in English Language teaching. Richards (2001) mentions that textbooks are a primary source of language input for language learners. As Hutchinson and Torres suggest:

The textbook is an almost universal element of teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in countries ... No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook (Hutchinson & Torres, 2001, p. 315).

In this regard, evaluating the textbooks used in educational settings is very important. The importance of the textbooks is not only valid for the learners but also the teachers. Textbooks can assist the teachers as a reference point; they are handy tools to conduct the courses (Tomlinson, 2008).

The use of commercial textbooks has both advantages and disadvantages. Richards states these advantages as following:

- They provide structure and a syllabus for a program.
- They help standardize instruction.
- They maintain quality.
- They provide a variety of learning resources.
- They are efficient.
- They can provide effective language model and input.
- They can train teachers.
- They are visually appealing.

Richards also mentions the disadvantages of using commercial textbooks as following:

- They may contain inauthentic language.
- They may distort content.
- They may not meet the students' needs.
- They can deskill teachers.
- They are expensive. (Richards, 2001, p.13)

Interchange, 5th Edition was written by Richards, Hull, and Proctor in 2017. It is a four-level, American English textbook. *Interchange, 5th edition* is claimed to deliver a communicative approach. Every unit in the *Interchange, 5th edition* covers two cycles, each of which has a particular topic, grammar point, and function. The units encompass a variety of exercises.

This study aims to evaluate *Interchange, 5th edition* to reveal both the weaknesses and strengths of the books. The research question is “How do Turkish students rate practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content of the *Interchange series, 5th edition*?”

As a result, this study enables teachers to prepare any needed additional resources to compensate for the weaknesses in the book and stakeholders to improve the quality in future editions.

Literature Review

Although textbooks are a fundamental element in most of the EFL classes, there has been a little investigation done in terms of how and why materials are chosen by the stakeholders (Soori et al., 2011). According to Prabhu, textbooks are fully specified and pre-constructed materials. Hence, textbooks should be evaluated carefully in order to find the one that fits best (Parabhu, 1987).

Sheldon has offered numerous aims of textbook evaluation. He advocates that the selection of an ELT textbook shows a crucial decision (Sheldon, 1988). Thus, textbook evaluation lets the authorities discriminate between all of the presented textbooks.

Riazi and Mossallanejad conducted research to evaluate the types of learning objectives represented in high school and pre-university English textbooks. As a result, the study showed that the main objectives of the textbooks were the development of lower-order cognitive skills (Riazi & Mossallanejad, 2010). Another study done by Haghverdi and Ghasemi evaluated the American *English File* series. They found out that although there were some drawbacks, the books met the overall objectives set by the authors (Haghverdi & Ghasemi, 2013).

There has been some research on the evaluation of the *Interchange series*. Sahragard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi conducted an evaluation of the *Interchange series*; the results indicated that the communicative skills were emphasized in the textbook (Sahragard, Rahimi & Zaremoayeddi, 2008). Another study, done by Riasati and Zare evaluated the overall effectiveness of the series. They conducted research with the instructors using these books. The findings revealed that most teachers consider books as useful and appropriate for their teaching settings (Riasati & Zare, 2010).

Rezaee, Kouhpaenejad, and Mohammadi also researched on *the Interchange series*. They made a comparative study evaluating *the Interchange series* and *the Top-Notch series*. The results showed *Interchange* books focus on the four skills in a balanced way. When it comes to

comparison, the results did not show any significant difference in terms of students' choice of the best book (Rezaee, Kouhpaenejad & Mohammadi, 2013).

As seen, there are some studies on the evaluation of *the Interchange series*. However, there has not been any research in Turkey. This present paper aims to evaluate *the Interchange series, 5th edition* with the questionnaire created by Litz (2000).

Methodology

Research Design

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, a quantitative research survey design using a random sampling method was used.

Participants and Setting

The participants in the study are 47 Turkish EFL learners who are selected from different levels of language proficiency. They are first-year students at a foundational university in Turkey. They have 12-hour *Interchange* classes per week. They are between 16- 30 years of age.

Instruments

The participants completed a questionnaire for the goal of evaluating the *Interchange, 5th edition*. It required the participants to rate 25 items on a five-point Likert scale. The textbook evaluation questionnaire developed primarily by Litz (2000). It includes categories such as practical considerations, layout and design of the book, activities, skills, language type, subject, and content of the book. The participants filled the survey online using Google Forms.

Data Analysis

Statistical descriptive analysis was conducted to analyze the data. So as to compute the data, SPSS was used.

Results

In this section, the results of the descriptive analysis are presented. The meanings of the abbreviations as for the statistics tables are given below:

- HD: Highly Disagree
- D: Disagree
- N: Neutral
- A: Agree
- HA: Highly Agree

Practical Considerations

Practical considerations were evaluated according to items 1 and 2 of the questionnaire.

Table 1 displays the frequencies and percentages.

Table 1: Percentages Related to Practical Consideration.

Practical Consideration	%	HD	D	N	A	HA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I1. The price of the textbook is reasonable.	%	25,5	24,9	19,1	19,1	11,3	2,957	1,503
I2. The textbook is easily accessible.	%	10,6	10,6	19,8	29,1	29,8	3,468	1,316

As pointed out in Table 1, more than 58% of the participants agree or highly agree that the books are accessible. When it comes to the price, on the other hand, almost half of the students do not think that the prices are reasonable.

Layout and Design

Items 3 and 4 were written in order to evaluate the layout and the design of textbooks. Table 2 displays the frequencies and percentages.

Table 2. Percentages Related to Layout and Design

Layout and Design	%	HD	D	N	A	HA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I3. The layout & design are appropriate & clear.	%	2,1	12,8	14,9	29,8	40,4	3,468	1,131
I4. The textbook is organized effectively.	%	2,1	17,0	14,9	29,8	36,2	3,809	1,173

As shown in Table 2, more than half of the students agree with items 3 (70,2%) and 4 (66%). Also, the mean scores are 3,468 and 3,809; and the standard deviations are 1,131 and 1,173, respectively. Thus, it could be said that the participants' ratings regarding the layout and design were positive.

Activities

Activities were evaluated through items 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages.

Table 3. Percentages Related to Activities

Activities	%	HD	D	N	A	HA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I5. The textbook provides a balance of activities.	%	2,1	8,5	12,8	44,7	31,9	3,957	,999
I6. The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice.	%	4,3	4,3	19,1	42,6	29,8	3,894	1,026

I7. The activities incorporate individual, pair & group work.	%	4,3	2,1	21,3	27,7	55,3	4,064	1,071
I8. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.	%	6,4	8,5	17,0	40,4	27,7	3,745	1,151
I9. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses.	%	2,1	10,6	27,7	27,7	31,9	3,766	1,088

As elucidated in Table 3, over 65% of the students agree or highly agree with the items 5, 6, 7, and 8. More than 55% of the students agree with item 9.

Skills

The fourth category is skills; the results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Percentages Related to Skills

Skills	%	HD	D	N	A	HA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I10. The materials include and focus on the skills that I need to practice.	%	6,4	10,6	14,9	36,2	31,9	3,766	1,202
I11. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.	%	8,5	10,6	27,7	27,7	25,5	3,511	1,231
I12. The textbook pays attention to subskills - i.e. listening for gist, note-taking, skimming, for information, etc.	%	4,3	8,5	25,5	34,0	27,7	3,723	1,097

Regarding the issue of whether the books constitute the skills that the learners need, about 69% of the students had a satisfactory rating, only 17% of the participants had contrary insights. While about 53% of the participants agreed that there is a balance in terms of four skills in the textbooks, some thought the reverse. Since the standard deviation is quite high (SD= 1,23), there is a reflection that there was a wider dispersion of the responses among the students. As for the subskills, many of the students (61%) thought that the books are satisfactory.

Language Type

Another category is related to Language Type. Table 5 summaries the frequencies and percentages of six items.

Table 5. Percentages Related to Language Type

Language Type	%	HD	D	N	A	HA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I13. The language used in the textbook is authentic - i.e. like real-life English.	%	6,4	8,5	21,3	31,9	31,9	3,745	1,881
I14. The language used is at the right level for my current English ability.	%	8,5	10,6	6,4	40,4	34,0	3,809	1,262
I15. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.	%	6,4	4,3	17,0	38,3	34,0	3,893	1,127
I16. The grammar points were presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.	%	6,4	6,4	21,3	34,0	31,9	3,787	1,160
I17. The language functions exemplify English that I will be likely to use in the future	%	10,6	4,3	17,0	34,0	34,0	3,766	1,271
I18. The language represents a diverse range of registers and accents.	%	8,5	4,3	25,5	38,3	23,4	3,639	1,150

More than 60% of the participants had an approval towards the authenticity of the textbooks. Most of the participants (74,5%) also thought that the level of the books is appropriate for their level of English.

Regarding the issue of grammar points and vocabulary items, more than 65% of the participants had a positive argument. When looked at the mean and the standard deviation, it can also be said that *Interchange series* have appropriate and well-presented grammar and vocabulary items. ($M=3,893$, $SD=1,881$; $M=3,787$, $SD=1,16$) As for the language functions' exemplification, about 68% of the students had positive attitudes.

More than 60% of the students had an approval towards the notion that the books have a diversity of accents and registers.

Subject and Content

The subject and the content of the books are measured items 19-23. Table 6 shows the frequencies and percentages.

Table 6. Percentages Related to Subject and Content

Subject and Content	%	HD	D	N	A	HA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I19. The subject & content of the textbook are relevant to my needs as an English language learner.	%	10,6	.0	21,3	4	46,8	3,936	1,292
I20. The subject and content of the textbook are generally realistic.	%	4,3	4,3	17,0	29,8	44,7	4,064	1,092
I21. The subject and content of the materials are interesting, challenging and motivating.	%	10,6	2,1	23,4	29,8	34,0	3,745	1,259
I22. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook.	%	6,4	4,3	21,3	38,3	29,8	3,809	1,116
I23. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative.	%	4,3	2,1	27,7	29,8	36,2	3,915	1,60

In regards to whether the subject and the content are relevant to the learners' needs, about 68% were satisfied. About 75% of the participants also agreed that the subject and the content of the books are realistic. As for whether the subject and the content are interesting, the percentage showed that the participants that agree decreased; however, it is still valid that most of the students (64%) think positively in this way.

For the sufficient varieties of the subject and the content, respondents' ratings were positive, too. Moreover, about 66% of the learners supposed that *Interchange series* is not culturally biased.

Interest and Choice

Items 24 and 25 are about if the participants are interested in the books and whether they would like to use the same book again. Table 7 shows the participants' perspectives.

Table 7. Percentages Related to Interest and Choice

Interest and Choice	%	HD	D	N	A	HA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I24. The textbook raises my interest in further English language study.	%	8,5	6,4	23,4	31,9	29,8	3,680	1,218
I25. I would choose to study this textbook again.	%	8,5	8,5	19,1	31,9	31,9	3,702	1,250

As shown in Table 7, the more significant part of the participants (about 61%) had positive insights for the books. Besides, about 63% of the participants would choose to use the *Interchange series* again.

Discussion and Conclusion

As revealed in the results, many of the learners thought that books are accessible. However, many of the students found the books' prices unreasonable. Most of the participants believed that the layout and design of the *Interchange series* are suitable and precise.

As can be seen from the results, the participants agreed that the activities are beneficial for the four skills, and the skills are presented in a balanced way. Most of the learners also believed that grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in a good and clear way. It is also agreed that attention to sub-skills is given adequately in *Interchange series*. Besides, it is seen that most of the students were content with the level of the textbooks.

The students also showed that the textbooks are not culturally biased, or they do not portray any negative stereotypes.

Briefly, the aim of this research was to examine how the learners think 'practical considerations', 'layout and design', 'activities', 'skills', 'language type' and 'subject and content' of *Interchange series, 5th edition*. The research also tried to find out whether the students would like to use the same books again. To gather the data, a questionnaire was employed to the students, and the results were interpreted.

This study can be expanded through employing the questionnaire to the instructors' as well. At first, the researcher planned to do so; however, the instructors were too busy to participate in the research at that time.

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