

An Investigation Into The *Speak Now* Series: Internal And External Characteristic

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Abstract: The main thrust of the present study was to explore the *Speak Now Series* in terms of external and internal characteristics. To this end, Littlejohn's (1998) checklist was utilized in order to investigate the series in terms of Task Analysis Sheets (TAS) and Design. The results of the study indicated that the series has its own strengths among which form-meaning relationships, developing communicative competence, consistency and continuity, the visual and auditory features supplemented with oral-emphasized skills are worth mentioning. Exploring the design of the series, on the other hand, showed that the themes covered in the series are the most related, necessary and crucial ones which motivate the learners to engage in the presented activities. Furthermore, The *Speak Now* series is apparently suffering from the presented speaking tasks, which do not seem to be challenging and motivating enough. The series also does not engage the learners and teachers in the learning and teaching processes.

Keywords: textbook analysis, internal, external, task analysis sheets (TAS).

1. Introduction

Textbooks are among the main components of any language course, which provide the main source of data provided to the learners who are learning English as a foreign language. In the field of language teaching and learning, there are a vast variety of language textbooks that may not be developed according to the educational needs of a curriculum or even the needs of learners. Such an issue demands considering different textbooks available, which in its turn necessitates evaluating the textbooks.

Textbook evaluation, in effect, provides the opportunity for the curriculum and syllabus designers as well as teachers to select, include and adapt the textbooks which are more fitted to the educational, curricular and learners' needs as well as in line with the teachers' teaching strategy and approach. Hence textbooks are considered as both learning and teaching instrument which help and support the processes of learning and teaching for both learners and teachers.

in this regards, Sheldon (1998, p. 237) argues that textbooks "are perceived by many to be the route map for any ELT program, laying bare its shape, structure, and destination, with progress, program, and even teacher quality being assessed by learners in terms of sequential, unit-by-unit coverage". Likewise, textbooks have some advantages to be considered among which autonomy of the students to follow a self-study paradigm and providing learning and teaching instrument are worth mentioning (Ur, 1996). Ur (1996) also points out to the disadvantages of using a textbook such as lack of challenging and irrelevant topics, demotivation and biases.

Rashidi and Bahrami (2012) explicate that textbook selection demands considering curriculum objectives and approach, as well as the roles and relations between the teacher and the learner. Textbooks selection may also affect the processes of teaching and learning due to the fact that it determines syllabus, teaching approach as well as students' learning strategies (Cunningsworth, 1995; Garinger, 2001; McGrath, 2002).

The main problem-related to textbook selection, according to McGrath (2002), is that it is selected based on the reputation of the author and its publisher. Likewise, intrinsic pedagogical values of the textbooks are being ignored in favor to the reputation of the author and the publisher.

Tomlinson (2012), in a similar vein, refers to the professional marketing as the main factor in textbook selection. He adds that textbooks are mainly produced for objectives other than the educational ones especially in terms of capitalism or commercial issues. Tomlinson (2012) explicates that most of ELT textbooks are resulting into failure in terms of learners' language development or even into pedagogical failures. Tomlinson (2008) also considers the failure of ELT textbooks into EFL learners' development to be rooted in commercial and marketing-oriented issues and in theory-driven issues without considering the practical and pedagogical issues.

Hence, it is crucial to explore EFL textbooks in order to determine whether they are in line with the educational and curricular objectives and whether they are reliable, valid and practical instruments for educational and instructional purposes based on teachers and learners needs. The next section illustrates the statement of the problem considered by the study.

2. Statement of the Problem

Considering Mukundan's (2010) argument who points out to the issue that textbook's selection influences the process of teaching and learning. It means that the wrong choices may result into failure as well as frustration and even waste of time and energy which lead to dissatisfaction, resentment and desperation.

One of the skills which is recently considered by many language-related syllabus including English as a foreign language is oral skills among which speaking. There is no doubt regarding the significance of speaking not only in terms of developing language skill but also in terms of communication, expressing an idea and being understood. Likewise, being able to speak and comprehend English may motivate EFL learners to be more interested in which and to be able to use a great wealth of entertainment among which movies and music are worth mentioning that in its turn improve their cultural literacy.

English proficiency may influence any individual's success in terms of personal as well as professional communication and even their intelligence, understanding, critical thinking and the way they handle different problems. In meeting such a need, Jack C. Richards and David Bohlke endeavored to design and develop a four-level speaking course which is titled as *Speak Now* published by Oxford University Press.

Having considered that no study was conducted to explore the series, the researcher tried to do that. To this end, the following questions were raised:

1. What are the explicit features of *Speak Now* series?
2. What pedagogic values does *Speak Now* series have?

3. Significance of the Study

EFL textbooks as the main sources available to the teachers and students who are teaching and learning English in a situation in which English is considered as the foreign language and for which there is few authentic interaction, if any, seem to be crucial. Textbooks' evaluation, according to Cunningsworth (1995) may be either for adopting a new textbook or for exploring the weaknesses and strengths of the utilized textbooks. Likewise, textbook's evaluation as it is stated by Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) is also conducted for providing some feedback for further material development.

Henceforth, textbook's evaluation may provide some pedagogical implications significant for teachers, learners, syllabus designers and even teacher's trainers to be considered. In fact, teachers need to be aware of the educational objectives along with the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks and to supplement them with other useful resources.

Teacher's trainers also need to include such issues to raise the consciousness and knowledge of the teachers to consider and evaluate the curricular objectives and textbooks' instructional features. Learners, in a similar vein, need to be aware of the textbooks' pedagogical and instructional characteristics in order to have an evaluation of them and determine whether they are capable to meet their needs.

Syllabus and course designers also need to consider the instructional and pedagogical characteristics of the textbooks and provide the framework and method to be followed in providing the materials and the strategies to meet the objectives of both curriculum and students.

4. Review of the Related Literature

One of the neglected issue in education setting especially where English is considered as the foreign language, according to Hargreaves (1989), is textbook evaluation. One of the dominant way through which textbooks are being evaluated is through using checklists which may include different criteria and classifications among which objectives and approaches, or design and organization are worth mentioning such as the ones developed by Chastain (1971), Tucker (1975), Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979), Canlin and Breen (1979), and Sheldon (1988) or Cunningsworth (1995). In following some empirical studies in utilizing textbook evaluation's checklist for textbook exploration are presented.

Amerian and Esmaili (2015) explored the representation of gender in *American Headway Student Textbooks* utilizing Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model. In effect, they studied the series in terms of eight factors, vis-à-vis female and male's characters, female and male's social roles, female and male's domestic roles, female and male's semantic roles, female and male's titles, order of appearance, masculine generic construction, activities females and males engaged in, and finally the pictorial representation of both genders. They concluded that the series is laden by two forms of sexism which they called as overt and covert where the overt one "discriminates against females in a vivid way and the covert one exploits the women as an instrument for advertising in order to

promoteselling” (Amerian and Esmaili, 2015, p. 3) . This study also argues that the series is following the ideology of capitalism.

Esmaili and Amerian (2014), in another study, examined gender representation in Iranian high School English textbooks using Fairclough’s (2001) three-dimensional model. They showed that the series is also following sexist attitude in which male characters are being favored. They explicated that the dominant sexist attitude in the series is rooted in the Persian culture.

Haghverdi and Ghasemi (2012) evaluated *American English File* using Littlejohn’s (1998) textbook evaluation in order to determine the explicit features of the book as well as its pedagogic values. Their study revealed that the series is reasonably a good source with its own strengths outweighed its weaknesses.

Rashidi and Bahrami (2012, p. 137), on the other hand, investigated “intermediate Top Notch based on Littlejohn’s (1998) evaluative framework, in order to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and explicit features of the books and to see whether the books are in line with the CLT principles and the objectives set for them”. To this end, six ELT teachers helped the researcher in the process of textbook evaluation which resulted into the fact that the textbook has its own positive and negative features in which its strengths is outnumbered.

Having conducted a comparative study, Nazeri (2010) studied gender representation in conversations in Iranian *High School English Textbooks* and *Interchange series* using Fairclough’s (1989) language discourse studies. Her findings revealed that gender is depicted in terms of capitalist economy in *Interchange series*. She also found that Iranian *High School English Textbooks* is de-gendered.

Kayapinar (2009) is one the researchers who explored *opportunities* and *New English File* in terms of teacher’s perspective. To this end, 134 teachers participated in the study which resulted into the conclusion that the teachers are not satisfied with the textbooks and it demands considering other resource to meet the learners’ needs.

Sahragard, Rahimi and Zaremoayehdi (2009) evaluated *Interchange series* using Littlejohn’s framework (1998). The results of the study indicated that “Interchange is not completely along with the objectives intended for it” (Sahragard, Rahimi & Zaremoayehdi, 2009, p. 37). They indicated that the series is mainly theory-driven in which learners and teachers as the source of data are being ignored. In effect, the series was revealed to be sentence-leveled which

Dominguez (2003), on the other hand, investigated gender representation in *New Interchange Intro*. His study showed that the textbook is beneficial source which has included a vast variety of settings with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Evaluating *English firsthand 2*, Litz (2005) studied the fitness of the textbook for the expected language curriculum. To this end, eight teachers and five hundred students were selected as the participants of the study who were asked to answer to the book evaluation and needs’ analysis questionnaires. The findings revealed that the strengths of the textbook are considerably higher than its weaknesses and the textbook is apparently considered as an interesting and beneficial resource for the program.

It is worth mentioning that textbook’s evaluation as it is also argued by McDonough and Shaw (2003) may be conducted into two stages of external and internal wherein the external evaluation deals with the general organizational principle and the internal evaluation with the specifically and detailed characteristics of the materials.

Likewise, the materials and textbooks may be divided into two main groups of the commercially-produced and curriculum-produced materials. The most utilized materials are the first group, namely, the commercially-produced ones in which neither the teacher nor the learners have any influence. Here, the textbook evaluation seems to be fundamental and one of the series, which is apparently utilized in the context of Iraq where English is considered as a foreign language, is *Speak Now* series, which the present study tried to explore. The following section sheds light on the methodology based on which the study was conducted.

5. Methodology

5.1. Design of the study

Having utilized Littlejohn’s (1998) checklist, external and internal characteristics of an international ELT series were explored. Hence, the study has followed a qualitative content analysis design.

5.2. Corpus of the study

Speak Now series authored by Jack C. Richards and David Bohkle designed and developed by Oxford University Press (2012) was selected as the source for gathering data. The series, in effect, includes four volumes, namely *Speak Now 1*, *Speak Now 2*, *Speak Now 3*, and *Speak Now 4*—each includes eight themes and 32 lessons with its focus on speaking skill. Table 1 illustrates the themes along with the lessons covered in the series.

Table 1
Speak Now Series: Contents

Volumes	themes	Lessons
Speak now 1	New friends	How are you? Nice to meet you. Can you say that again? Nice weather, isn't it?
	Interests	I love pop. My favorite movie is... What time is it? Would you try kayaking?
	People	Do you have any brothers? She's pretty smart. I love your shirt. What's she wearing?
	Daily life	When do you get up? When do you get there? What do you do first? What are you doing?
	My hometown	What's your place like? Where can I get a lamp? Where's the mall? Take a left.
	Shopping	How much is coffee? Will you take \$20? Do you ever buy books? Your phone is so cool.
	Food	Do you eat much fruit? We need onions. Do you eat a big lunch? How does it taste?
	Past & future	I had a great weekend. What time did you call? You won't believe this! What are your plans
Speak now 2	Friends & Family	Where are you from? I'm tall and thin, Alice is more serious. All of my friends text.
	Restaurants	I've never had Thai food. First, grill the bread. The service is great. Are you ready to order?
	Health	I have a sore throat. What should I do?

		<p>I'd love to try that! Soccer is more exciting!</p>
	Jobs	<p>I can write pretty well. I'd have to have... I travel for free. Is the manager there?</p>
	Free Time	<p>That sounds fun! I'd love to go. I'm sorry, but I can't. Sorry I'm late.</p>
	Travel	<p>Did you go alone? Which do you prefer? You must get a visa. When is the next train?</p>
	Style & Fashion	<p>I usually wear... What do you think? Can you do me a favor? What is it used for?</p>
	Opinions	<p>I think it's fun! I feel the same way. What would you do? Then what happened?</p>
Speak now 3	People	<p>I'm an only child. She's a born leader. We're both reliable. As I was saying...</p>
	Vacation	<p>I'd like to check in. Here are some rules. There are some problems. That would be great.</p>
	Errands	<p>Do you know... Sorry, my mistake. Can I please...? I'm broke,</p>
	Stories	<p>I'd used to play hopscotch. She said she was sorry. I read an unusual story. When did they release it?</p>
	Friends	<p>You didn't know? A good friend is loyal. I could do that.</p>

		I wish I'd remembered,
	Business	I'd rather not say. It could be an ad for... The main reason is... It needs a good location.
	Culture	You're expected to ... What does it mean? What will happen if ... It must have been...
	Future	Cars will mostly fly. That's a good really idea! I'll pick you up. What do you hope to do?
Speak now 4	People	I learned a lot from ... Did you hear about...? I can't stand it when ... You put up with a lot.
	Socializing	How do you know...? Are you up for...? I had thought she was ... It's just not my thing.
	Life styles	What exactly is a ...? I decided to ... I spent too much time ... You have a point, but ...
	Careers	My short-term goal is ... I'm very organized. The first thing you need ... I'm here to talk about ...
	Feelings	Are you afraid of...? I'm overworked. If I could go anywhere... I which I had ...
	Pop culture	It started out kind of slow. It has really good beat. Did you hear about ...? Have you heard ...?
	Travel	Is the flight on time? I'm afraid... Do you think ...? It's important to ...
	In the news	Did you see the game? Hold on. Studies have shown ... What's your opinion?

5.3. Sampling Procedure

Following the purposive sampling *Speak Now series* was selected as the source for gathering data due to the fact that it is relatively new materials targeted the Asian learners for whom English is considered as a foreign language. Hence, the series were explored in terms of both external and internal characteristics in order to present a comprehensive evaluation.

5.4. Instrument

Littlejohn’s (1998) checklist was utilized as the instrument through which the series was explored which was answered by three MA raters. The checklist has composed of two sections, i.e. Task Analysis Sheets (TAS) and Design. Task Analysis Sheets (TAS) explores the activities and tasks in one typical theme of a textbook.

The Task Analysis sheets demands that the raters tick the items, which were present in the task. Since the four textbooks were designed around a particular theme—each with four lessons—only one theme were explored randomly from one of the four textbook. In fact, because of the same format and practical considerations only one theme of a textbook was explored.

The Design section, on the other hand, was explored in terms of *Aims and objectives, Principles of selection, Principles of sequencing, Subject matter and focus of subject matter, Types of teaching/learning activities, Participation, Classroom roles of teachers and learners, learner roles in learning, and the Role of materials* as a whole which each were given a score out of four.

5.5. Procedures

Through a qualitative and evaluative design, some descriptive statistics especially in terms of frequency counts and percentage indexes were presented in which external and internal features of the series were depicted. the following section sheds light on the results of the study.

6. Results & Discussion

In the first step in evaluating the series, the course package along with the extracted sample was explored in terms of their features and characteristics. In effect, the series was considered in terms of the course package as a whole (type, intended audience, age range, extent, components, total estimated time, design & layout, distribution, routh through the material, and subdivision of the course. Table 2 illustrates the external features of the series.

Table 2
The external characteristics of Speak Now series

Title: <i>Speak Now Series</i>	Author: Jack C. Richards and David Bohkle	
Publisher: Oxford University Press	Year: 2012	
A. Course package as a whole:		
1. Type: general		
2. Intended audience:		
<i>Age range:</i> teenagers & adults		
<i>Location:</i> worldwide especially for Asian EFL learners;		
3. Extent:		
<i>Components:</i> student book with online practice, audio download through Oxford learn, teacher’s book with testing program CD-ROM, i/tools classroom software with video and PowerPoint presentation, class audio CDs and DVD;		
<i>Total estimated time:</i> eight three-month semesters in Iraq's Context (about 2 years);		
4. Design & Layout: Student book in full color, work book in two color, teacher book n full color;		
5. Distribution:		
a. Material		
<i>Audio</i>	Teacher	Learner
<i>Audio scripts</i>	■	■
<i>Answer keys</i>	■	
<i>Guidance on the use of material</i>	■	
<i>Methodology guidance</i>	■	
<i>Extra practice</i>	■	

tests	⚡	
b. Accesses		
Syllabus overview	⚡	
World lists	■	⚡
6. Routh through the material		
Specified	⚡	
User-determined		
7. Subdivision		
<p>Four volumes each including eight themes and each theme consisting of four lessons with some standardized and fixed presentation. The first and third lessons of each theme includes four sections of <i>Vocabulary</i>, <i>Conversation</i>, <i>Language Booster</i>, and <i>Pronunciation</i>. Second and forth lessons, on the other hand, includes <i>vocabulary</i>, <i>Conversation</i>, <i>Language Booster</i> and <i>Listening</i>. /moreover, each lesson involves listening, pronunciation and conversation supplemented by review section, which composed of video and self-assessment in form of online practice.</p>		
B. Overview of an extract from the Student Book:		
1. Length: one theme out of eight themes in <i>Speak Now 4</i>		
2. Sequence of the theme:		
<i>Lesson 9: 1. Vocabulary, 2. Conversation, 3. Language Booster, 4. Pronunciation, 5. Speak with confidence;</i>		
<i>Lesson 10: 1. Vocabulary, 2. Conversation, 3. Language Booster, 4. Listening, 5. Speak with confidence;</i>		
<i>Lesson 11: 1. Vocabulary, 2. Conversation, 3. Language Booster, 4. Pronunciation, 5. Speak with confidence;</i>		
<i>Lesson 12: 1. Vocabulary, 2. Conversation, 3. Language Booster, 4. Listening, 5. Speak with confidence;</i>		

In terms of task analysis, what the learner is expected to do (turn-take, focus, mental operation), who with, and with what content (input to and output from learners in terms of form, source, and nature) were explored to determine which one is present and which one is absent.

Having considered such factors, it seems that the both initiate and scripted response are expected in the process of turn taking from learners. Likewise, the focus of the presented tasks in the series is on meaning, system and form relationship. Exploring the mental operation in the series, on the other hand, demonstrates that performing the speaking tasks need to be retrieved from the long-term memory, prior knowledge, as well as through repeating with expansion, selecting information and applying language rule.

It is worth mentioning that no role is given to deducing language rule, building text, relating sounds to objects, or comparing. In addition, the input offered to the learners in the series have different forms including graphic (pictures and illustrations), oral words, phrases, and sentences, written words, phrases, sentences as well as audio and video materials. The output expected from learners are mainly in terms of oral production in forms of oral words, phrases, or even extended discourse, and in some cases in terms of written words and phrases.

Furthermore, the teacher, learners and materials are among the sources of either input or output. The nature of presented input and expected output have different types of Personal opinion, fact and personal information. It means that fiction, metalinguistic knowledge or scientific issue do not have any place in the series. Figure 1 sheds light on the design based on the ratings and percent.

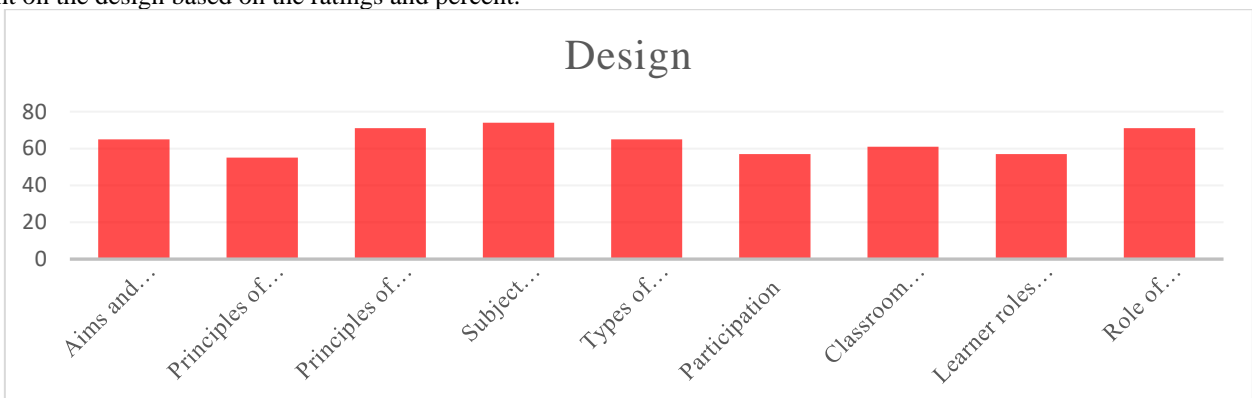


Figure 1: Design of the Speak Now Series

Figure 1 reveals that the raters consider 65% of the optimum score for the aims and objectives followed by series, which claim to be speaking and communicative-focused. Principles of selection seems to be problematic due

to the covered themes, presented content, and the range of vocabulary and expressions. Likewise, the principles of sequencing which is about 70% needs some consideration to be in line with learners' needs and the contextual issues.

Subject matter and the focus of subject matter that is about 74% seems to cover the themes crucial for a speaking course. Likewise, the series is suffering from the presented tasks and activities, which are not challenging enough and it, demand further consideration. Participation composes only 57% and denotes that the series is not meeting its purposes in terms of different types of participation and is apparently limited to the group activities.

Classroom roles of teachers and learners also need some consideration in order to be flexibly utilized in different situation for a vast variety of teaching and learning styles and strategies. Furthermore, learner' roles of learning and the role of material which received the percent below 65% need some consideration due to the fact that it is not supplemented by challenging and detailed tasks and questions to be utilized in the classrooms or at least in form of self-study.

7. Conclusion

The pedagogic values of the series are that the EFL learners may be encouraged to use language for authentic purposes. Moreover, the series encourage the learners to work on their oral proficiency using appropriate expressions. In addition, the series includes the tasks, which demands the learners to initiate or respond to the tasks due to its emphasis on oral skills. Likewise, the series has been organized in terms of functions and notions, which emphasizes form-meaning relationships.

In fact, meaning making is crucial for the series in order to develop communicative competence in EFL learners. Expressing ideas, beliefs and issues in a target language appears to be motivating for many EFL learners for whom there is few authentic situational context for communication. However, there is consistency and continuity during the series, which follows a set format design, it does not seem to present a new direction, material or even any new task. The difference between the explored series and the previous ones is in the visual and audial features supplemented with oral-emphasized skills.

The series also emphasized the pair and group work and deemphasized the individual speaking tasks. The results also demonstrate that the focus of the series is on oral communicative skills. The expected output of students is to utilize the presented vocabulary, expressions and structures in speaking tasks and in form of argument.

One prominent feature of the series is that it provides many opportunities for both teachers and learners to provide and present the content of the presented speaking tasks. It means that no text was specified for the majority of tasks to determine the nature and source of content.

Exploring the design of the series, in effect, showed that the themes covered in the series are the most related, necessary and crucial ones which motivate the learners to engage in the presented activities. The *Speak Now* series is apparently suffering from the presented speaking tasks, which do not seem to be challenging and motivating enough. The series also does not engage the learners and teachers in the learning and teaching processes, respectively.

In a nutshell, the Table of Content at the beginning of each volume clearly present the themes, topics, and scope of the series, and defines the sequence, objectives, and roles considered for teachers, learners or even materials. Henceforth, Principles of selection seems to be problematic due to the covered themes, presented content, and the range of vocabulary and expressions. Likewise, the principles of sequencing also needs some consideration to be in line with learners' needs and the contextual issues.

Furthermore, Subject matter and the focus of subject matter cover the themes crucial for a speaking course. Likewise, the series is apparently suffering from the presented tasks and activities, which are not challenging enough, which also demand some consideration. Exploring participation denotes that the series is not meeting its purposes in terms of different types of participation and is apparently limited to the group activities. Classroom roles of teachers and learners also need some consideration in order to be flexibly utilized in different situation for a vast variety of teaching and learning styles and strategies. Furthermore, learner' roles of learning and the role of material need some consideration due to the fact that it is not supplemented by challenging and detailed tasks and questions to be utilized in the classrooms or at least in form of self-study.

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