

Evaluation of a Japanese Language Textbook from Teachers' and Language Learners' Perspectives

Zeinab Shekarabi

University of Tehran

Abstract

Textbooks are valuable resources that play a key role in teaching foreign languages. Therefore, the evaluation of textbooks is considered an inseparable part of the teaching process. Since teachers and language learners use these books to teach and learn, their perspective is of great importance in evaluating textbooks. The present study is to evaluate the textbook *Minna no Nihongo* (Japanese for Everyone), which is one of the most widely used and important sources of Japanese language teaching across the globe. In a questionnaire, teachers and students of the Japanese language at the University of Tehran separately evaluated this textbook in terms of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general. The findings showed that all participating teachers and students evaluated positively this book in most of the assessment components. Also, there were no significant differences between the teachers' and students' perspectives. In other words, both teachers and students agreed on the effectiveness of the textbook in terms of layout and design, activities, language type, content and subject, and in general; however, they believed that the book needed to be improved in teaching skills to learners. Ultimately, when choosing this book, despite its various good components, it might be found deficient in the area of skills development and so it may be necessary to use some supplementary materials.

Keywords: textbook evaluation, Japanese language teaching, *Minna no Nihongo*

Introduction

There are numerous educational resources available for language learning, including written materials such as textbooks, and non-written materials such as educational CDs and audio aids. However, since books are mostly used for teaching and learning a language, textbooks are of great importance for both teachers and language learners and are among the necessary and much needed resources. Textbooks not only provide a framework for teachers to help them achieve their lesson objectives, but also have a direct impact on the students' and language learners' performance and efficiency. In other words, teachers and students are influenced by textbooks (Ahour & Omrani, 2020). The more students are content with the textbook and like it, the more they become interested in the lesson and do more activities (Tomlinson, 2012). *Minna no Nihongo* is one of the most widely used books in the field of Japanese language teaching. Despite the emergence and decline of other textbooks, this book has been used in different parts of the world for a long time and is still in use by teachers and language learners. Therefore, the present study aims at evaluating the two-volume book *Minna no Nihongo* from Iranian teachers' and students' perspectives.

Literature Review

The use of books in language teaching, without a doubt, leads to coherence of content and order in educational materials, and books might also create a systematic structure in the learners' mind. Textbooks are useful learning resources that can serve as a guide and reference (McGrath, 2006). Moreover, textbooks are a coherent source of information for both teachers and learners that facilitate the understanding of topics and concepts and guide learners through language structures and learning patterns like a map (Yule, 2010). Although some researchers consider books as an obstacle in education (Tomlinson, 2011; Ur, 1993), books can be useful and effective when there is a common educational goal to meet the students' needs.

Although using books to promote educational goals is considered helpful, no book is complete (Grant, 1987; McDonough & Shaw, 2003). Therefore, it is essential to evaluate educational books. Teachers' and students' perspectives are very influential in evaluating and improving the quality of books. Assessment enables teachers to make the right choice from among diverse teaching resources. The wrong choice harms language learners' learning process (Mukundan, Nimehchisalem, & Hajimohammadi, 2011).

Tomlinson (2012) states that textbook evaluation means examining the effectiveness of a book from different aspects, which can include the book's achievements for its audience, the book's educational activities and content, and how it improves the audiences' knowledge. Two factors are of great importance in the process of evaluating a book: one is the students who use the book in the educational environment and the other is measuring the level of need satisfaction of both students and teachers. Therefore, textbook evaluation should not be confused with a case study and objective analysis that focus on the context of the book.

The process of evaluating books can be done in two forms of impressionistic evaluation and in-depth evaluation (McGrath, 2002; Cunningsworth, 1995). In the impressionistic method, one evaluates the structure, layout and design, content organization, and activities to get an understanding of the book advantages and disadvantages. Then, in the in-depth evaluation, certain characteristics of the book are examined in detail, such as how the activities are presented, activities being need-oriented, to what level the book can teach skills, etc. The book evaluation happens before, during and after using the book. To measure how much the book matches any long-term and short-term goals, the evaluation is done after using the book (McGrath, 2002).

Questionnaires in book evaluation can give us an understanding of how useful that book is (Harmer, 1991). They are useful to learn about different opinions regarding the books (McGrath, 2002) as they contain a systematic and logical process (McGrath, 2002). Although it is not possible to define a single questionnaire for all assessments (McDonough and Shaw, 2003), specific questionnaires can be designed to comply with the assessment components (Mukundan, et al., 2011). Evaluation of educational books based on the components of assessment is one possible way that leads teacher/educators to make the right choice and select an appropriate book that meets more needs of students.

In the field of language textbook evaluation, most of the evaluations are about languages with a larger number of learners, including English textbooks, and evaluation of languages such as Japanese are less common. In this regard, Luis Miguel Dos Santos (2017) reviewed the Romanized version of *Japanese for Busy People I*, a book for new learners of the Japanese language. Santos evaluated the book with a questionnaire from 46 teachers who taught using the book in Boston, Massachusetts. His questions included:

(1) the availability and price of the book, (2) being usable and up-to-date, (3) useful exercises, (4) the book structure, (5) balance between activities and lessons, (6) teaching the correct pronunciation of words, (7) using grammar and vocabulary in realistic contexts, (8) activities, (9) proportion of four skills, and (10) the book matching the learners' level. In this survey, none of the teachers had a negative opinion about the book and 90% believed that it has a systematic structure, and up-to-date and efficient content. However, some teachers pointed out that the book is not efficient in teaching the correct pronunciation of words and the four skills.

Onur Er (2017) analyzed the content of *Genki I: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese* from a cultural point of view. In his research, he qualitatively evaluated cultural elements such as behavioral aspects, cultural beliefs, and cultural awareness in this book. As a result of this assessment, he found out that *Genki I* focuses on the description of cultural issues and deals with behavioral and cognitive aspects more than teaching cultural beliefs.

In another study, Umehara (2011) evaluated four Japanese textbooks (*Mirai, Hai, Iitomo, and Obento*) that were published in Australia and taught to the junior high school students. He evaluated the books on the basis of grammar and syntax in the foreign language curriculum of Australian schools. In his evaluation, Umehara found out that although the curriculum tries to focus on practical teachings rather than grammar, the books still deal with syntactic and grammatical issues.

Among the Japanese textbooks, no evaluation has been done on the popular and widely used textbook *Minna no Nihongo* from the perspective of the users of this book (i.e., teachers, Japanese as a second/foreign language learners). *Minna no Nihongo* had been used for about 20 years in Iran at the University of Tehran as the only prominent academic center in Iran. *Minna no Nihongo* was first published by the Japanese publisher Surie Netowaaku (3A Corporation) in 1998 in two volumes (elementary level), and a new version was released in 2012 with some revisions. The book contains 50 lessons (25 lessons per volume). It includes a CD for the dialogues. Updating the educational content and supplementary books have made this book very popular in educational centers, both academic and non-academic. In the present study, the new 2012 version of the book was evaluated.

Research Questions

Since Japanese teachers and language learners use language textbooks to teach and learn, they are entitled to be involved in the evaluation of textbooks, and their opinion about the efficiency of the textbooks is of great importance. Therefore by examining the following three questions, this study seeks to evaluate the efficiency of *Minna no Nihongo* in terms of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general, from the perspective of teachers and students at the University of Tehran.

1. To what degree do teachers believe *Minna no Nihongo* is a useful textbook by evaluating it in terms of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general?
2. To what degree do students believe *Minna no Nihongo* is a useful textbook by evaluating it in terms of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general?
3. To what degree do teachers and students have different opinions about *Minna no Nihongo*?

Methodology

In the present study, using a descriptive research model, *Minna no Nihongo* was evaluated. Evaluation was done using a questionnaire provided to Japanese language teachers and students at the University of Tehran.

As the University of Tehran is one of the major active centers in teaching Japanese language in Iran, Persian-speaking students and teachers in the university who had the experience of teaching and learning Japanese using *Minna no Nihongo* (volumes 1 and 2) participated in this study. A total of nine teachers participated in the study, all having experience teaching *Minna no Nihongo* (volumes 1 and 2), and more than half of them had more than 11 years of experience teaching Japanese. Information about teachers is given in Table 1.

Table 1
Information about teachers participating in the study

	Gender		Teaching experience			
	Female (%)	Male (%)	1-5 years (%)	6-10 years (%)	11-15 years (%)	16 and over (%)
Teachers	5 (56)	4 (44)	3 (33)	1 (12)	3 (33)	2 (22)
Total N (%)	9 (100)		9 (100)			

In addition, 90 Iranian students who were learning Japanese at the University of Tehran, including 60 female (66.66%) and 30 male (33.33%) students took part in the study. All the participating students had the experience of learning Japanese with *Minna no Nihongo* (volumes 1 and 2). They are relatively familiar with other Japanese language textbooks and resources, and language teaching methods. Familiarity of students with other Japanese language teaching books acknowledges the reliability of the assessment made by the students in the present study.

To evaluate *Minna no Nihongo*, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = partially agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) was used. The questionnaire was adopted from the evaluation rating scale of textbooks by Paramitha (2018). The researcher revised it for the Persian-speaking target population in this study. This questionnaire consists of 30 questions that cover six components of evaluation including layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and the book in general. The layout and design component evaluates the following issues: (1) overview of teaching patterns, (2) appropriate layout and design, (3) organized structure of each chapter, (4) vocabulary list and glossary, (5) periodic exercises, (6) appropriate periodic tests, (7) guide to use the book, and (8) clarity of book objectives for both teachers and students. In the component of activities, (9) appropriate activities, (10) practical activities for all learners, (11) individual and group activities, (12) real and tangible examples, (13) the level of creativity, and (14) the level of flexibility are evaluated. The component of skills includes (15) the level of emphasis on the student's skills learning and skills development, (16) proportion of four main language skills, (17) phonology and correct pronunciation, and (18) addressing sub-skills such as taking notes

and concepts comprehension. The language type component includes (19) applying language as it is used in the real world, (20) suitable language of the book for the students' level, (21) proper development of grammatical points and vocabulary, and (22) having comprehensible and easy explanations with appropriate examples. The content and subject component includes (23) need-driven content, (24) presentation of real and genuine content, (25) interesting and engaging content, (26) diverse subjects, and (27) content away from cultural prejudices. Finally, the 'in general' component looks at issues such as (28) whether the level of the book is appropriate for teaching at the university, (29) whether the book encourages students to learn Japanese, and (30) whether the participant would choose the book again for language teaching/learning.

Using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the reliability of each of the six components was measured separately as well as the reliability of the questionnaire as a whole. The alpha coefficients in Table 2 confirm the high reliability of the questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.97$), and each of the relevant components (α value from 0.74 to 0.84).

Table 2
Cronbach's alpha coefficients on the evaluation rating scale of Minna no Nihongo

Textbook evaluation scale/criteria	Alpha
Layout and design	0.79
Activities	0.89
Skills	0.74
Language type	0.84
Subject and content	0.77
In general (Whole aspect)	0.83
Total	0.94

Results

In the first research question (to what degree do teachers believe *Minna no Nihongo* is a useful textbook by evaluating it in terms of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general), the usefulness of *Minna no Nihongo* was examined in each of the components of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general from the teachers' point of view. The results are presented in Table 3. About two-thirds of the teachers, 73.60%, agreed and strongly agreed that the textbook is effective according to the layout and design. In details, they evaluated the structure of the chapters, vocabulary, exercises and clarity of book objectives in this book as effective (Table 4). In contrast, only 8.32% of teachers did not consider the book design appropriate. The 73.60% approval shows that the book has a favorable layout and design. Regarding the book activities, while less than one third (20.37%) of teachers believed the activities were inappropriate, more than half of the teachers (24.07% agree and strongly agree and 53.71% partially agree) acknowledged they were useful. Comparing 20.37% disagreement and 24.07% approval indicates that there is a slight difference between the teachers who approved and disapproved of the appropriateness of activities. However, the higher percentage of approval over the disapproval shows that activities were rather effective. Regarding the skills component,

nearly half of the teachers (47.21%) emphasized the inefficiency of the book in skills training. This shows that teachers believe that the textbook is possibly deficient in the area of skills training. The majority of teachers (80.54%) agreed and strongly agreed with the appropriateness of the language of the book, while only 2.77% disagreed. Teachers' maximum agreement and opposition of less than 3% confirm the authenticity and the proper language of the book. In evaluating the content component, nearly half of the teachers (48.89% agree and strongly agree) rated the content as appropriate, and one fifth (19.99%) of them disagreed and strongly disagreed with the appropriateness of the content. This shows that the book has content that is regarded as effective. Finally, in the 'in general' evaluation, more than half of the teachers (66.65%) believed that the textbook is suitable, about one third (29.65%) said partially suitable, and only a small percentage (3.77%) of the teachers said unsuitable. This indicates that generally the book is satisfactory.

According to the results of the study, the top three components of the book, which were approved by teachers are the language of the book (80.54%), layout and design (73.60%), and in general (66.65%), respectively.

Table 3
Mean, standard deviation, and percentage of teachers' evaluation of Minna no Nihongo

Evaluation criteria	N	Mean	SD	Variance	Strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	Strongly agree
					%	%	%	%	%
Layout & design	9	30.77	3.38	11.47	2.77	5.55	18.05	51.38	22.22
Activities	9	18.33	3.28	10.82	3.70	16.67	53.71	20.37	3.70
Skills	9	11	3.1	9.64	19.44	27.77	19.44	25.00	8.33
Language type	9	15.88	1.71	2.92	0	2.77	16.66	61.10	19.44
Subject & content	9	17.22	3.71	13.83	0	19.99	31.11	33.33	15.55
In general (Whole aspect)	9	11.44	1.61	2.61	0	3.70	37.03	48.14	18.51

Table 4 shows the percentage of frequency of teachers' opinion on each of the components of assessment. In the layout and design component, teachers expressed the highest level of satisfaction about clarity of book objectives for both teachers and students and glossary items with 88.89%. In the activities component, 66.67% of teachers said they were satisfied that they could easily change or complete the activities, while one third of the teachers (33.33%) were not content as they believed the activities did not stimulate students' creativity. In the skills component, the biggest objection (66.66%) is about the lack of correct teaching of pronunciation to students. However, 66.67% of teachers agreed with the level of emphasis on the student's skills learning and skills development. In assessing the language type component, more than 80% of teachers (88.88%) agreed with the way language was used in the book. In the content component,

more than half of the teachers (66.66%) agreed with the presentation of real and genuine content of the book. Regarding ‘in general’ component, more than 70% of the teachers (77.77%) considered the book suitable for teaching at the university, and no one indicated that they would not choose the book again for teaching.

Table 4
Percentage of frequency of teachers' and students' opinion about the evaluation of Minna no Nihongo in each component

Evaluation components in details	Teachers			Students			
	Agree & strongly agree	Partially agree	Disagree & strongly disagree	Agree & strongly agree	Partially agree	Disagree & strongly disagree	
Layout & design	1. The book includes an overview of what will be taught in each unit.	77.78	11.11	11.11	60	26.66	13.33
	2. The book has an appropriate layout and attractive design.	55.55	44.44	0	50	40	9.99
	3. The book has an organized structure for each chapter.	88.89	0	11.11	66.66	20	13.33
	4. The book includes an adequate vocabulary list and glossary.	88.89	0	11.11	80	10	6.66
	5. The book includes periodic exercises.	77.77	22.22	0	76.66	23.33	0
	6. The book includes appropriate periodic tests.	44.44	22.22	33.33	50	13.33	36.66
	7. The book has guide/guidebook that explains how to use this book more effectively.	66.66	33.33	0	70	26.66	3
	8. The material's objectives are apparent to both the teacher and student.	88.89	11.11	0	86.66	10	3.33
Activities	9. The book provides appropriate activities which are well-balanced.	22.22	55.56	22.22	20	50	29.29
	10. The activities are practical for all learners.	22.22	55.56	22.22	20	40	39.99
	11. The activities include individual and group work.	11.11	55.56	22.22	20	50	30
	12. The activities include real and tangible examples.	22.22	55.56	22.22	20	56.66	23.33
	13. The activities promote creativity.	0	66.66	33.33	0	56.66	43.33
	14. The book's activities are flexible and modifiable.	66.67	33.33	0	50	46.66	3
Skills	15. The book emphasizes the student's skills learning and skills development.	66.67	22.22	11.11	50	40	10
	16. The book provides an appropriate proportion of four	55.55	22.22	22.22	20	23.33	56.66

	main language skills.						
	17. The book highlights the phonology and correct pronunciation (i.e., stress, intonation).	22.22	11.11.	66.66	20	10	69.99
	18. The book addresses sub-skills (e.g., note-taking, concepts comprehension).	22.22	22.22	55.55	20	20	60
Language type	19. The language of the book is authentic (real-life Japanese).	77.78	11.11	11.11	56.66	20	23.33
	20. The language of the book is suitable for the students' level.	77.77	22.22	0	76.66	20	3.33
	21. The book develops the grammatical points and vocabulary properly.	88.88	11.11	0	76.66	20	3.33
	22. The grammar points are explained comprehensibly with appropriate examples.	77.77	22.22	0	66.66	30	3.33
Content & subject	23. The content of the book is relevant to students' needs as a Japanese language learner(s).	44.44	56.56	0	40	50	10
	24. The content of the book is generally realistic.	66.66	11.11	22.22	46.66	20	33.33
	25. The content of the book is interesting and engaging.	33.33	44.44	22.22	20	40	39.99
	26. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content.	44.44	33.33	22.22	30	40	29.99
	27. The content of the book is not culturally biased.	55.55	11.11	33.33	56.66	10	33.33
In general	28. The level of the book is appropriate for teaching at the university.	77.77	22.22	20	76.66	20	3.33
	29. The book encourages students to learn Japanese.	66.67	44.44	11.11	50	26.66	23.33
	30. I would choose this book again for Japanese language teaching/learning.	55.55	44.44	0	40	56.66	3.33

In the second research question (to what degree do students believe *Minna no Nihongo* is a useful textbook by evaluating it in terms of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general?), Japanese students expressed their opinion whether *Minna no Nihongo* is effective in each component: layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general (Table 5). More than half of the students (67.50%) agreed and strongly agreed with the effectiveness of the design of the book, and only 11.24% disagreed; this indicates that students believe the book has an appropriate layout and design. Regarding the book activities being useful, 21.66% of the students agreed and strongly agreed, while 28.32% disagreed and strongly disagreed with it. Although there is a slight difference between the students in favor of and against the activities, the number of those who disagreed with it was higher, which shows the activities are not appropriate enough. Regarding the skills component, while about one third of the students (27.50%) expressed satisfaction with how the book teaches them (agree and strongly agree), about half of the students (49.15%) disagreed and

strongly disagreed with it. Based on this, it can be said that the majority of the students are not satisfied with the skills training in the book. The language of the book is a component that more than half of the students (69.15%) agreed and strongly agreed with, while only 8.32% disagreed with it. The students' consensus in this regard confirms that the language of the book is likely suitable for the students' level, and the grammatical points and vocabulary were developed properly. More than half of the students thought that (38.66% = agree & strongly agree, 32% = partially agree) the book is effective in terms of content. This is while less than a third of them (29.32%) disagreed with the effectiveness of the content. This high percentage of agreement indicates that students rated the book as effective in terms of content. For the 'in general' evaluation, about half of the students (55.55%) agreed and strongly agreed with the usefulness of the book as a whole, while one tenth of the students (9.99%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Meanwhile, about a third of the students (34.44%) partially agreed. So it can be said that most of the students rated the book as good and useful.

According to the findings of the present study, in students' opinion, three of the best components of the book are the language of the book (69.15%), layout and design (67.50%), and 'in general' (55.55%), respectively.

Table 5
Mean, standard deviation, and percentage of students' evaluation of Minna no Nihongo

Evaluation criteria	N	Mean	SD	Variance	Strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	Strongly agree
					%	%	%	%	%
Layout & design	90	3.31	0.46	0.21	2.91	8.33	21.25	47.08	20.42
Activities	90	3.73	0.51	0.27	8.33	19.99	49.99	18.33	3.33
Skills	90	2.88	0.66	0.44	16.66	32.49	23.33	20	7.5
Language type	90	2.69	0.74	0.55	0.83	7.49	22.5	54.99	14.16
Subject & content	90	3.74	0.60	0.36	3.33	25.99	32	27.33	11.33
In general (Whole aspect)	90	3.17	0.71	0.51	3.33	6.66	34.44	42.22	13.33

As shown in Table 4, in the layout and design component, the highest percentage of students' agreement went to the clarity of the book objectives with 86.66%. Glossary and proper periodic exercises came in the next ranks with 80% and 76.66%, respectively. In the activities component, half of the students (50%) agreed and strongly agreed with the flexibility of activities and less than half of them (43.33%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with that the activities of the book promote creativity. In the skills component, half of the students (50%) agreed and strongly agreed with the level of emphasis on the student's skills learning and skills development, while more than half of them (69.99%) were dissatisfied with the lack of proper Japanese pronunciation training. In assessing the language type, suitable language of the book for the students' level, proper development of grammatical points and vocabulary were approved by the students (76.66%).

Regarding the content component, around half of the students (56.66%) agreed and strongly agreed that the content of the book was not culturally biased. But 39.99% were against interesting and engaging content of the book. About 70% of the students (76.66%) agreed that the level of the book was proper for the university and half of them (50%) stated that the book has increased their interest in learning Japanese.

The third research question examines whether there is a significant difference between teachers' and students' evaluation of *Minna no Nihongo*. To do this, with the help of Chi-square test, teachers' and students' evaluation in each of the components of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general were examined. The expected frequency of no cell was less than 5. As shown in Table 6, no significant differences were observed between teachers' and students' evaluation for any of the components of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general ($p > 0.5$). This means that teachers and students agree on the evaluation of each component of the layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general. Teachers and students rated the book useful and effective in terms of layout and design, language type, content, and in general, but believed that it is not appropriate in terms of skills training.

Table 6
Chi-square test results for each component of evaluation of Minna no Nihongo

Evaluation criteria	Pearson Chi-Square test		
	df	Sig	Value
Layout and design	4	0.96	0.61
Activities	4	0.96	0.61
Skills	4	0.94	0.75
Language type	4	0.89	1.11
Subject and content	4	0.88	1.13
In general (Whole aspect)	4	0.88	1.15

Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, teachers and students separately evaluated *Minna no Nihongo* in terms of layout and design, activities, skills, language type, content and subject, and in general. The result showed that the book was appropriate in terms of layout and design, activities, language type, content and subject, and in general, as teachers and students approved the book in these areas. However, they believed that the book is poor in terms of skills training, skills development, and the proportion of the four language skills.

Although individual characteristics, methods, and purpose of language learning are influential in choosing an appropriate textbook, according to the present study, it can be said that *Minna no Nihongo* is effective and valuable in most components of the evaluation. It is a suitable and useful textbook for teaching and learning Japanese regarding its layout and design, activities, language type, content and subject, and in general. In addition, as it was mentioned in the result section, to the consensus of teachers and students on positively evaluating *Minna no Nihongo*, in terms of layout and design, activities, language type, content and subject, and in general, it is interesting to note that

the first three priorities of both teachers and students are the language of the book, layout and design, and the book in general; This can indicate the great influence of the book in these areas in particular.

Regarding the language type component, both teachers and students acknowledge that grammatical points and vocabulary, and real-life Japanese as the most influential parts. Regarding the layout and design of the book, more than 80% of teachers and students considered the objectives of the book clear and effective, and named the vocabulary list and glossary, the organized structure of the chapters, the exercises, and the periodic exams among the most influential parts. Vocabulary lists and the layout of books are important elements that connect language learners with their textbooks (Sadeghi, 2020), in the present study, the Japanese language learners evaluated *Minna no Nihongo* positively at this point. Moreover, the authenticity of the language in this book is important because applying language as it is used in the real world is one of the vital elements for the development of communication skills of language learners, particularly for the language learners who learn the language as a foreign language (Alemi, Ahmadi, & Rezanejad, 2020; Alemi & Mesbah, 2013).

In general, more than 70% of teachers and students agreed that the book level was in line with university education. Also, more than half of teachers and students strongly expressed interest in choosing *Minna no Nihongo* again and said that it would encourage students to learn Japanese. Stimulating the interest of language learners in language learning is considered as an important and effective component in the evaluation of textbooks (Herliana, Djajanegara, & Suendarti, 2020). The finding of the present study confirms this feature for *Minna no Nihongo*. The existence of such features, therefore, might lead a majority of Iranian teachers and students to be satisfied with the book. On the other hand, content that avoids cultural prejudices is another strong point for this book that has attracted the attention of more than half of the teachers and students in this study. Avoidance of cultural prejudices and beliefs was mentioned in the Japanese language textbook, *Genki I*, in the previous studies (Er, 2017). Moreover, in line with the previous studies that showed general satisfaction of users with some Japanese language textbooks (Santos, 2017; Umehara, 2011), the findings of the current study showed that teachers and students are satisfied with *Minna no Nihongo* as a whole. This suggests that Japanese language textbooks are generally satisfactory to their users; however, there are some points that may need to be revised.

Although *Minna no Nihongo* has many positive aspects, its poor skills training aspect should not be ignored. Teachers and students are dissatisfied with the lack of proportion among the four language skills, lack of pronunciation and phonetics training, and the lack of sub-skills such as contents comprehension and note-taking in this book. In particular, they strongly feel the need for teaching correct Japanese pronunciation in the book. The lack of proper Japanese pronunciation training was also observed in some other Japanese textbooks (i.e. *Japanese for Busy People I*) in previous studies (Santos, 2017). Therefore, teachers, students, and language learners who intend to use this book to teach and learn Japanese should also consider using other supplementary books, educational resources, and teaching aids to improve all the language skills.

In the present study, *Minna no Nihongo*, as one of the most important and reliable Japanese language textbooks, was evaluated by Iranian teachers and students who had experience using it. The number of learners and especially teachers of Japanese in Iran is limited; however, since the role of teachers and evaluation can be decisive in the work

process (Ahmadi & Shekarabi, 2011), more accurate and in-depth findings can be achieved by increasing the number of participating teachers and adding more detailed components in the assessment. For more comprehensive and accurate results, it is also suggested that a comparison is made between *Minna no Nihongo* and other textbooks in this field in another study. Furthermore, to generalize the results of this study, it is suggested that the evaluation of *Minna no Nihongo* is also done from the perspective of teachers and language learners in other regions and countries.

References

- Ahmadi, Sh. M., & Shekarabi, Z. (2011). The Effect of Feedback on the Writing of Iranian Learners of Japanese as a Foreign Language. *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 1(2), 5-17.
- Ahour, T., & Omrani, P. (2020). Abstracts Evaluation of English Textbook “Prospect 2” based on Students’ Needs and Teachers’ Perceptions. *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 9(3), 659-690. [10.22059/jflr.2019.279184.617](https://doi.org/10.22059/jflr.2019.279184.617).
- Alemi, M., Ahmadi, K., & Rezanejad, A. (2020). Evaluation of High School English Course Books in Iran: Task Types in Focus. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 8(32), 107-124.
- Alemi, M. & Mesbah, Z. (2013). Textbook evaluation based on the ACTFL standards: The case study of Top-Notch series. *The Iranian EFL Journal*, 9, 162-71.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Er, O. (2017). Evaluation of the cultural elements in the textbook “Genki I: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese”. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 5(9), 193-204.
- Grant, M. (1987). *Making the Most of Your Textbook*. London: Longman.
- Harmer, J. (1991). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Harlow, England: Longman
- Herliana, L., Djajanegara, S., & Suendarti, M. (2020). Students’ and Teachers’ Perspectives on EFL Textbook for Senior High School Students. *DEIKSIS*, 12(01), 44-55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/deiksis.v12i01.5585>.
- McDonough, J., & Shaw, C. (2003). *Materials and Methods in ELT: A Teacher's Guide*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- McGrath, I. (2002). *Materials Evaluation and Design for Language Teaching*. London, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- McGrath, I. (2006). *Teachers' and Learners' Images for Coursebooks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mukundan, J., Nimehchisalem, V., & Hajimohammadi, R. (2011). Developing an English language textbook evaluation checklist: A focus group study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(12), 100-106.
- Paramitha, M. L. (2018). *English teachers’ experience of evaluating a textbook using TTES* [Master's thesis, Sataya Wacana Christian University]. SWCU Institutional Repository. https://repository.uksw.edu/bitstream/123456789/16698/2/T1_112014096_Full%20text.pdf
- Santos, L. M. D. (2017). Evaluation of a foreign language textbook used in the Greater Boston Region: An evaluation of a Japanese as a foreign language textbook. *International Research in Education*, 5(1), 153-161.

- Sadeghi, S. (2020). Evaluation of EFL textbooks from teachers' viewpoints on the ninth grade high school Prospect 3 based on Ghorbani's checklist. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 7(3), 47-61.
- Tomlinson, B. (2011). *Materials Development in Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomlinson, B. (2012). Materials development. In D. Gorter & J. Cenoz (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 269-278). Wiley.
[10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0765](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0765).
- Umehara, D. (2011). Ostoraria no nihongo kyokasho no bunseki [Evaluation of Australian Japanese textbooks]. *Konan Joshi daigaku kenkyu kiyō, bungaku bunka hen* [Bulletin of Konan Women's University, Literature and Culture], 48, 39-46.
- Ur, P. (1993). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice & Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (2010). *The Study of Language* (4th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.