

## Textbook Evaluation: Looking at Prospect Series through Teachers' Perspective

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### Abstract

Textbooks play a vital role in the realm of language teaching and learning particularly in formal contexts i.e. schools. In the investigation reported in the current paper, the researcher employed an eclectic checklist derived from previously utilized frameworks aimed to evaluate the textbooks taught in Junior high schools in Iran looking through teachers' perspectives. To approach the aims of the study, 34 teachers from East and West Azerbaijan with 8- 28 years of teaching experience were asked to evaluate the textbooks on the basis of the provided checklist. Moreover, in order to gain a richer insight to their attitudes toward the textbooks, 8 teachers from the same provinces were interviewed to express their opinions with respect to strength and weak points of the textbooks as well as suggestions to improve the textbooks. The results of the study depicted that *pronunciation* and *task and activities* are the aspects of the textbooks that are in need of more improvement and revision. However, *vocabulary* was the most satisfactory dimension of the textbooks. The findings of the study could help material developers in the process of editing and improving the textbooks.

**Keywords:** Evaluation, Checklist, Junior High school, Prospect Series, Textbooks

## **1. Introduction**

Among the four influential factors in language teaching and learning, namely, teachers, learners, context and textbooks, the role played by the textbooks cannot be neglected specially in foreign language contexts that are considered as the main source of linguistic input after the teacher (Razmjoo, 2010). According to Sheldon (1987), a textbook can be considered as a published textbook designed to aid learners in acquiring communicative and linguistic abilities. McGrath (2002) states that a textbook is important since it sets the direction, content, and to a certain degree, how the lesson should be taught. All materials utilized in educational settings should meet some specified criteria as well as attracting learners' interest and attention to be fruitful (Tomlinson, 2001). Moreover, textbooks are designed to give cohesion to language learning and teaching process through direction, support, and specific language-based activities to provide learners with more practice (Mares, 2003) and facilitate and hasten learning process (Cunningworth, 1995). Foremost, textbooks provide teachers with the chance to have access to already-made sources to focus on in language teaching and save time and energy (Edge & Wharton, 1998).

In spite of unremitting effort devoted to English teaching, neither teachers nor students were satisfied and convinced with the result of the English instruction. Maybe the most crucial factor in this regard was the textbooks. Fortunately, during the last six years a great shift has occurred in the educational system with regard to the English teaching and learning anticipating the new series to overcome the limitations of the former series. The current study intended to evaluate a recently compiled and added English textbook to the educational system.

The quality and role of textbooks might be so important that they can affect the success or failure of the students and / or teaching program (Mukundan, 2007). According to Sheldon (1988), textbook evaluation cannot be ignored due to two key reasons. The first deals with smoothing the teachers' way in selecting an appropriate textbook. Furthermore, familiarizing teachers with the textbook, the evaluation makes strength and weak points of them clear and known. Evaluation, as a dynamic process, deals with appropriateness and suitability of the existing materials (Rea-Dickens and Germaine, 1992) and can be regarded as a useful device for teachers and material developers. Additionally, it may provide modification and novelties in teaching and learning situations. Moreover, Ellis

(1997) proposed three types of textbook evaluation, namely, “pre- use”, “in- use” and “post- use”. An evaluation with pre- use or predictive purposes aids teachers and instructors in selecting an appropriate textbook among the abundant number in the market. The second type of evaluation, help teachers to find the strength and weak points of the textbook as it is being taught. Finally, based on the post- use evaluation also known as retrospective evaluation, teachers reflect upon the textbook after its use in particular instructional situation. Having the objectives and aims of the present study in mind, it can be claimed that this evaluative investigation corresponds with the second type of the evaluation set off by Ellis (1997) i.e., “in- use evaluation”.

William (1983) states that evaluation relates assumption about teaching a second language to a set of linguistic, pedagogical, general, and technical criteria. Furthermore, it supports teachers to gain convenience, precise, organized and circumstantial perception into the global natural surroundings of textbook materials. In addition, Tomlinson et al (2001), claim that textbook evaluation is an applied linguistic activity through which the effect of material on people utilizing it is scrutinized by teachers, supervisors, administrators, and material developers. Considering material evaluation as a way of action research, Tomlinson (1996) states that evaluation aid us to understand how the material works. Moreover, evaluation contribute to teachers’ professional development since it provides the chance of being aware of the critical points of materials and make the academic investigation of course textbook possible.

## **2. Literature Review**

Most of the textbook evaluation studies carried out in the past focus on two main goals. The first group has mostly tried to develop some criteria to contribute to more successful textbook evaluation studies. Miekley (2005) trying to make textbook selection more efficient and reliable, provides a checklist for evaluating reading textbooks in ESL/EFL classrooms. Each question in this checklist is either based on the recent research or previously developed checklists. The checklists provided by Byrd (2001) and Skierso (1991) are considered as the corner stone of the new checklist to be provided. The checklist contain some parts and subparts regarding content, vocabulary and grammar, exercises and activities, physical make-up, general features and background information, methodological guidance, supplementary materials, and finally context that should be rated on the basis of

weights like *excellent, good, adequate, poor, totally lacking, mandatory, optional, and not applicable*. Using the provided checklist will make the textbook selection for efficient and reliable.

Razmjoo (2010) intends to investigate and evaluate the existed textbooks evaluation schemes and develop an evaluation scheme pertinent and beneficial to the expanding circle i.e. the countries in which English has various roles and is widely studied but for more specific objectives (Japan, China, Korea). To approach the aims of the study, 30 male and female EFL instructors with enough experience answered to the questions during a semi-structural interview. The questions of the interview have been selected from previously employed checklists such as Sheldon (1988), Ur (1996), LittleJohn (1998), and Tucker (1975). Moreover the participants were asked to provide open-ended answers to questions either in Farsi or English. As such, the researcher reviewed the existed schemes critically and considered the experts' points of view. Accordingly, the resulted checklist consists of six main factors (Pronunciation, Vocabulary and idiom, structure, reading, writing, listening, speaking, tasks, general considerations, and teachers' manual) including 41 items.

A study by Demir and Ertas (2014) was set out with an extensive review of the literature, intending to propose an eclectic checklist by borrowing some items from different instruments available in the literature. The checklist includes items from twenty already- exist- checklists accompanied by the items written by the researchers themselves. The resulted checklist contains four main categories namely, subject and content, skills and sub skills, layout and physical make-up, and practical considerations.

Some other researchers has evaluated certain textbooks for their strength and weakness to find their advantages and shortcomings. Yasemin (2009) evaluated three English textbooks taught in grade 4 classes in state schools in Turkey. To approach the aims of the study, teachers and students were asked to reflect their opinion on those textbooks through the Smiley questionnaire which includes 37 items. In addition to questionnaire, interview was utilized to obtain more information regarding teachers' and students' perception of the textbooks. The result revealed that the textbooks are appropriate to some extent for young learners for whom the textbooks are applied.

Incecay and Incecay (2009) aimed to better understand the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in their English as a

foreign language in a private university preparatory school in Istanbul. The data were gathered from 30 university students using multi-method by means of questionnaire and semi-structure interview. The results revealed that the textbooks utilized in EFL countries need to be modernized and their teaching methods should be updated. The students' previous educational habits should be taken into consideration. Also, it was depicted that in the case of combination of communicative and non-communicative activities, the students make use of communicative language teaching.

Ruben (2010) through a comprehensive content analysis of the Dutch early childhood teacher education shows that the chosen textbooks meet the aims and intentions of the curriculum. Based on the findings of the study, the textbooks failed to cover the content standards in teacher professional profile and the content standards from educational profile of their training course are adequately covered in the textbooks. Some aspects of the primary work process are dealt with less detail in the textbooks. Among these need for strategy planning, for reflection and evaluation, for the development of educational policy, as well as for cooperation between practitioners from other fields and disciplines can be mentioned.

Nasiri and Ahmadi (2011) in a study attempted to assess the suitability of the textbook "summit 2B" for undergraduate University students based on two perspectives of subject matter and Vocabulary/ structure. The participants of the study, 10 teachers as well as 150 students, answered the items on the checklist developed by Doaud and Celce Murcia (1979). Also, the teachers were interviewed individually to obtain qualitative data regarding their points of view toward the textbooks. The results of the investigation depict that the "summit 2B" is suitable for the students for whom it is taught.

Using a meta-analysis of international and local checklists, Cheng Hung, and Chieh (2011) discuss a textbook evaluation for standardized use at the elementary level. The Researcher was after to describe the role of the textbooks and make textbook selection more efficient and reliable. He argues that teachers, students, and classroom dynamic are influenced by textbook selection as the most important decisions facing ESL educators. The use of an evaluation procedure leads to more thorough examination of potential textbooks and enhance outcomes for learners and teachers. The teachers should be able to know how to use a textbook as well as they must be aware that how useful it can be.

Alavinia and Siyadat (2013) through an inquiry aimed to weigh the features of four series of textbooks taught in various institutes in Iran on the basis of the checklist set off by Cunningsworth (1995). During the data collection phase 320 male learners from West Azerbaijan were required to evaluate American English File 1, American Cutting Edge 1, American Headway 1, and New Interchange 1. The findings of the study revealed that American English File 1 was more effective than other three textbooks due to some characteristics e.g., up-to-date materials, attractive coverage and depictions and a suitable websites.

In a more recent and local study, Torki and Chalak (2017) aimed to explore the teachers and students' attitudes toward the English textbooks taught in high schools in Iran. To approach the aims of the study 150 male and female students and their teachers answered 45 items on the questionnaire developed by Karavas- Doukas (1996). The analysis of the gathered data revealed that the major part of the participants in the survey believe that the textbooks appropriately reflect the principles of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, it does not mean that the need for further improvement and revision is not felt in the field of Textbook analysis.

Although abundant studies have evaluated the textbooks and their effectiveness of various aspects of the textbooks, there are not convincing literature regarding the investigation of the textbooks specially prospect series. Concerning these less explored areas of knowledge, the current study intended to evaluate the Prospect Series utilized as the sole material in Junior high schools in Iran. The investigation was conducted investigating the view points of the teachers teaching these textbooks based on an eclectic checklist. Furthermore, the teachers were asked to express their recommendations and critiques that may aid material developers to improve the weak points of the textbooks via an unstructured interview. Therefore, the researcher was after finding the answer to the following questions:

1. What are the L2 teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Prospect Series in junior high school?
2. What are the strong points of Prospect Series from the teachers' point of view?
3. What are the weak points of Prospect Series from teachers' point of view?

### **3. Methodology**

Data collection in this study took place in two subsequent phases. In the first phase of the study, the required data were gathered through an elected checklist. Regarding the second phase of the study, eight teachers were interviewed to gain more transparent picture regarding their view on Prospect Series.

#### **3.1. Design and Context of the Study**

This study enjoyed a mixed method design, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather data. Junior high school teachers from north-west of Iran participated in this investigation.

#### **3.2. Participants**

The main users of the textbooks are teachers as well as the students. However, in this investigation the students were not included as the participants due to the fact that their proficiency level may not advocate answering the questions of the checklist. To meet the objectives of the study, 34 EFL teachers with the age range of 27-48 (23 females and 11 males) from East and West Azerbaijan with the teaching experience of 8-28 years participated in the scrutiny. Regarding the second phase of the study, an unstructured interview was applied to ask 8 teachers consist of 5 females and 3 males from the same area of the country about their viewpoints according to the strength and weak points of the study.

#### **3.3. Material**

The sole source of the material employed in this study, is the Prospect series taught in Junior high schools in Iran written by Alavi Moghaddam, Khodaparastan, Kheirabadi, Anani Sarab, Foruzنده, and Ghorbani (2012). Being designed to cater for the needs of students, these series managed to compensate the drawbacks and shortcoming existed in the previous series to some extent. Each of them consists of six units that are arranged based on various topics and themes (personality, travel, media, health and injuries etc.).

### 3.4. Instrument

To meet the objectives of the study, 34 junior high school English teachers were asked to rate the items on an eclectic checklist (See appendix) driven from frameworks set off by Daud and Celce Murcia (1979), Garinger (2002), Ghorbani (2011), McDonough and Shaw (1993), Munkundan (2011), Razmjoo (2010), Tomlinson (2003). The checklist applied for the present study, consists of ten subheadings, namely, *general, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening, writing, reading, pronunciation, supplementary materials, and tasks and activities criteria*. The participants should select one of the scales of *Poor* (value=1), *Fair* (value= 2), *Good* (value= 3), *Excellent* (value= 4) with regards to each question. Four experts in the field (university professors) control the checklist for its validity and approved it. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha was run which yielded the satisfactory reliability of .84. Moreover, another means of data collection was unstructured interview with teachers regarding the pros and cons of the textbooks as well as their suggestions that can make the textbooks more fruitful and productive. The aim of this section of the study was to gather qualitative data to gain deeper insight to the answers to checklist.

### 3.5. Data Collection Procedure

After developing the eclectic checklist and calculating its validity as well as reliability, the checklist was given to teachers through email or social media to evaluate the textbooks. Via snowball sampling, 34 teachers participated in the investigation.

### 3.6. Data Analysis Procedure

After collecting the data through eclectic checklist, the SPSS (Statistic Package for the Social Science) was utilized to provide the descriptive statistics regarding the quantitative phase of the scrutiny. For each criteria the percentage of the participants' answers, mean, and standard deviation were depicted through tables. Concerning the qualitative part of the study, the participants' view point regarding the pros and cons of the Prospect Series were reported.



#### 4. Result

The concurrent study dealt with the appropriateness of the textbooks taught in the junior high schools in Iran. It is not fair to devaluate the attempt made regarding the improvement of curriculum. However, I cannot gainsay that this update is a long way away from what is currently practiced in EFL methodology worldwide. Table 1 provides a more transparent picture regarding the findings of the scrutiny.

##### 4.1. General Considerations

The first criterion to be measured on the basis of the developed checklist is general considerations. Regarding the finding of the study, among the items of this criteria, relatedness to learners' culture and environment was the most satisfactory item ( $M= 2.5$ ) and rated as excellent by 14.7 percent of the participants.

Table1.

*Descriptive Statistics Regarding General Issues*

Items	Criteria				Mean	SD	Mean of the Criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent			
The textbook takes into account the current accepted methods of ESL/EFL.	11.8	44.1	44.1	0	2.32		
It gives directions for presentation of language items.	14.7	17.6	64.7	2.9	2.55	0.42	2.5
It relates content to the learner's culture and context.	2.9	14.7	67.6	14.7	2.94		
Cultural sensitivity has been considered.	14.7	5.9	55.9	23.5	2.88		
It has authentic and real use of language.	44.1	26.5	26.5	2.9	1.88		

Moreover, 23.5 percent of the teachers, answering to the checklist, claimed that cultural sensitiveness was excellently considered, also, the item was weighed as good by almost 60 percent. However, the language presented in the textbook is not authentic according to the answer of the participants (M= 1.88).

#### 4.2. Vocabulary

Looking at the mean of items, first and second items dealing with appropriateness of contexts in which the vocabulary are provided along with the criteria for vocabulary selection were the most satisfactory items.

What is more, item two was rated as excellent by almost 12 percent of the teachers. Likewise, the load of new vocabulary across the textbook and each chapter is fair (M= 2). On the other hand, the vocabulary is not recycled efficiently and effectively across the textbook. Repetition of the vocabulary across the textbook may facilitate its learning and enhance their usage in learners' production.

Table 2.

#### *Descriptive Statistics Regarding Vocabulary*

Items	Criteria				Mean	SD	Mean of the criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent			
It presents vocabulary in appropriate contexts and situations.	11.8%	35.3	50	2.9	2.4		
The selection of the vocabulary is based on specified criteria.	20.6%	23.5	44.1	11.8	2.4		
Load of vocabulary is appropriate to the level of learners.	26.5%	29.4	44.1	0	2.1	0.49	2.5
Words are efficiently repeated and recycled across the book.	79.4%	8.8	11.8	0	1.3		
Distribution of the vocabulary across chapters and the whole book is good.	38.2	20.6	38.2	2.9	2		

#### 4.3. Grammar

Grammar covers four items in the developed checklist. Concerning this criterion, the most satisfactory item is the contextualization of grammatical items with mean of 2.4.

Additionally it was shown, on the basis of the answers, communicative competence is not emphasized in teaching structural items since 70 percent of the teachers rated the item as fair or poor.

Table 3.

*Descriptive Statistics Regarding Grammar*

Items	Criteria				Mean	SD	Mean of the Criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent			
It stresses communicative competence in teaching structural items.	32.4%	38.2%	23.5%	5.9%	2		
It provides adequate models featuring the structure to be taught.	26.5%	32.9%	38.2%	2.9%	2.1	0.54	2.1
Grammar is contextualized.	17.6%	29.4%	47.1%	5.9%	2.4		
Grammar is introduced explicitly and reworked incidentally throughout the book.	29.4%	29.4%	41.2%	0	2.1		

Also the textbooks lack adequate modeling and examples featuring the grammatical structures to be taught. Moreover, it would be better to have explicit introduction of the structures and then elaborate them in a more implicit manner via adequate models and examples which was not followed by these series of textbooks.

#### 4.4. Speaking

The developed checklist allotted three items to evaluate appropriateness and efficacy of speaking skills in Prospect Series. Table 4 provides a more transparent picture touching the findings of the scrutiny:

Table 4.

*Descriptive Statistics Regarding Speaking*

Items	Criteria			Mean	SD	Mean of the Criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good			
Speaking tasks are Complete, appropriate, and adequate.	55.9	32.4	11.8	1.5		
It Includes speech situations relevant to the learners' background.	38.2	20.6	41.2	2	0.5	1.8
The speaking activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication.	23.5	44.1	32.4	2		

Based on the results of the scrutiny touching this skill, the tasks related to speaking skill are neither appropriate nor complete ( $M= 1.5$ ). By the same token, the textbooks failed to relate the speaking situations and tasks excellently to learners' background and environment according to the answer of instructors participated in this study. In the same line, speaking activities are not targeted to teach learners how to use language and initiate meaningful communication ( $M=2$ ).

**4.5. Listening**

Regarding the second skill to be evaluated, the answers to the first item was 44 percent fair and only 38.2 percent of the answers rated the item as good. Table 5 deals with the result of the study in more detailed manner:

Table 5.

*Descriptive Statistics Regarding Listening*

Items	Criteria			Mean	SD	Mean of the criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good			
The tasks for listening are arranged from simple to complex.	17.6	44.1	38.2	2.2	0.57	2
The tasks are authentic.	44.1	29.4	26.5	1.8		

Furthermore, 73.5 percent of the teachers did not consider the listening tasks to be authentic or near to real life ( $M= 1.8$ ). Besides, some of the teachers noted that the recorded audio tasks did not have a good and satisfactory quality. On the other hand, the listening tasks are not arranged based on a rational order from simple to complex.

#### 4.6. Writing

Comparing with the other skills evaluated on the basis of the developed checklist, writing was the most satisfactory skill with the mean of 2.2.

Table 6.

#### *Descriptive Statistics Regarding Writing*

Items	Criteria				Mean	SD	Mean of the criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent			
The written tasks are related to the structure and vocabulary practiced orally.	8.8	23.5	58.8	8.8	2.6		
They give practice in controlled and guided composition in early stages.	29.4	41.2	29.4	0	2	0.48	2.2
They relate learning to the learners' interest and context.	35.3	32.4	32.4	0	1.9		

Almost 60 percent of the teachers answering to item 1 rated it as good. Besides, 9 percent of the teachers believe that the textbook excellently relate the written tasks to the orally practiced vocabulary and structure (item 1). On the contrary, item 3 was weighed as poor by nearly 35 percent of the teachers which was the highest percent.

#### 4.7. Reading

Reading skill was weighed through three items. The general mean of these three items was 2.1. The following is the table of the results regarding the findings:

Table 7.

*Descriptive Statistics Regarding Reading*

Items	Criteria			Mean	SD	Mean of the criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good			
Reading tasks offer exercises for understanding of plain sense and implied meaning.	14.7	41.2	44.1	2.2	0.59	2.1
It selects passages within the vocabulary range of the students.	29.4	5.9	64.7	2.3		
It selects passages reflecting a variety of styles of contemporary English.	52.2	23.5	23.5	1.7		

The first and second items were rated as good by majority of the participants, 44 and 64 percent, respectively. On the contrary, they claim that the textbooks deprive the students from variety of the styles of writing in contemporary English (M= 1.7).

**4.8. Pronunciation**

According to the results of the investigation, it can be claimed that the pronunciation section has not been touched effectively and still there is a lot to do to make that aspect of the textbook convincing (M= 1.6). The first three items were considered as poor by the majority of the participants. The textbooks lack appropriate and complete presentation concerning pronunciation (m= 1.5), sufficient exercise on recognition and production of individual sound and stress. Nonetheless, work on intonation patterns was weighed as good by 41.2 percent of the teachers. The findings are depicted in table 8:

Table 8.

*Descriptive Statistics Regarding Pronunciation*

Items	Criteria			Mean	SD	Mean of the Criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good			
The presentation is complete and appropriate.	64.7	14.7	20.6	1.5		
There is a sufficient exercise on recognition and production of individual sound.	70.6	14.7	14.7	1.4	0.5	1.6
There is a sufficient exercise on recognition and production of stress patterns.	79.4	2.9	17.6	1.3		
There is a sufficient exercise on recognition and production of intonation.	20.6	38.2	41.2	2.2		

#### 4.9. Supplementary Materials

One of the crucial factors that may influence learning and teaching process and improve the outcomes of the instruction is the supplementary materials employed in the learning context. Looking through the results, as the table 8 shows, it may be safe to claim that the supplementary materials associated with the Prospect Series did not content the teachers as expected.

Table 9.

#### *Descriptive Statistics Regarding Supplementary Materials*

Items	Criteria				Mean	SD	Mean of the criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent			
The book contains visual materials such as pictures, videos, flash cards.	14.7	41.2	41.2	2.9	2.3		
It contains audio/video material.	11.8	50	35.3	2.9	2.2	0.5	2.2
The teacher guide is available and gives useful and complete guidance along with alternative activities.	26.5	41.2	32.4	0	2		
The book has work book and supplementary activities.	20.6	35.3	35.3	8.8	2.3		

Touching the first item, 41.2 percent of the teachers evaluated it as good, however, exactly half of the participants mentioned that the textbooks should be improved from the aspect of visual materials. Almost 67 percent of the teachers are not satisfied with the teacher guide and rated it as either poor or fair. The last item of the checklist to be evaluated was work textbook and supplementary activities which were weighed as good and fair by 35.5 percent of the teachers and only 8.8 percent consider it as an excellent effort.

#### 4.10. Tasks and activities

As long as the tasks and activities are concerned, the textbooks were unable to satisfy the majority of teachers.

Table 10.

*Descriptive Statistics Regarding Tasks and Activities*

Items	Criteria			Mean	SD	Mean of the criteria
	Poor	Fair	Good			
The activities are interesting and adequate.	38.2	38.2	23.5	1.8		
The activities are designed so that the learners are using language rather than just practicing specified features of it.	52.9	26.5	20.6	1.6	.58	1.7
The activities help learners to communicate fluently, accurately, appropriately, and effectively.	44.1	38.2	17.6	1.7		
There is a balance between controlled and free activities.	44.1	32.4	23.5	1.7		
The activities and exercises are varied in format so that they will continually motivate and challenge learners.	61.8	32.4	5.9	1.4		

On the basis of the table 10, the activities and tasks throughout the textbook do not generate a need for students to use language effectively for the goal of communication neither fluently nor accurately (M= 1.8). What is more, the tasks are not interesting to students (M= 1.6) since they do not enjoy variety to amuse and motivate the learners to participate in accomplishing them (1.4).

#### **4.11. Results of the Unstructured Interview**

Additionally, as the second phase of the scrutiny, 8 teachers were selected on the basis of the convenience of access to be interviewed concerning any recommendations they have with regard to the improvements of the Prospect Series and mention any other aspect that was ignored in the checklist. The followings are stated by the teachers:

The textbooks do not enjoy a CD Rom which has recently revolutionized language teaching due to its contribution to encourage learners to feel more fun, relaxed and independent in acquiring a language or the ignorance of target languages' cultural



consideration which is intended to be as a major component of a foreign language. Along with the same line, it was mentioned that the students' native culture is the pivot of the whole textbooks. As it is stated by McDonough & Shaw (1997) it is indisputable that language is culturally bound and since language teaching and culture cannot be distinctly separated from each other. Therefore, it may be more fruitful to familiarize the students with the English culture as well, since culture of the target language as the vital component of the language cannot be neglected.

Moreover, in first grade there is a presupposition that all of the students have known the alphabet of English due to taking some classes in private institutes. Therefore, before teaching the fundamentals of language such as alphabet, they started to provide the learners with texts, dialogues, and tasks to be accomplished. On the basis of the mentioned feature of the textbook for this particular grade, teaching the textbook in rural parts of the country may be encountered by some difficulties and frustrate students.

Another shortcoming concerns workbooks which make use of Farsi for instructions trying to review the covered structures and vocabularies in the student textbook. Instead of providing the equivalents of new words in Farsi, it would be more fruitful to make use of some pictures to elicit the desired answers from learners. It, also, would be better to have the instructions in English to satisfy the communicative aims of the textbooks. Additional point regarding the supplementary materials is that the students are deprived of videos and movies. At the end of each unit it would be better to have some movies about the topic of the unit. It may add some fun and variety to the instruction and supply the students with more context using the vocabulary and structure learned across the unit. Last but not least, concerning the weak points of the textbooks some of the teachers mentioned that the time allotted to the course in the instructional system do not provide the teachers with the chance to act as efficiently as possible. This problem is more noticeable especially in grade 9<sup>th</sup>. They stated that increasing in the allotted time will lead to more satisfactory results.

The interviewed teachers did not consider the textbooks as a complete failure and mention some of the good points of them. As the strong point of the textbooks it was mentioned by teachers that the textbooks make efficient and considerable use of pictures in various sections of the textbooks that can aid students in comprehension of new vocabularies and conversation. Almost all of the interviewees agreed that the new series made a great improvement in comparison to the previous series. Teaching the previous

sessions, the students were deprived of the listening, writing, speaking skills that may prepare them for a more real life and authentic situations. Moreover, in contrast to the previous series of textbooks, the Prospect series do not overload the students with explicit grammatical points and structural drills.

## 5. Discussion

Since the Prospect Series have been newly compiled and added to the educational system, there are not many studies conducted to evaluate the textbooks. Therefore, the discussion of the results and findings will be concise. Some of the investigations carried out in the field of textbook evaluation were based on the previous series of the textbooks taught in Iran till 2013. Due to the main difference concerning the methodology, content, and layout of the current and previous series of textbooks taught in high schools, the results cannot be in the same line. The findings of the current study is in contrary with that of Azizifar (2009) which concluded that the textbooks taught from 1970 to 2010 cannot meet the students' needs since the main focus of the textbooks are structure rather than communicative role of language. A similar conclusion was reached by Rashidi and Kehtarfard (2014) that textbooks do not support all of the components and language skills that are important to learners. The findings of these investigations are in contrary with the results of the present study. The Prospect Series cover topics related to the proficiency level and need of the students in each grade. Simple topics such as *Your Family*, *Age*, and *Appearance* are presented in grade 7<sup>th</sup>, however, more elaborated ones like *Services*, *Festivals and Ceremonies*, and *Media* are postponed to grade 9<sup>th</sup>. Based on the answers of the teachers in interview section, the presented topics and themes are in a good harmony with the needs of the students. Evaluation and selection of materials that best fit the learners' needs is becoming more and more important for all levels in language teaching (Tosun, 2012). Additionally Nashidi and Kehtarfard (2012) concluded that the supplementary materials need to be revised and improved which is consistent with the findings of the present study.

The overall findings of the current study are in accordance with findings reported by Soori, Kafipour, and Soury (2011) who evaluated the textbooks taught in Iranian high schools and revealed that 63 percent of the textbooks conformed to the universal characteristics of textbooks. Moreover, a contrasting pattern of result with our finding was

obtained by Javanmehr (2013) who set off the results that the textbooks have no effectiveness in improving English knowledge of learners. Also, students are not contented with their educational source; therefore, the textbooks need considerable attention and revision.

Along with the compilation and utilization of the new series of textbooks some researchers scrutinized the usefulness and effectiveness of them. Contrary with the findings of Akbari and Pourabbas (2015), we did not find that the textbooks may not satisfy the learners' foreign language needs. Nevertheless, likewise the current findings, their results confirmed the need for additional learning materials and supplementary materials to make the textbooks more conducive and advantageous. As well, in another investigation by Toriki and Chalak (2017) the contrary results have been gained since it was shown that approximately 80 percent of the teachers are satisfied with the textbooks. Since in the present investigation almost all of the subcategories of the checklist were evaluated less than good by the teachers i.e., mean < 3.

The result of the study by Mirzaei and Tabatabaei (2017) is in line with the findings of the present study which concluded that the textbooks contain some interesting and motivating picture. Along with the same line Jahangard (2007) gained the conclusion that using pictures of real people and environment can be appealing. *Speaking* was one of the subcategories of the utilized checklist which was evaluated and gained the mean of 1.8 by the teachers. The same finding was also obtained by Mirzaei and Tabatabaei (2017) who concluded that the textbooks taught in Iranian high schools are in need of more revision and improvement in terms of speaking. Akin to the findings of the current study, they concluded that the new Series are more effective and advantageous comparing to the previous textbooks. However, the four skills mostly depend on the teachers and their level of ability to be practiced and integrated with other language skills.

## **6. Conclusion**

During the last years, the ministry of education intended to improve the textbook taught in junior and senior high schools in Iran to some extent. Lacking any communicative activities and tasks, the previously utilized textbooks had abundant number of structural drills. It would not be fair to belittle the effort undertaken to promote the quality of the textbooks as the sole instructional materials in schools in Iran. However, there are some areas that are in need of more effort and improvement to keep up with the

textbooks employed worldwide. To approach this aim, the task and activities should make students use language for meaningful communication. The students should be provided with some videos and authentic audio files to have the opportunity to be exposed to natural and real language use. Then, the students should be required to accomplish appropriate, complete, and adequate speaking tasks. In order to permit the students to flourish the communicative ability, the grammatical points along with the needed vocabulary should be appropriately embedded in a communicative context and recycled suitably to lead to a more fruitful learning and teaching processes.

Applying the findings of the current scrutiny of the *Prospect* series may help material developers to design more fruitful material acknowledging to communicative claim of the textbooks. Additionally, teachers and students may surely enjoy the well-developed and well-designed textbooks and materials that can boost the communicative competence of the students.

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## Appendix

## An Eclectic Textbook Evaluation Checklist

criteria	Items	P	F	G	EX
general	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The book takes into account the current accepted methods of ESL/EFL</li> <li>2. It gives directions for presentation of language items</li> <li>3. It relates content to the learner's culture and context</li> <li>4. Cultural sensitivity has been considered</li> <li>5. It has authentic and real use of language</li> </ol>				
vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It presents vocabulary in appropriate contexts and situations</li> <li>2. The selection of the vocabulary is based on specified criteria</li> <li>3. Load of vocabulary is appropriate to the level of learners</li> <li>4. Words are efficiently repeated and recycled across the book</li> <li>5. Distribution of the vocabulary across chapters and the whole book is good</li> </ol>				
Grammar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It stresses communicative competence in teaching structural items</li> <li>2. It provides adequate models featuring the structure to be taught</li> <li>3. Grammar is contextualized</li> <li>4. Grammar is introduced explicitly and reworked incidentally throughout the book.</li> </ol>				
speaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Speaking tasks are Complete, appropriate, and adequate</li> <li>2. It Includes speech situations relevant to the learners' background</li> <li>3. The speaking activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication.</li> </ol>				
listening	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tasks for listening are arranged from simple to complex</li> <li>2. The tasks are authentic</li> </ol>				
writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The written tasks are related to the structure and vocabulary practiced orally</li> <li>2. They give practice in controlled and guided composition in early stages</li> <li>3. They relate learning to the learners' interest and context</li> </ol>				
Reading	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reading tasks offer exercises for understanding of plain sense and implied meaning</li> <li>2. It selects passages within the vocabulary range of the students</li> <li>3. It selects passages reflecting a variety of styles of contemporary English</li> </ol>				
pronunciation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The presentation is complete and appropriate</li> <li>2. There is a sufficient exercise on recognition and production of individual sound</li> <li>3. There is a sufficient exercise on recognition and production of stress patterns</li> <li>4. There is a sufficient exercise on recognition and production of intonation</li> </ol>				
materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The activities are interesting and adequate</li> <li>2. The activities are designed so that the learners are using language rather than just practicing specified features of it</li> <li>3. The activities help learners to communicate fluently, accurately, appropriately, and effectively</li> <li>4. There is a balance between controlled and free activities</li> <li>5. The activities and exercises are varied in format so that they will continually motivate and challenge learners</li> </ol>				
Supplementary Tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The book contains visual materials such as pictures, videos, flash cards. ... ( <b>Notes:</b> )</li> <li>2. It contains audio/video material )</li> <li>3. The teacher guide is available and gives useful and complete guidance along with alternative activities ( <b>notes:</b> )</li> <li>4. The book has work book and supplementary activities ( <b>Notes:</b> )</li> </ol>				