

Original Research Article

Students' Perceptions of Textbooks in Moroccan High Schools

Sana Sakale

Assistant Professor, English Studies, IbnTofail University, Faculty of letters and humanities, Kénitra, Morocco

Corresponding Author: Sana Sakale, E-mail: sakale.sana@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to reveal the different perceptions, practices and problems related to speaking skills in Moroccan secondary education in general. The sample of the study consisted of students coming from different schools in the academy of Rabat-Salè-Zemmour-Zaer area. The results revealed a discrepancy between classroom activities, textbooks activities and the objectives of the guidelines set for the teaching of speaking in Moroccan high schools. The results also showed that the thematic importance, thematic variety and the preference of listening-focused textbooks including listening to songs are found to be what students perceive to be their most significant inclinations. The study concluded with a number of pedagogical implications for the teaching/learning process.

Introduction

The current study highlights students' perceptions towards textbooks in Moroccan high schools. The concept of perception encompasses issues that are intertwined since it has to do with percept, cognition and psychology. That is why a comprehensive definition will be presented below. Historically speaking, the impact of psychological schools on language study and language learning came as a reaction to the criticism addressed to linguistic theory for its emphasis on the linguistic structure and the formal analysis of language, and its dwelling on the relations among structures. The need to go beyond linguistic description thus marked the shift of interest to psychological theories which contributed to the development of language learning theories. For example, cognitive psychology has opened up new perspectives for the study of the learning process in general including L1 acquisition but also L2 acquisition which has benefited from research methods used in L1. Undoubtedly enough, Piagetian insight into human psychology has yielded profound reconsideration to the cognitive processes employed in speech production which is analyzed as comprising a number of operations underlying any speech entity. According to Funt (1971), in his study of Piaget and structuralism, mental or logical processes have been the major advocacy of Piaget who has always believed in the impact of cognition and mental logic on the learning process.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, more recent psycholinguists have identified several processing components of speech. Levelt (1994:91), for example, advocates that speaking comprises at least three processes (1) intentions and ideas, (2) words and sentences, and (3) sound production or articulation. These three levels of processing have their own characteristic speed of operation as highly cognitive processes. Accordingly, this paper aims to capture this cognitive and psychological dimension through investigating learners' perception of the textbook. The present study adheres to a mixed design or what has been identified in research methodology as *ex-post facto*: it is both a qualitative and a descriptive one. But the main limitation is that the two hundred learners who participated come from one academy. Involving more academies in the kingdom could have been more fruitful. Although previous studies (Admire, & Winnet, 2018; Qadhi, 2018; Elnadeef, & Abdala, 2019; ElNaggar, 2019; Maulina, Hikmah, & Pahamzah, 2019; Shamsi, Altaha, & Gilanlioglu, 2019; DerKhachadourian, 2019; Hamouda, 2020; Namaziandost, E., & Imani, 2020; ElNaggar, 2020) conducted on students' perceptions related to speaking skills have revealed interesting findings, little attention so far has been paid to the Moroccan students' perception towards

textbooks in high schools. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to shed some light on different perceptions, practices and problems related to speaking skills in Moroccan secondary education in general.

Literature Review

The concept of perception is very complex. It is deeply rooted in cognition (Merikle & Joordens, 1992), psychology (Vecera & O'Reilly, 1998; Peterson & Rhodes, 2003) and philosophy (Kleiman, 2003; Crane, 2011). It can be affected by physiological influences such as age and fatigue or social, cultural and communication influences as it can be impacted by attributions and self-concepts and these may be explained in either simple or complex ways.

The Thesaurus Free Dictionary, for instance, attributes the following definition to perception "*the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition; understanding or an immediate or intuitive recognition or appreciation*", while Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as "*the process whereby sensory stimulation is translated into organized experience*". From a psychoanalysis viewpoint, experience or percept, is the co-constructed and multiform outcome of the stimulation and understanding of a whole process based on the faculty of association. That is why perception is believed to be influenced by many factors like unconscious ideas, learning, expectations, needs, values, past experiences, relations and conflicts.

In theoretical research based on psychoanalysis, the similarities, relations or conflicts found between various types of stimulation and their associated percepts suggest inferences that can be made about the properties and characteristics of the perceptual process. Levelt (1966), for instance, studied the perception of syntactic structure and later on the perceptual conflict in binocular rivalry while Mackay (1987) investigated the relationship between the cognitive processes underpinning both perception and action and in what way one may be linked to the other. On the other hand, from a practical and pedagogical perspective, the perceptual process cannot be directly checked and measured except by the perceiver who is responsible for classifying, comprehending, and organizing the selected data. Therefore, the validity of any perceptual process can be checked only in an indirect way. To this end, the utility of scientific research lies in the fact that perceptions that are derived from theory will then be compared with corresponding statistically checked empirical data to find out similarities, conflicts, new associations and discrepancies.

In the present article, the term perception refers to the whole perceptual process that incorporates the way participants in this study understand (comprehend and interpret), retain (select and react to), feel towards (make emotional connections through mechanisms of retention and memory) and organize (classify and categorize) the teaching/learning process of speaking skills in EFL classes. The instruments used have in part focused on participants' needs to help unveil their underlying perceptions.

Methodology

The students chosen as a sample for this study come from different schools in the academy of Rabat-Salè-Zemmour-Zaer area and belong to three different educational levels including common core, first year and second year baccalaureate. The sample has been selected from the two broadest branches, namely literary and science without specific sub-categorization of the two. The sample included both male and female students covering age categories ranging from 15 to 21 years. The following table shows information related to the learners' number, gender, educational level and age range in more detail.

Table 1: Demographic information on learners

Educational level/profile	Number	Gender		Age range						
		Male	Female	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Common core literary	40	17	23	19	12	6	3	0	0	0
Common core science	39	21	18	22	14	3	0	0	0	0
First year science Bac	30	16	14	0	21	6	2	1	0	0
First year literary Bac	33	15	18	0	19	9	3	1	0	0
Second year science Bac	28	13	15	0	0	15	9	2	1	1
Second year literary Bac	30	14	16	0	0	16	10	2	2	1
Total Number	200	96	104	41	66	55	27	6	3	2
%	100%	48%	52%	20.5%	33%	27.5%	13.5%	3%	1.5%	1%

Approximately an equal gender proportion is represented in the current research paper. The group is constituted of (104) females versus (96) males. The reason behind this situation is a remarkable higher/growing rate of female presence in the secondary as has been registered. The table also shows that a good proportion of learners' age category is situated at sixteen to seventeen years (60.5%) totaling 33% aged 16 and 27.5% aged 17. A growing population (20.5%) of students aged just 15 is recognized while the least age category proportion is aged 20 to 21 with a percentage estimated at just (2.5%).

All three secondary educational levels have contributed in this research as table (3) demonstrates. Since the speaking skill is a long process that needs to be improved through both knowledge building and skill building, samples from all three levels have been represented in this study to engage learners who have developed a number of observations throughout their learning process including all levels. Finally, on the whole, both science and literary students have been represented in this research with approximately equal student frequency proportions (science= 97; literary= 103).

Results and Discussion

Following is a table showing responses concerning perceptions related to the textbook. Eight items are concerned here and they include listening material, guided readings, short stories, printed songs, visual material, varied content, themes, and material other than the one included in the textbook.

Table 2: Students' perceptions of textbooks

1. To better speak in class	T. a	A	N. o	D	T. d	M	T	q	p
2. T.B with listening texts alone	55 27.5%	83 41.5%	27 13.5%	24 12%	8 4%	3 1.5%	200 100%	788	.000
3. T.B with guided readings	103 51.5%	54 27%	28 14%	13 6.5%		2 1%	200 100%	594	.000
4. T.B with listen and repeat short stories	67 33.5%	84 42%	29 14.5%	14 7%	2 1%	4 2%	200 100%	784	.000
5. T.B with printed songs	90 45%	59 29.5%	28 14%	11 5.5%	9 4.5%	3 1.5%	200 100%	788	.000
6. T.B with visual materials	82 41%	76 38%	21 10.5%	10 5%	10 5%	1 0.5%	200 100%	597	.000
7. T.B with varied content	72 36%	74 37%	38 19%	11 5.5%	3 1.5%	2 1%	200 100%	792	.000
8. T.B with themes interesting to you	118 59%	61 30.5%	12 6%	4 2%	5 2.5%		200 100%	800	.000
9. Other material not T.B	86 43%	73 36.5%	24 12%	10 5%	5 2.5%	2 1%	200 100%	792	.000

* $p < .05$ (all cases) ; * $q = 788; 594; 784; 788; 597; 792; 800; 792$ respectively. [T.a = totally agree; A= agree; N.o= no opinion; D= disagree; T.d= totally disagree; M= missing; T= total; q= chi-squared value; p= probability (significance level)]

As the above table shows, students' answers concerning their perceptions about the textbook reveal a significant estimation of different items reaching a very high q value aligned with a corresponding highly significant p value. Students' perceptions seem to be concerned with thematic importance (item 8), thematic variety (item 7) and the tendency to highly favor listening-focused textbooks (item 2) including songs (item 5). In addition, the use of non-textbook focused material is also highly favored (item 9). The p value is highly significant ($p = .000$) for all hypotheses advanced above.

Concerning students' perceptions related to the textbook, the results show high deviations for hypotheses concerned with thematic importance, thematic variety and the preference of listening-focused textbooks including listening to songs. Most importantly, students revealed their need to use non-textbook focused material, and to be given a chance to select topics of their own choice and that are of interest to them instead of being imposed classroom material. Correspondingly, students overtly express a need to use more extra-curriculum activities and authentic material too. The perceptions here are indicative of learners' readiness to actively engage in and be responsible of their own learning by either choosing the topics and/or contributing to providing the material that can be used in class. Through their answers, students seem to favor songs and role plays. This matches with other empirical findings which reveal the positive impact of the use of creative strategies such as

singing songs and practicing socio drama techniques to improve learners speaking (Sweeny, 1992; Khmeis, 2007; and Yen-lin, 2002).

Conclusion

This article aims at investigating students' perceptions towards textbooks in Moroccan High schools. The operationalization of different research instruments and application of the SPSS software to the data collected revealed highly significant findings. Therefore, students' answers concerning their perceptions about the textbook reveal a significant estimation of different items reaching a very high q value aligned with a corresponding highly significant p value. Students' perceptions seem to be concerned with thematic importance, thematic variety and the tendency to highly favor listening-focused textbooks including songs. In addition, the use of non-textbook focused material is also highly favored. The findings of the present study have a number of pedagogical implications for the teaching/learning process of the speaking skill in EFL Moroccan classes. There is a strong need to base the textbooks on what learners think the most suitable or interesting for them especially listening-focused textbooks. As for the methodology and the scope of the whole investigation, the population sample included does not allow the findings to be generalizable, since the focus has been on the area of Salé Zemmour Zaer exclusively. The implication of other academies in the process could have increased the sample's representativity. Further research is needed to examine whether all variables included are closely related and to detect the degree of their correlation.

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