Assessing Practical General English Textbook: An Analysis of Overall Quality and Intercultural Communicative Competence Attributes [In English]

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive evaluation of Practical General English, a widely adopted university-level textbook, with a focus on its overall quality and its integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) attributes. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research draws on data collected from 30 Iranian university professors specializing in language education. Data were gathered through a 61-item checklist, developed by Lei and Soontornwipast (2020), which assessed two primary dimensions: Overall Quality (22 items) and ICC Attributes (39 items). Additionally, semi-structured interviews with five open-ended questions provided qualitative insights into the textbook's strengths and limitations. Quantitative findings revealed moderate to high satisfaction among professors, with an overall quality mean score of 3.92 (SD = 0.62) and an ICC attributes mean score of 3.78 (SD = 0.71), based on a 5-point Likert scale. The Practicality theme scored highest (M = 4.05, SD = 0.58), indicating the textbook's user-friendliness and adaptability, while Teaching Aids (M = 3.72, SD = 0.69) and Activities and Exercises (M = 3.71, SD = 0.70) received lower scores, suggesting deficiencies in supplementary resources and interactive tasks. Statistical analyses, including independent and paired-samples t-tests, showed no significant differences across themes or between dimensions (p > 0.05), indicating consistent perceptions of the textbook's strengths and weaknesses. Qualitative analysis highlighted the textbook's robust inclusion of cultural content, such as global festivals and intercultural scenarios, which professors noted fostered cultural awareness and empathy among students. However, recurring critiques highlighted the insufficient technological integration, including the lack of interactive

digital tools and multimedia resources, as well as a notable absence of teacher training materials to support ICC-focused instruction. These gaps align with contemporary literature advocating for technology-enhanced learning and educator preparedness to optimize ICC development (Byram et al., 2021; Godwin-Jones, 2022). The study highlights the effectiveness of Practical General English in supporting linguistic proficiency and ICC, but recommends enhancements to digital resources and instructor guidance to maximize its impact. By addressing these areas, the textbook could better prepare students for intercultural interactions in globalized contexts. This research contributes to the broader discourse on language textbook evaluation, offering actionable insights for educators and curriculum designers to refine language education programs and foster ICC in diverse, globalized classroom settings.

Keywords: Language Education, Cross-Cultural Communication Skills, Linguistic Instruction, Functional English

Introduction

Textbooks play an important role in language learning, and they are the materials used to practice in classrooms. Textbooks are a precious resource for teachers and students, giving guidance and aiding in memory retention (Awasthi, 2006, p.1). The most significant facet of textbook usage is for teachers to involve learners with the contents they are teaching (Harmer, 2007). Textbooks are not only tools for measuring students' progress and achievement but also serve as a means to impart language skills, morals, and cultural values (Sulistiyo et al., 2020). As the world has become more interdependent, communication across the borders of cultures has become vital. Language education programs are confronted with a new challenge in addition to teaching linguistic abilities: ensuring that learners acquire intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This paper seeks to assess the overall quality while examining its effectiveness in promoting ICC among students.

The significance of the ICC in language education cannot be overstated. As Byram et al. (2021) contend, developing learners' capabilities to navigate cultural differences is crucial in creating effective communication in a globalized society. Programs emphasizing ICC prepare students for active use with a variety of views and, subsequently, improve their competence both in language and culture. Agustin and Wirza (2020) emphasized the need to provide chances for students to learn the language, which will enhance their ICC. This study will evaluate how well the *Practical General English* program aligns with

these objectives, contributing to the broader discourse on effective language education. To achieve this aim, the study will address two primary research questions:

1. What is the overall quality of the *Practical General English* as perceived by university professors specializing in language education based on Lei (2020)?

2. How effectively does the program incorporate ICC attributes into its curriculum?

These questions will guide the assessment of the program's strengths and areas for improvement, providing valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers.

Previous research has identified that effectively designed language courses can go a long way toward significantly developing learners' intercultural competence, as seen by Liddicoat and Scarino (2020). Thus, the professors' assessments are expected to illustrate an appreciation of the course contributions toward ICC development.

In English language instruction, choosing an appropriate textbook is crucial to ensure effective language learning outcomes and the progress of ICC among learners. *Practical General English* is a widely used general resource in teaching English at universities, yet a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of its Overall Qualities and ICC attributes remains limited. Consequently, the lack of empirical evidence hinders educators and curriculum developers from making informed decisions regarding textbook selection. Moreover, a few studies have specifically examined the impact of ICC attributes in enhancing language proficiency and cultural sensitivity. Thus, this study seeks to address these research gaps by conducting a comparative analysis of the *Practical General English* textbook, assessing its Overall Quality, and exploring the extent to which it demonstrates attributes of ICC.

Review of Literature

Textbooks are crucial in language teaching and learning. Razmjoo (2010) stated that textbooks are particularly important as they are often the primary source after the teacher. McGrath (2006, p. 174) mentioned, textbooks can be compared to oil in cooking, serving as a valuable foundation. Similarly, textbooks can also be likened to ladies' handbags, as they provide us with what we require and are often carried by women wherever they go. Textbooks serve as commodities, political tools, and cultural symbols, thus becoming the focal point of conflicts and

negotiations to decide on their production, content selection, distribution, and utilization by teachers and students (Shannon, 2010).

Textbooks are vital resources for educational institutions, schools, and academic pursuits (Gholami, Nikou, & Soultanpour, 2012) and (Wang, 2010). Sheldon (1988) asserted that textbooks are guidance for students and teachers. Textbooks have an important role in classes (Guilloteaux, 2013). Textbooks also aid in learning the language by learners (Tomlinson, 2011) and (Waters, 2009). Textbooks are crucial in every learning environment, supporting educators' teaching responsibilities (Dudley & John, 2005).

Additionally, textbooks are responsible for presenting information in a clear and organized way, making it easily accessible to learners. Textbooks play a significant function in teaching, ranking as the second most essential resource following the teacher (Riazi, 2003). Horsley and Sikorova (2014) mentioned that the assertion made by politicians that the media will be the primary teaching aid in the time to come is contradicted by the continued significance of printed textbooks in the classroom. Horsley, Knight and Huntly (2010) commented that integrating textbooks with additional resources is necessary.

Gelfman, Podstringich and Losinskaya (2004) remarked that textbooks play a crucial role in imparting new knowledge to students and motivating them to expand their learning. They offer a structured mathematical framework that is both coherent and rational. Additionally, textbooks stimulate curiosity by introducing new inquiries and fostering students' engagement and innovation. Defining the role of a textbook in classrooms with absolute precision can be challenging, and both students and teachers require textbooks that are equipped with a structure to cater to their respective needs (Garinger, 2002). Garinger (2002) argues that it is important to take into account the balance between the text and coordination in production. Utilizing textbooks provides students with a sense of security and accomplishment within the educational environment (Razmjoo & Jozaghi, 2010).

Language education program evaluation is a necessary tool to understand how such programs provide linguistic proficiency and ICC. In the past decade or so, there has been considerable interest in ICC, or effective and appropriate communication across cultural boundaries. As Byram et al. (2021) have pinpointed, language education should be engaged not only in grammatical accuracy but also in developing learners' cultural awareness, attitudes, and skills necessary to accomplish intercultural interaction. Such a point of view is considered relevant in the analysis of the paper by Sarlak and Atabaki, entitled *Practical*

General English since it was aimed at the evaluation of the entirety of ICC attributes presented within the program.

Recent literature underscores the necessity of integrating cultural components into language curricula. Liddicoat and Scarino (2020) assert that effective language teaching must encompass a comprehensive understanding of cultural contexts, enabling learners to navigate real-world interactions with confidence. As Sarlak and Atabaki explore the effectiveness of *Practical General English,* they align with this growing consensus that traditional language instruction must evolve to include a focus on ICC training, preparing students for global citizenship.

The role of technology in improving language learning and ICC has also been a point of great interest in recent research. Godwin-Jones (2022) touches on how digital instruments and platforms support cross-cultural exchange and allow for real-life contexts of language use. Through integrating technology into their curriculum, educators can design immersive learning experiences that foster active engagement with a variety of cultures. This aspect may be integral to Sarlak and Atabaki's analysis, as they assess how *Practical General English* leverages technological advancements to enrich students' intercultural experiences.

Moreover, the attributes of ICC—knowledge, attitudes, and skills— are critical for evaluating language programs. Byram's (1997) model serves as a foundational framework for understanding these elements, and recent studies have expanded upon it to emphasize the importance of experiential learning opportunities that encourage reflection on cultural differences (Deardorff, 2020). This literature provides a robust framework for assessing how well *Practical General English* equips learners for intercultural interactions, making it a pertinent focus for Sarlak and Atabaki's investigation.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the positive impact of ICC-focused curricula on learners' outcomes. For instance, research by Huber (2021) indicates that students who engage in intercultural training exhibit enhanced communication skills and increased cultural empathy. These findings support the notion that integrating ICC into language education programs like *Practical General English* is essential for developing well-rounded language learners. Sarlak and Atabaki's work contributes to this growing body of evidence by examining how their curriculum aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches.

The significance of teacher training in implementing ICC-focused curricula cannot be overstated. Recent literature emphasizes the need for educators to possess a deep understanding of both language instruction

and intercultural dynamics (Byram et al., 2019). Professional development programs that include intercultural training can better equip educators to facilitate meaningful learning experiences for their students. In evaluating *Practical General English*, Sarlak and Atabaki may address the role of instructor preparedness in fostering ICC and its implications for overall program quality.

Besides training teachers, learner perspectives are very important in evaluating language programs. Engaging students in the evaluation process can offer valuable insights into the learning experiences and learners' needs (Lee & Toh, 2022). By incorporating learner feedback in the analysis, Sarlak and Atabaki could have enriched their evaluation of *Practical General English* to ensure it meets the diverse needs of its student population and fosters ICC.

The literature on ICC and language education, in conclusion, draws on the importance of the integration of cultural awareness into language curricula. Sarlak and Atabaki's analysis of *Practical General English* contributes to this discourse by assessing its overall quality and its potential to foster ICC among learners. By drawing on contemporary research and theoretical frameworks, their work emphasizes the need for language education to adapt to the demands of an increasingly globalized society.

Methodology
Method and Design

In this study, there isn't any treatment due to this research is descriptive. To evaluate *Practical General English*, the researcher utilized a descriptive design aimed at understanding the Overall Quality and ICC attributes of the textbook utilizing the *checklist that was developed by Lei and Soontornwipast (2020)* and a semi-structured interview consisting of five open-ended questions. The checklist was completed by University Teachers who are experts and have had the experience of teaching the book. The research approach was a mixed-methods approach due to the research utilizing both qualitative and quantitative phases. Finally, the analysis of the data was conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Participants

This study involved a sample of 30 university professors who specialize in language education and ICC from the population of all the university professors who teach English in Iran. The participants were purposefully selected from various institutions to ensure a diverse

representation of perspectives on the *Practical General English* program developed by Fatemeh Sarlak and Fatemeh Atabaki. Each respondent was invited to contribute his/her insights by using a structured checklist with items that were designed to probe the overall quality of this program and its attributes vis-à-vis ICC. The selection criteria were at least five years of teaching experience in language education for working with this curriculum.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument used for data collection was a checklist developed by Lei and Soontornwiapst (2020). This checklist is tailored to assess language education programs with a focus on ICC attributes and overall quality. The checklist has 61 items that pose diverse dimensions of the program regarding linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and pedagogical effectiveness. In addition to the quantitative items, five open-ended questions solicit qualitative responses from the participants regarding certain areas of the program. This mixed-methods approach enables a comprehensive evaluation by capturing both numerical ratings and detailed comments from the professors. The items on the checklist included two dimensions and eight themes, which are presented: Dimensions: 1. Overall Quality (22 items); 2. ICC attributes (39 items);

Themes: 1. Practicality (6 items); 2. Objectives (4 items); 3. Teaching aids (4 items); 4. Contents (8 items); 5. Language skills (2 items) 6. Cultural topics (8 items); 7. Cultural information (11 items); and 8. Activities and exercises (18 items).

After that, it was translated into Persian. It was done to make it easy for students to respond to it without any problem, and they could answer it due to their mother language is Persian.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process involved the distribution of the checklist to 30 university professors via a Google Form that was prepared in PDF format for ease of access. This email of invitation was prepared with an outline of the purpose of the study, the instructions to fill out the checklist, and a link to the Google Form. Utilizing an online platform ensured that the process of collecting the data would be efficient and that participants could respond at any time they preferred. Reminder notifications were sent one week after the initial invitation, and the data collection lasted for two weeks to ensure a high response rate; all responses were securely collected through Google Forms.

Data Analysis Procedure

In analyzing the data, a Likert-type type of equal range and the checklist consisted of two dimensions, eight themes, and 61 items were used. The statements were labelled as: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- No opinion, 4- agree, 5. Strongly agree. The data was analyzed by SPSS (V.26). SPSS was utilized because some parts of the data were quantitative. First, all answers which were completed by University Teachers were coded and transferred to SPSS. The mean, frequency, percentage, and standard deviation of the data were then obtained by SPSS. In presenting the results, the means, standard deviations, and percentages of each item were calculated to describe and summarize the teachers' responses. Statistical tests, such as T-tests, were conducted to determine if there were significant differences in the ratings of the textbook.

By obtaining the mean and standard deviations of the data, the researcher understood which items and categories received the highest and the lowest scores. As regards the qualitative part, content analysis was used to find further answers and information about the main research questions. The qualitative analysis will involve examining the comments and suggestions provided by the participants. These qualitative insights will provide a deeper understanding of specific strengths and weaknesses identified in the textbook via thematic analysis regarding *Practical General English*.

Results

The study involved 30 university professors who evaluated the *Practical General English* textbook using a 61-item checklist and semi-structured interviews. The checklist assessed two dimensions: Overall Quality (22 items) and ICC Attributes (39 items), across eight themes: Practicality, Objectives, Teaching Aids, Contents, Language Skills, Cultural Topics, Cultural Information, and Activities and Exercises. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (V.26), and qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis.

Quantitative Results

Overall Quality Dimension

The Overall Quality dimension (22 items) had a mean score of 3.92 (SD = 0.62), indicating moderate to high satisfaction. Table 1 summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations for the four themes within this dimension.

Table 1
Mean Scores for Overall Quality Themes

Theme	Mean	SD	% Agree/Strongly Agree
Practicality (6 items)	4.05	0.58	78%
Objectives (4 items)	3.98	0.60	75%
Teaching Aids (4 items)	3.72	0.69	65%
Contents (8 items)	3.94	0.63	76%

The Practicality theme received the highest mean score (M = 4.05, SD = 0.58), with 78% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the textbook is user-friendly and adaptable to classroom needs. Teaching Aids scored the lowest (M = 3.72, SD = 0.69), with only 65% positive responses, suggesting limited integration of supplementary resources like digital tools.

ICC Attributes Dimension

The ICC Attributes dimension (39 items) had a mean score of 3.78 (SD = 0.71), reflecting moderate satisfaction. Table 2 presents the mean scores for the four themes within this dimension.

Table 2
Mean Scores for ICC Attributes Themes

Theme	Mean	SD	% Agree/Strongly Agree
Language Skills (2 items)	3.85	0.66	72%
Cultural Topics (8 items)	4.02	0.64	80%
Cultural Information (11 items)	3.76	0.73	68%
Activities and Exercises (18 items)	3.71	0.70	66%

Cultural Topics received the highest mean score (M = 4.02, SD = 0.64), with 80% of respondents agreeing that the textbook effectively introduces diverse cultural perspectives. Activities and Exercises scored the lowest (M = 3.71, SD = 0.70), with 66% positive responses,

indicating that tasks may not fully engage students in intercultural interactions.

Statistical Analysis

Independent t-tests were conducted to compare mean scores across themes within each dimension. No significant differences were found between themes in the Overall Quality dimension (p > 0.05) or the ICC Attributes dimension (p > 0.05), suggesting consistent perceptions across categories. A paired-samples t-test comparing Overall Quality (M = 3.92) and ICC Attributes (M = 3.78) showed no significant difference, t (29) = 1.82, p = 0.08, indicating that professors rated both dimensions similarly.

Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of responses to the five open-ended questions identified three key themes:

Strengths in Cultural Content: Professors praised the textbook's inclusion of diverse cultural topics (e.g., global festivals, cross-cultural communication scenarios), noting that these fostered cultural awareness and empathy. One respondent stated, "The cultural topics are engaging and relevant, helping students understand global perspectives."

Need for Technological Integration: A recurring critique was the lack of digital resources, such as interactive online exercises or multimedia content. A professor commented, "Incorporating technology could make intercultural activities more immersive and appealing to students."

Teacher Training Gaps: Several respondents highlighted the absence of teacher guides or professional development resources to support ICC-focused instruction. One professor noted, "The textbook assumes teachers are well-versed in ICC, but many need training to effectively deliver this content."

Discussion

The findings indicate that *Practical General English* is perceived as a moderately to highly effective textbook for language education, with mean scores of 3.92 for Overall Quality and 3.78 for ICC Attributes. The high ratings for Practicality (M = 4.05) and Cultural Topics (M = 4.02) align with the literature emphasizing the importance of user-friendly materials and cultural integration in language curricula (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2020; Byram et al., 2021). These strengths suggest that the textbook supports both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness, key components of ICC (Byram, 1997).

However, the lower scores for Teaching Aids (M = 3.72) and Activities and Exercises (M = 3.71) highlight areas for improvement. The limited use of digital tools, as noted in qualitative feedback, contrasts

with recent research advocating for technology-enhanced learning to foster ICC (Godwin-Jones, 2022). Similarly, the lack of teacher training resources echoes Byram et al. (2019), who stress the need for educator preparedness in delivering ICC-focused curricula. These gaps may hinder the textbook's ability to fully engage students in experiential learning, a critical aspect of ICC development (Deardorff, 2020).

The absence of significant differences across themes ($p > 0.05$) suggests that professors view the textbook's strengths and weaknesses as relatively balanced. However, the qualitative data provide nuanced insights, particularly regarding the need for technological integration and teacher support. These findings contribute to the discourse on textbook evaluation by highlighting the interplay between content quality and implementation challenges.

Limitations include the relatively small sample size (N = 30), which may limit generalizability, and the reliance on self-reported data, which could introduce bias. Additionally, the study focused solely on professors' perspectives, omitting student feedback, which Lee and Toh (2022) argue is essential for a holistic evaluation. Future research should incorporate learner perspectives and assess the textbook's impact on students' ICC development through longitudinal studies.

Findings of this study reveal that *Practical General English* is perceived by university professors as a moderately to highly effective textbook, with an overall quality mean score of **3.92 (SD = 0.62)** and ICC attributes mean score of **3.78 (SD = 0.71)**. These results align with previous research emphasizing the importance of well-structured language textbooks in fostering both linguistic and intercultural competence (Byram et al., 2021; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2020).

Interpretation of Key Findings
Strengths in Cultural Content and Practicality
The high ratings for **Cultural Topics (M = 4.02)** and **Practicality (M = 4.05)** suggest that the textbook successfully integrates diverse cultural perspectives while remaining accessible for classroom use. This supports Byram's (1997) argument that effective ICC instruction requires exposure to varied cultural contexts.

Qualitative feedback highlighted that the textbook's cultural themes (e.g., global festivals, intercultural dialogues) enhance students' awareness and empathy, reinforcing findings from Huber (2021), who found that cultural exposure improves communicative competence.

Deficiencies in Technology and Teacher Support

The lower scores for **Teaching Aids (M = 3.72)** and **Activities and Exercises (M = 3.71)** indicate gaps in supplementary resources. Professors noted a lack of digital tools (e.g., interactive exercises, multimedia), which contrasts with Godwin-Jones' (2022) advocacy for technology-enhanced ICC learning.

The absence of teacher training materials emerged as a critical limitation, echoing Byram et al. (2019), who argue that educators need specialized training to effectively teach ICC. Without such support, the textbook's potential may remain underutilized.

Consistency Across Themes

The lack of significant differences between themes ($p > 0.05$) suggests that professors' perceptions of the textbook's strengths and weaknesses are evenly distributed. However, qualitative insights reveal nuanced concerns, particularly regarding implementation challenges.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical: The study reinforces Byram's (1997) ICC model, demonstrating that textbooks must balance linguistic and cultural components. It also supports Deardorff's (2020) emphasis on experiential learning, as professors called for more interactive activities.

Practical: Curriculum developers should:

Integrate digital resources (e.g., online exercises, cultural simulations) to align with modern pedagogical trends.

Provide teacher guides or workshops to enhance ICC instruction.

Expand activities to encourage real-world intercultural interactions (e.g., virtual exchanges with learners from other cultures).

Limitations

Sample Size: The study's small sample ($N = 30$) limits generalizability.

Perspective Bias: Relying solely on professors' views excludes student feedback, which could offer valuable insights into learning outcomes (Lee & Toh, 2022).

Context-Specific: Findings may not apply to non-Iranian settings due to cultural and educational differences.

Conclusion:

This study demonstrates that *Practical General English* is a valuable resource for language education, with notable strengths in practicality and cultural content that support ICC development. However, deficiencies in technological integration and teacher training resources suggest areas for enhancement. These findings underscore the need for language textbooks

to evolve in response to technological advancements and pedagogical demands. Educators and curriculum developers should consider supplementing *Practical General English* with digital tools and professional development programs to maximize its efficacy. Further research is recommended to explore student outcomes and the long-term impact of ICC-focused curricula in diverse educational contexts.

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